

IN CHINA

900-90

BY THE AUTHOR

One million in Western Lattara. — **From Senegal** to Tiri. 1 vol. in-8°. Paris, Auy. Challafnel, Publisher, 186.

In Banara: Through the Land of the Nomadic Alawites. 1 vol. in-4°. Paris, Société et Frères d'Éditions d'Art, 1897.

On Action: An Essay on Social Morality. 1 vol. in-18. Paris, Fistsbacher, publisher, 1897.

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EN CHINE

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M. A D, R I E N H Ë B R K R D

DIRECTOR OF 'TEALPS'

*You sent me to China to write this book. Please accept this
dedication as a token
of my gratitude.*

G 9TON BONNET.

VERS f•A CHINA

Saïgon, 9 août 1900.

The more one studies this Chinese question, the more one realises that the more one studies it, the less one understands it.

During the interminable journey from Marseille to Cape In Santiago, there we were, on *board*, about thirty

Europeans, officers, civil servants, engineers, traders, whose topic of conversation was China, always China. And today, with great humility, I have the very clear feeling that everything we said about that China was as nonsensical as it was pointless. The soldiers wanted to return straight away to Peking, in orderly columns and on foot; the engineer preferred to go by railway and the civil servant preferred to stay at the gate. There was also a

a free-thinking globetrotter who spoke out in defence of the insurgents, whom he likened to nationalists; a second, taciturn globetrotter who uttered but a single syllable . by moonlight, two young women who already saw themselves as victims of a massacre in Shanghai, their two husbands doing their best to combat these troubling forebodings, and finally a dignified clergyman, in the name of Jesus, who preached extermination.

I went from group to group, smiling, tugging at the sleeves of the soldier, the engineer and the civil servant. Thus I obtained rare confidences. I learnt that the Chinese belong to the yellow race, that they wear a plait of hair down their backs, and that they are, in a sense, the enemies of European civilisation, since they fight against its influence. And how much other valuable information was shared that evening, on the deck, on the windward side, so that the voice might be lost to the open sea!

— Beware of Li Hung Chang!

— Beware of the Empress!

— The Asian mind is inscrutable, sir!

You are right, sir. Since the Asian mind is impenetrable, why on earth should one try to penetrate it? There is nothing better than stretching out on a deckchair, gazing at the vast expanse of the sea, reading a few harmless books, smoking Port Said cigarettes and sleeping eighteen hours a day like a groundhog....

This grey gloom fades away in Saigon. A torrent of life leaps out at you and rouses you. The rains, in this month of August, fall without ceasing: rains, no, cataracts; the sky, thick with black clouds, the sunlight blotted out, extinguished, like an electric lamp in a laundry room. Under this warm shower, the trees stretch out their leaves, bursting into a riot of colour above the city streets — straight, wide avenues, where the red earth is covered in mud.

And I followed my tiny little Anna-Mite men as they scurried through the mud; I met my worthy Chinese friends, Hey Long and Luong Zraong, standing bare-chested behind their counters, poring over their brushes in pursuit of some numerical error. The ancestral altar was always shrouded in various fragrances, a small puddle of milk rested in its grease at the foot of the Buddha, who smiled contentedly. And Mey Long seemed sad.

“What’s the matter, Mr Mey Long?”

That was my first interview with a Chinese man.

At the time, H. Mey Long explained to me that his business was going as well as could be expected, that his own health remained sound, but that, unfortunately, the same could not be said for that of his homeland. He lamented our lack of understanding; he was worried. He had overheard, near his shop, snippets of conversation that smacked of trouble. Saïyon seemed to him to be a man of iron. ‘No quarter!’ the Bank’s **fourth** accountant had just said. ‘We must

go all the way?" replied the court bailiff.

And 11. Hey Long was sad, all the sadder because he feared his fellow countrymen from Glio-Len might get up to mischief. Rumour had it that supporters of Prince Tchouan were plotting a revolt, a special revolt, posing no danger to the rebels, since the sorcerers assured them that all the cannons and rifles would be blocked at the moment of battle by one of the papode's hona genies.

But Mr Me3• Long is a Pyrrhonian; he doubts his sorcerers. He does not see the rifles as being blocked; on the contrary, he sees them all too well, firing on the Chinese, demolishing the shops, overturning the junks, tearing open the sacks of rice! The ancestral altars lie shattered, Buddha falls on his belly, his nose in the dust... *Hey*, Ney Long is sad, and it is with great difficulty that the yellow ball of his face lights up with a smile when I take my leave of him to go to Cho-Len to follow the progress of this revolution.

Need I say that I have found my Clio-
Like in the old days, no more and no less chaotic? Its humpbacked bridges laden with carts, its arroyos lined with sampans, its shopkeepers and restaurateurs beating eggs and rolling out
, and selling slices of steamed cat meat...

I saw, at night, this anthill grow even denser: pushcart pullers, peddlers of choaes

that devour one another, drink one another or flee from one another, hills of filth, cabbage stalks, skins and guts, old smells of rancid opium and sandalwood...

I saw this sweaty, filthy crowd, the immense fair of this rabble, but I did not see the revolution. And I returned straight away to the city to reassure H. H. Long.

Yet one can clearly sense that something is afoot. The officers are surrounded; the ladies, shuddering with fear, rush towards them. Groups of porpoises block the streets. When a Chinese man passes by, everyone shakes their fists at him, chanting, in his honour, the litanies of General Com\$ronne.

In the café, all the talk is of China; at the club, all the talk is of China. Every minute, new political and military scenarios unfold. People are more pessimistic than optimistic, as is only right; they speculate with such fervour that some forget their chains and have only an aperitif, instead of the regulation half-dozen.

This morning, three hundred men boarded the Z'nnnii. Last week, three hundred had already set sail; next week, even more will depart. Requests for supplies are pouring in; transport convoys shuttle back and forth, escorted by warships; coolies, mules and oxen make their way to La Kou. Carts and artillery wagons gallop past,

lorries get bogged down up to their axles, bugles blare, bells ring, sirens wail... II. Hey Long is growing ever more fearful

Here, in the wake of this alarming scene, the question of the defence of Indochina naturally arises. Is the tranquillity of our colony not under threat? What if disorder were to spread among the Annamite population? What if the Celestial troops were to invade the territory

neither one nor the other. The Annamites have no desire to be Chinese; and even if the Chinese had any desire to reconquer Annam, they would encounter great difficulties.

The valley of Ai-Kong being too far outside their

sphere of influence – there is no point in discussing it. That

leaves Annam by the sea and Annam near the border. But

Annam by the sea remains a distant prospect.

The Ohinoise fleet is a peculiar one. It is a fleet that is afraid of water; it is a hydrophobic fleet. These sailors, even under the command of an admiral, may venture into shallow waters, or even a sheltered basin, but as soon as they head out to sea, they no longer feel at home. So, becoming disoriented, they mistake a lighthouse for a channel, or a beach for deep water, and this terrible fear causes them, at best, to run aground or break up. However, in living memory, no battleship or cruiser from the Pacific has ever entered a foreign port except as a result of a shipwreck. Given that

Given the Chinese captain's instinctive **dread of the sea**, and, on the other hand, knowing that the Governor-General has had the foresight to install **batteries** at all the weak points along the coast, **one can, I believe**, maintain that a naval combat is **an** impossible prospect.

Only **in** Tonkin would there be any chance of **war**. **An** army might penetrate there by following the Si-líiang valley to Song-Ki-Kong, but it would then have to contend with I.ang-Son and the barracks at Na-Charn and Doug-Dang. A few **hundred** men, armed with cannons and rapid-fire rifles, **would hold** its forces in check.

There is no longer any need to fear marauders **between** Lao-that, Cao-Bang and That-Sò, for just **as the** Chinese navy is a special force, so **too** is the Chinese army a special force. Like all armies in the world, it **has** officers **and** soldiers; only these officers and soldiers **are** never paid. The honour of being a soldier is enough **for them**; for the rest, they must turn to banditry. Whenever a Chinese man, on the **roads** of his homeland, falls victim to robbery or murder, he believes that it is officials **who have** killed, robbed and hacked him to pieces—and that **is** indeed some consolation.

Admittedly, one might expect, if the tragedy were to continue **in the** North, to see these bands of bandits scouring **our** borders. In these words of Yiin-ben, there is almost **a** threat. It is true that we have given

signs of weakness — the first mistake. Last year, at Hong-Tse, 5,000 piastres were stolen from us and two of our native servants were killed: we are still awaiting compensation. Three months ago we left Se-İllao; the English missionaries there¹ are still there. It is almost tantamount to abandoning this country, which such significant political interests ought to bring to our attention. One need not study the map at length to recognise that Yunnan is the great gateway, the heartland of Inner China. Imagine a plateau at an altitude of 4,000 to 11,000 metres, from which all the rivers of the Far East flow. Picture within it a population that is not Chinese, that hates the Chinese, because it has been conquered by them. It is said that all the military leaders are Muslims, and that barely thirty years ago, Muslims were being massacred by the millions. 1 Gh'u-Hsiung Fou and Hui-Lung...

Next to Yunnan lies Guangxi, a more important and more dangerous political centre. Secret societies, those climbing plants of the Middle Kingdom, as the philosopher Hiri-Tae put it, are rife there. For two years now, we have been thwarting their plans, thanks to our friendly relations with the mandarins. In particular, we have the famous Marshal Sou, who pretends to adore us for financial reasons. This façade will hold for a long time yet, provided, however, that the Chinese troops do not interfere. Should these troops interfere, we would then find ourselves facing a horde of eight

VERS LA CHINE

or ten thousand marauders, whom we would have to repel with the butts of our rifles. However, precautions have already been taken. The military territories are dotted with outposts, intended to form a sort of buffer zone between the border and the Delta.

All in all, things have remained calm in Tonkin, apart from two or three attempts to expel missionaries. There has been talk of Black Flags heading north; there has been talk of two thousand Hauser rifles in the hands of secret societies; there has been talk... there has been talk... Who and what hasn't been talked about? It's a disease here; people make up news. Every day, dozens of rumours circulate around the city. People comment on them, embellish them, wrap them in a Marseille accent, after which the prudent ones wait for the official dispatches to be set in their minds.

On that note, I forgot to mention one of the biggest issues of the day: the island of Hainan, which could well cause us some trouble as well. When, several months ago, Rear Admiral Courrejolles had the Tao-tai's gunboat seized, he found, amongst the mandarin's papers, evidence of his complicity in the uprising of 15 December 1897. (You will recall that uprising in which a Frenchman was massacred at Thai-Binh?)....

Since that discovery, everyone has been on their guard. II. Doumer, without losing sight of his beloved Yunnan, has half a wing stationed at Kiang-Tchou and

Han-Ho-Sou. He has already managed, with some effort, to bring in a French settler, a postal agent, a schoolteacher and a doctor. As soon as he has established a barber's shop and a café there, the colony, to all intents and purposes, will probably have reached the height of its prosperity; all that will remain then is for him to create a knighthood.

And I shall have finished with this question of defence when I have once again affirmed, after two journeys made a year apart, how secure the four great Indian states are, capable of complete self-sufficiency. From this whole emerges an impression of strength and absolute unity. Cochinchina is a land as French as Martinique or Senegal. Cambodia is so admirably pacified that a battalion of militia maintains order throughout its entire territory. Finnam has an emperor who is a mere lamb in our hands. Tonkin fears only its pirates, a few ragged bands. Yet, to deal with them, we can normally muster 10,000 men of white troops and 10,000 men of native troops. That is more than enough to ensure peace of mind and to regard, with the pride of an owner, master in his own house, this corner of the map of Asia stretching from Ca-ùfao to Ha Long Bay. If, at the very least, the owner would take the trouble to cultivate all his properties!..

But I don't intend to expand on any of the three model lectures from 11. Good luck with

French and foreign colonisation. I simply wished, before setting foot in China, where **the** terrible things one knows **are taking place**, to **reassure you** regarding the current situation in Tonkin, and **to** try to show you that, whatever happens, whatever **turn** events may take, **the** valley of the Rous River will never be seriously threatened.

That is all.

EN HINE

IS fi 0-1901

Shanghai, 24 août.

Before setting off, I had solemnly promised myself never to describe what are commonly referred to as 'nature's grand spectacles', for these are most unfortunate habits, barely permissible even in the works of Pierre Loti and M. de Buffon. But, on the other hand, it has been pointed out to me that a travelogue, whatever its nature, cannot be complete, or worthy of being read by the literati, unless it contains at least one or two attempts at this kind of rhetoric. So, for the benefit of these scholars, I note here the sunset we witnessed on the eve of our arrival in Shanghai. Some other day, I shall note some sunrise — and I

I think that after this show of goodwill, the scholars will kindly leave me in peace.

It spread out like a blanket over the dark expanse of the sea. At first, there were yellow clouds streaked like mines; then the sky turned metallic, as if covered by an immense copper dome, and other clouds came, in tight rows, evoking nightmarish shapes, oily shadows, the gaping maws of apocalyptic beasts. ... For a few minutes, we witnessed a battle of wild colours, frenzied impressionism, the howls of reds and the clamour of violets. ... {When a new wave of clouds swept in, like a sponge, to wash away that palette. A single hue of melted wax now covers the sea, that hue, reminiscent of the delicate greys of Scandinavian ceramics, with, in places, indefinable blues, the blues of alpine lakes, the blues of silk...

The sun, skimming the horizon, seems to linger for a long time, intoxicated by the veiled light. And when it sinks completely, when all that remains of it is a sliver of crimson, then the sea glows from within, and a strong, diffuse glow envelops us. ... And night falls gently, without transition or jolt, like the caress of a fan, as if it were still that veiled, infinitely gentle day continuing...

The next day, at five o'clock in the morning, we

are in muddy water, the colour of washed-out chocolate, the colour of Chinols. Before us lies a sandy beach, and along this beach, within cannon range, ships at anchor spew smoke, for amusement.

These waters are those of the Yangtze and the Hoan-Pou combined; and these ships are European warships. To complete the picture, we shall add fishermen's huts on stilts and junks whose unfurled yellow sails resemble huge waffles.

We stop. The health inspector arrives and examines us like cattle to make sure we do not have the plague. It seems certain that we do not have the plague; we may disembark. A rowboat comes to pick us up and heads up the Yangtze River. In two hours, we will be in Shanghai.

The river, very wide, gnaws at the banks that flank it, stretching its yellow monotony for nearly a kilometre. All one can see is a ribbon of very pale green riverbank, the walls of the forts of Woo-Sung on the horizon, behind those walls, legions of labourers hauling earth, driving in stakes, reinforcing palisades...

I feel a moment of sweet emotion when I think that these labourers are Chinese, that at this very moment these Chinese are rebuilding their defences, and that even the smallest of their cannons would be enough to cut our boat in two. And that becomes

I am disheartened when I realise that all the cruisers, destroyers, torpedo boats, destroyers and aviso ships of every European navy are watching these preparations, seemingly no more troubled than if they were merely cardboard artillery.

Now, here we are amidst a jumble of junks, clusters of sampans and sampanmen cutting through the water with a unified stroke of their oars. The banks remain ever so green, glistening with fine grass, criss-crossed by canals and hedgerows that bring Holland to mind. Native huts raise their black beams with low, pointed gables; factory walls loom gigantic above these ruins.

And the scene widens still further: it is the entire expanse of the docks stretching along the quays. An imposing, solemn entrance to the city, the apotheosis of industrialism. Houses with dreary facades overlooking gardens that seem like perpetual concessions, black smoke, ships laden with opium, football pitches and bandstands,

I shall be most pleased to note that the customs house, an English building constructed of brick, is an eyesore. Yet it will be a great strain on my patriotism to observe that the French consulate is also an eyesore, and that it would be a service to art to wish that a small Chinese bombardment were to bring it down in the next few hours.

Besides, we had been told on board: 'Alas!

you will see Shanghai depopulated, without women, without old people and without children, all having taken refuge in Japan from the very start of the uprisings. Only the able-bodied men have remained; when evening falls, they barricade themselves in their homes and do not fall asleep without a revolver in each hand.

Misled by this promise, I wandered about all afternoon and part of the night, looking for the thrills of the city. I wanted first to explore the streets leading out of the International Settlement. There is a neighbourhood there inhabited solely by Chinese people, where one must seek out the excitement of the city. I wanted first to explore the streets leading out of the International Settlement. There is a neighbourhood there inhabited solely by Chinese people, where one must seek out the excitement of the city. I wanted first to explore the streets leading out of the International Settlement. There is a neighbourhood there inhabited solely by Chinese people, where one must seek out the excitement of the city. I wanted first to explore the streets leading out of the International Settlement. There is a neighbourhood there inhabited solely by Chinese people, where one must seek out the excitement of the city.

seeking the thrills of the city. I wanted first to visit the streets at the end of the International Concession. There is a district there inhabited solely by Chinese, where it must surely be very unwise to venture alone

I was walking in the middle of the road to avoid ambushes, when suddenly I spotted, fifty paces away, a young lady, followed by her brother, a bodyguard of about twelve years of age, both armed with nothing more than a pair of tennis rackets. A second young lady followed a little further behind on horseback. . . I did not wait to see a third before making my escape. Two young ladies are more than enough to give you an idea of the rigours of a siege.

And in the evening, on the Biind, during the five o'clock stroll, I saw yet more young ladies—tall and petite—and several boarders parading under the watchful eye of their governesses! One

one wonders, if it is true that half the female population has taken refuge in Japan, just how many people did this population

pUlatlQQ? And if some danger still threatens Shanghai, one also wonders of what stuff the heroism with which the Shanghainese await the approach of this danger should be made. 7

But no, after a stroll along the Bund, one gets the impression of a thriving city whose inhabitants could hardly listen to a lecture on the Chinese threat without laughing. The fact is that here the Chinese are, in a sense, both at home and among us; they could not live without us, any more than you could live without them. Their capitalists do business with Europeans and fund European enterprises. Li Hung Chang, the greatest among them, has invested the bulk of his fortune in British industry. Why would he risk losing that fortune by going to war?...

The Bund is the whole of the East, it is the whole of Europe, it is the whole world on parade...

Chinese men, plump and shiny, with round faces; Chinese women, their lips painted vermilion, waddling along on their little flat feet; missionaries in Chinese-style robes with their tails draped over their shoulders, matrons in groups, and the throng of rickshaws, dog-carts, and horse-drawn carriages, with the jostling crowd of English, Germans, Russians, Italians, French, Spaniards and Portuguese. The street of appetites, the Gevte of quick fortunes, buying

everything, giving everything back, oxen today, silk tomorrow...

This Cosmopolis offers a remarkable lesson in vitality. And what strikes one most is that the character of each race remains intact. These people coexist, intermingle, yet never merge.

The German remains German, the Russian remains Russian, the Englishman remains English, keeping his English habits, his English tastes, his pub, his bar where one drinks a 'Bonjour'—standing up, always in a hurry, sipping a whisky and soda. The Frenchman remains French, a bit boorish and boo ao(8nl; he takes his aperitif gx oc ftacas; he takes one, it seems as though he's taking ten; the Englishman takes ten, it seems as though he's taking just one.

After the dinner, there are endless card games on the jukebox tables. We talk politics and exchange views on the situation in China. The heat is stifling; we sweat, we drink, we argue, we fight and make up, always remaining good friends. At midnight, everyone finds their rickshaw and heads home through the narrow, winding streets... And the next day continues like the one before, with fewer emotions, fewer complications of distance. From time to time, an important dispatch arrives, and we are busy only with the commotion: groups form, faces grow anxious, the rough ones make gestures of me-

jj(a(i£'•. fit piiiig l'indifférence première reparalt,
Everyone finds their rickshaw at the exit at

at midnight and heads home, through the Chi-

...

Deep down, Shanghai laments this monotonous existence, this unshakeable security that allows young ladies to go out alone with their twelve-year-old brothers. Shanghai is jealous of Tien-Tsin and its headquarters; Shanghai would like to have a history, and so, for its future biographers, Shanghai has created its volunteer corps.

They are armed with state-of-the-art rifles, they are dressed in Chinese costume, and they drill regularly, three times a week, at nine o'clock in the evening on the Bund. All nations are represented, including the Swiss and the Belgians. You can well imagine how great the jealousy is and in what tones it is expressed!

And note that, to rub salt into these wounds of pride, we have general reviews. I was able to attend the last one, conducted by Admiral Seymour. Preparations had been underway for a long time; the photographers were up all night. By five o'clock in the afternoon, the main road, Banking Road, which leads to the racecourse—transformed for the occasion into a Champ de Mars—was filled with nothing but volunteers and the admirers of the volunteers—that is to say, the entire population. The good Chinese, lined up on the pavement in front of their shops, watched this avalanche pass by with wide eyes.

We arrive on the pitch; the assembly bell rings; the troops gather in groups by country of origin. The Germans in spiked helmets, the English in black caps, and far behind them, the tiny, tiny, tiny Japanese, hurrying along as fast as their little legs will carry them.

A few elderly gentlemen also arrive, armed to the teeth and wearing large Boer hats.

— ‘You’ve got a fine rifle there,’ I say to one of them. ‘My compliments.’

— ‘It’s a Lee-Met-Ford, sir, a Lee-Met-Ford of the latest model—so new, in fact, that I’ve fired it forty times without yet managing to figure out how to reload it.’

I shall not go into the details of the manoeuvres; I will simply say that the parade was admirably executed to the sound of a Tagnle band playing a funeral march.

The English held their rifles like candles; the Americans imitated the English; the Germans marched in parade step — you know that famous parade step which might lead an uninformed spectator to believe that Emperor Wilhelm’s soldiers are all walking on wooden legs —; the French had retained their usual relaxed gait. And I almost forgot the little ones, the very little Japanese children who did their best to keep up...

The following day, we celebrated the news of the capture of Peltin by holding a grand evening at the Sport-Club. There were two bands: the Tagal band, already mentioned, and a dozen Indian musicians accompanied by a bass drum. And there was also a bar. And how many people stopped by that dance! Quite a few distinguished gentlemen, who shook my right arm up and down, and down and up, like a pump, after which, in a short, deep voice, they stamped their boots:

— Oh! Yes, French! (in time) Ehisëey-soda?

— Oh! Yes, French! ... whisky-soda?

— Oh! Yes, French! ... whisky and soda?

— Oh! Yes!, ..

As for the 'Iiislty soda', I remember that we tried every possible combination of gin and tonics and brandy and tonics, and that we were just beginning to explore the vast world of cocktails. We were already being tempted by pale ale, porter and claret, and I would probably be dead today under the table had I not, between two drinks, managed to muster the last remnants of my balance to make a run for it...

But really, I wouldn't want to end this letter without offering my apologies to Shanghai and its residents. I believe, that, despite myself, I still see all the national guards, at the feet of Louis-Philippe and La-biche, in the footsteps of that bonnet-maker of *the 9th of July*, who only took his leave after having taken care to bring with him una

spare bayonet. I have, however, no difficulty in recognising that the comparison is not a serious one. I am absolutely certain that all the volunteers, in the face of danger, would use their rifles and sabres as soldiers.

And then, after all, it's not their fault that the danger never materialised! Well, one could always say it almost did. At the outbreak of hostilities, the second capital of Kiang-Sou experienced some magical days. 'We were a hair's breadth from being besieged,' an elderly resident told me. 'Imagine the swarm of ships, and not a single European cruiser to answer them. The Chinese merchants who remained our friends came every morning to offer their condolences. They were convinced we must be terribly afraid, and indeed, we were rather nervous. Yet the hour of revenge was drawing near. The European ships anchored at the mouth of the Hoan-Pou, and our Chinese, in turn, took fright and fled the city by the thousands.'

There was tranquillity in the independent viewpoint, but there was jealousy and strife on the political front.

The English, as was their custom, made the first move. They had long realised that the Yangtze Valley formed a very fine province which, sooner or later, together with the rest of the territory, the Yellow River and the other plains of the solar system, would complete the map of their colonial empire.

they devised a military coup that was to begin in Yoo-Sung. Their troops would storm the fort and from there advance towards Shan-gliai, which they would occupy on the pretext of ensuring its defence.

Our Consul General, It. de Bcazure, was very forceful:

‘If you have forces there,’ he told them, ‘we shall bring some too. And wherever you go, we shall follow you.’

The English hesitated. Bets were immediately placed: ‘They’ll land! . . . They won’t land! . . .’ In the club, people took sides; at the bar, they glared at one another. There was a noticeable drop in the consumption of Anglo-French whisky and sodas.

Finally, Chamberlain’s method prevailed. The map had to be completed, and the landing was decided. Two thousand soldiers came to camp in the town. But that very evening, Admiral de Bezaure ordered the landing of 100 sailors from the cruisers *Admiral Charner* and *Pascal*, and ten days later, at his request, 700 marines and an artillery battery arrived from Tonkin, completing the final contingent.

That is the state of affairs. There are now 2,800 troops in the two garrisons, and that is not the end of it, as it is reported that the Germans will decide to follow our example.

Sliaighai, despite being so well-guarded, must have lost all

... Unless ...

Unless events come to a head in the Han-heou area. There was talk of sending a detachment there. We shall see. It all depends on what happens in the North. Tomorrow I am going up to Peking to see him.

'}ie n-Tsin, 6 September.

In China, one must never be in a hurry. It was Marco Polo who said so, and since 1295, we must believe Marco Polo.

— Sir, I've been asked to work for some *Chinese company* in Shanghai, sir, I'd like to go to Ta-Kou.

— *All right...* 70 dollars.

I lay the 70 dollars on the table. Now, when are we leaving?

— Oh! This afternoon. Without fail, at four o'clock.

At four o'clock, I climb aboard. The captain is smoking his pipe on deck, reading the *Duffy Neufs*. He glances at me indifferently, coughs, spits and carries on reading.

I dare to interrupt him:

— Excuse me, sir, I believe we must *be* setting off soon...

— *No.*

— However, it seems that my ticket...

- *Nah.*

— Jit, if it were an e8e, would you be so kind as to let me know?...

— *No.*

There is nothing more to be gained from this laconic captain. I do not greet him, which does not seem to offend him, and I immediately go in search of the Company clerk, whom I find at his desk, also reading *the Daily News*.

— Do you think, sir, that we might be able to set sail tomorrow?

— Tomorrow?

— The day after tomorrow?

- *No.*

At last, after so much effort—so much so that even the smallest of them would have been enough to satisfy me—I finally learnt that the reason we are not setting sail is that we are waiting for a shipment of oxen that stubbornly refuses to arrive. As soon as the oxen arrive, the captain will have no choice but to read the *news*; then he will weigh anchor.

He weighed anchor four days later, the oxen having arrived in full. And what a number of oxen! One could have placed in the cabins, if the cabins

had already been occupied by the English, the Flemish, the Dutch, the Austrians, the Russians and the Americans – the usual retinue of invaders on the campaign trail, all of them, whether merchants or adventurers, having come to double their fortunes in a matter of months and succeeding in doing so.

When we arrived at Ta-flou, it was still raining; a thick fog enveloped us. We were in the sea or we were in the sky—one could no longer tell for certain. But around midday, the sun broke through the clouds. Then we saw columns of smoke rising on the horizon and the mass of warships standing still on the water.

The patriotism of our cattle merchants is in full swing. They battle it out through their spyglasses; they see their flag everywhere. Discussions arise regarding the number and range of the guns, the strength of the crews and the machinery, and the valour of the officers. The Dutchman launches into a lecture on the history of his navy: he goes right back to the beginning; but the Englishman counters with Nelson, and the American, vexed at having no ancestors, is forced to fall back on Admiral Illewey. It all ends with a massive poker game.

This stretch of the Chinese coast is despairing: endless flatness, a gloom that weighs down on your shoulders by the hundredweight. The Pei-Ho, a river of mud, banks of mud — and, in that mud, dilapidated junks and ramshackle huts. And the grey sky, and the rain, the rain, the rain... Where on earth are we? What nations, what races are fighting over this heap of

soaked earth? We see long columns bearing tattered flags, yellow colours, blue colours, red colours, the whole of Europe that has descended like a swarm of predators upon these wretched things.

And the further we go, the thicker this muck becomes, and the stronger the stench of sewage, carrion and political absurdities grows. The Russians, in their white coats, look as though they've just stepped out of a bath of sewage, the Americans' khaki uniforms are speckled with rubbish, and the French, in their blue smocks and trousers the colour of piss and goose droppings, bring to mind the socialist and likeable group of Coupeau and Lantier, plumbers and tinsmiths on the road.

One has to walk for about twenty minutes through this cesspool of plague and leprosy to reach the railway station on the line from 'I'ong-Kou to Tien'-fsin. And there, once again, it's a fine mess of filth! All the fleas of the Far East swarm there in tight, swarming masses. The Slavs treat each other, the Franks scratch themselves, with the harmony befitting two allied peoples. And come evening, we shall add mosquitoes to this concert, a few cockroaches and also bedbugs, with the rain still falling and the mud. That is all, and it is charming.

The little Japanese men camping at the entrance seem unconcerned by these ten plagues of China; the Cossacks no longer feel them, thanks to their boots, but the Italians make the feathers on their helmets quiver

As for the French porpoises, one can hear their cries of distress! Even the horses, even the donkeys tethered to the stakes of the stables, if only they could speak and complain...

As the track is under the supervision and protection of the Russian army, an infantry officer invites us to board the carriage. The rolling stock is half-demolished: the locomotive weeps with its dented panels, and in the compartments separating the first-class carriages from the second-class ones, one can count by the dozen the 188 marks left by bullets and cannonballs.

The few remaining passengers who haven't fled are herded together, their luggage loaded, and they're paid in war money—that is to say, with slugs. I still see one of them, an old man with a white beard, his eyes wet with tears, his face gaunt and trembling, so thin that his bones pierce through the blue cotton cloth covering them. This wretch tries to carry a box on his shoulders; the box is too heavy and flattens him against the ground. A soldier rains down his bullwhip upon him: the exhausted man does not attempt a single movement. The blows fall: he does not utter a cry. Yet his eyes, his sad, weary eyes, beg for mercy. The blows keep falling. And, having no strength left to resist any longer, he gives up, he slumps into the mud. The soldier, tired of striking him, leaves him there — and he dies there, poor Chinese wretch.

And after the siege of Beijing, after Tien-Tsin, after the massacres at Ghan-Si, where the Boxers cut off

cut off the hands and feet of a bishop and his missionaries; after hearing a hundred tales of cold-blooded cruelty that Mirbeau has forgotten in his garden *of tortures*, I cannot help but see that old man on his knees, his hands outstretched, begging for mercy and yet killing.

Two Russian engineers are heating the locomotive—
Live: a platoon of soldiers takes their places in the front and middle carriages — and the train sets off. Needless to say, it is still raining and, on both sides of the track, the mud is piling up in what seems to be a phenomenal quantity; a passing Japanese detachment is apparently up to their waists in it, giving us the impression of walking pilots.

‘What on earth are we doing in this rotten **country, sir?**’ asked a young marine infantryman, with a touch of irony. ‘Good heavens! Just look at this! It’s raining all the time!’ When you’ve finally got over one cold, you catch another, because your feet are always wet and also because we don’t have boots like the French. It’s flat, there are no trees, there’s nothing but this bloody rubbish of grass. There aren’t even any Chinese left, because all those Iroussards have trodden into the interior. Back in the day, before the war, when the Empress was on good terms with the Princess, the ‘head-to-tail’ lot would still bring you eggs, chickens, a few vegetables, aubergines, prawns, and salad.

!rur sfir, not salad from our own garden, but, well, it went down all the same, without causing indigestion,

Whereas now, we've got to eat monkey meat, emergency rations and biscuits. You can beat the coolies with sticks all you like, but they won't listen; they'll let us all starve to death, that's for sure. You can go and write that in your newspaper, then! Which paper do you write for, sir, if I may ask? Is *Le Temps* a big paper?

— Good heavens, yes.

— Well, I don't know him. But **never mind**, you can go and tell them straight away that we're not happy, and if you want my name, you know, I'm not afraid to give it to you... Here, have a guess: what I'm telling you now, I'd say just as easily to the colonel, the general, the Minister of War, or the Emperor, the whole lot of them. It wouldn't faze me any more than smoking this cigarette. That's just the sort of bloke I am...

— And if, by any chance, you'd like any further information, you're always welcome to ask me at number 3. I've got a whole book's worth of stories to tell. There have been some real doozies, believe me! It's a shame, but every single one of them—the Japanese, the Germans, the English, the Americans—every single one of them has walked all over us! We're the last ones, sir, just as I'm telling you. No order! We have to fight and shiver, whilst the others tuck in six times a day! Ah! If only my poor mother were here to see me

Good heavens! What a state! What a state! For heaven's sake!... I beg you not to take the complaints of my soldier from the 3rd too seriously. It is a habit common to all Frenchmen to complain; it is a well-worn refrain to shed tears over our poor organisation, our lack of political stability, our barrenness of initiative, coupled with the barrenness of our wives. About half a dozen times a night, since the

three weeks I have been in China, I have seen the shadow of the complaining Frenchman.

He makes remarks that would bring any patriot to tears. I admit that at first I too was deeply moved, but now I have steeled myself, and when my despairing friend begins to list our national shortcomings, as I am sure that what he will tell me will be exactly the same as what he told me yesterday, the day before and on previous occasions, his compatriots and fellow sufferers...I let him carry on; out of politeness, I murmur an affirmative sound, an 'um', every ten minutes or so, always out of politeness, but inwardly, I wander, I cross the seas and settle in a certain corner of the boulevard that I know well, and from there I watch Mr Le Bargy pass by...

+

Ton G-Tclieei, **10 September.**

Travelling up the Peï-Ho to Beijing on a rickety boat where coolies were pulling the rope, I had the good fortune to travel with three Frenchmen who had witnessed the famous siege.

We all huddled together in the same tent for eight nights; it rained on our backs for forty-two hours; we roasted delightfully in the sun for nine days; we drank river water that smelled of an old Chinese corpse, and we got stranded fourteen and a half times.

But I didn't feel the rain, nor did I feel the sun, and I didn't smell the old Chinese corpse because, throughout all that time, I lived with these witnesses the unforgettable days of that defence,

Here is the account as I was able to grasp and clarify it amidst the chaos of the conversation, amidst the chaos of memories colliding within me,

tried to preserve its rapid, , precise

If the title doesn't strike you as too pretentious, this will be the story of the siege. One of these days — forgive me again for this pretension — I'll try to write it up.

Towards the end of May, staff at the Tchan-sin-'l'lien railway, located 10 kilometres from Beijing, were forced to retreat. The line was cut, the bridges set on fire. A battle broke out near the station: four trains were hit. We had to retreat, as best we could, and send a request for help to the French legation as best we could. Fortunately, the night passed very calmly. But at dawn, a mandarin ordered us to leave immediately; Danger is pressing. To leave, certainly we would ask for nothing better, but how? Finally, ealiin-caha, we set off. The prefect provides poor horses and it is an interminable journey across the great plain; at every moment soldiers stop you, threaten you... Nevertheless, the small group persevered and continued — and on 19 May, at ten o'clock in the evening, 13 men, 9 women and 6 infants arrived in Peking, half of them near death from hunger and exhaustion. They soon learnt that, after their departure, the regular soldiers had set fire to the Fchang-sin-Thien depot and that their compatriots on the line of

Pao-Ting, pursued like them, descended from the first hill to 'I'-Kon. This was the prelude to the war

On 3 May, the troops that had set out from Tien-Tsin to come to the aid of the Europeans reached Ha-chia-Pou. They were under the command of the Russian Colonel de Wogack and consisted of 75 Frenchmen commanded by Lieutenant de Vaisscau Darey, 75 Englishmen, 15 Russians, 10 Americans, 10 Italians, 10 Austrians and Germans, and 22 Japanese.

The Boxers are becoming increasingly aggressive. They advance to destroy the cathedral of Peliin, the Per-Tang; they are stopped. They return to the attack, so dangerous that some speak of retreating to Tien-Tsin. But already a line of iron and fire surrounds them; the plan is impracticable: they must stay there, defend themselves or perish. We learn that two English missionaries have been killed, that the American missionaries at Tong-Ttheou are fleeing in droves, and that Catholic brothers are following close behind them.

All this news is coming thick and fast,)antes. (One might think that the whole of China is in revolt and that the handful of Europeans struggling amidst this mass of men will be crushed, unable to fight back.

However, the town is calm. The Fsong-li-Yamen informs us that orders have been given to protect us, but there are too many Boxers,

fears he will be unable to reduce them; the Mongol market is already swarming with soldiers. The ministers are meeting. Measures will be taken. But which ones? We are at a loss. Everything is going from bad to worse. We learn that the racecourse has been set on fire, that a guard has just been killed... And, news twenty times more terrible still: Prince Chuan, the great enemy of the Europeans, has, since yesterday, become a member of the Imperial Council.

If only reinforcements would arrive! A few men advance to meet them, but to no avail. And nearby, the chancellor of the Japanese consulate, who had strayed from the column, is massacred by the Boxers.

Throughout the night of 12 June, the gong rang out ceaselessly. The Sino-Russian Bank was being evacuated; the wives and children of the employees took refuge in the offices of the Russian legation. And the troops did not arrive!

At last, a letter from Captain de Ma-rolle announces their departure. But they advance only slowly along the railway line, which they break up into stages. And Beijing is turning into a furnace. The Protestant chapel is burning, the Tong-Tang church is burning, the Hang-Tang church is burning, the house of the student interpreters is burning; Father Garrigue has been killed.

People are screaming, people are fighting.

The Chinese 8th Infantry Division is bristling with barricades; the French and Germans are firing from the

walls on the lookout. In the night, at the edge of the moonless plain, it is torches that blaze, the Boxers' torches...

.. The Si-tang (the church) is burning; Father Doré is massacred; Cha-La-Eul and the Tsien-Ilen Gate are ablaze; the end of Legation Street is alight, when the Japanese, in a bayonet charge, cut down the arsonists on the ground. The rest take to their heels...

And on 7 June, it is once again the power station that must be defended; a soldier falls, his skull shattered by a bullet... And meanwhile, the Tsong-li-Yamen solemnly declares that he will be held responsible for the lives of all Europeans if their troops do not return to the Palace. Prince Chuan is determined
s a deadpan expression of the highest order. While he speaks, his Boxers take action. They attack the Peking-Tang once more, but the Peking-Tang defends itself and kills forty of their men.

And the university is ablaze, and the telegraph is down... And the imperial government, seeing no reinforcements on the horizon, has now given the ministers twenty-four hours to evacuate Beijing. After that, no doubt, it will slaughter them at will along the roads.

It was a tragic day, that of 20 June. Shall we accept, or shall we not accept? If we go to Tsong-li-Yamen to give our reply, an ambush is to be feared. And on the other hand, if we do not go? ...

Baron Ectteler ignores these dilemmas. 11

goes alone; but a Chinese police officer follows him and, at point-blank range, fires a shot from a revolver into the back of his neck.

His interpreter, Et. Cordès, rushes to his aid.

11 is shot in the stomach. He has just enough strength to drag himself to the door of a Methodist mission, which takes him in.

With Ketteler dead, the ministers decide not to leave. At a certain hour, the ultimatum expires.

The fighting resumes. The Austrian legation and the customs house are attacked: the enemy attempts to set them alight, but French and Austrian troops charge and clear the area. The following day, 2 June, the fire breaks out nonetheless. The Boxers brandish their torches throughout the city, rush to the foot of the walls, try to scale them with their claws, and fall in heaps under the hail of bullets. And more arrive, and still more, more numerous, even more frenzied, filling the night with their screams.

The Italian legation, the Dutch legation, the Belgian legation, are burning...

The gunfire and cannonade show no sign of stopping. It is a hail of shells and bullets—and still the Boxer hordes are pounding the walls! We decide to go out and drive them back; we do not succeed. Three times our forces are broken, forced to retreat.

In the midst of this confusion, Sir Claude Macdonald assumes overall command. And on the evening of the 11th, **once again**

under Boxer fire, Prince Tsiouan and the Empress gently mock us by having a proclamation posted announcing that the Celestial troops will protect the European troops.

Strange protection.

On 26 June, constant alerts on the glacis. At first, the Germans held their ground alone; soon the Austrians and the French took their place. Another officers' meeting. They could not agree any better than the day before, and Sir Claude Macdonald,

•commander-in-chief, continues to give no orders whatsoever.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Darcy heroically defends the French legation, which is under attack on all four sides; Second Lieutenant Le Goanec is killed at his side. The danger is mounting. The other legations, under threat, are calling for reinforcements, but where are they to be found? Orders are confused and contradictory, as are the gunfire patterns. The Boxers regroup in force; Captain Labrousse makes a desperate sortie, driving them back against the wall; Midshipman Herbert, who was directing the firing from the top of a roof, is killed by a bullet to the forehead.

On 30 June, it is the Germans' turn to come under attack. An artillery battle ensues; the Japanese come to their aid and, once again, the Boxers are **driven back**.

And, once again, the Tsong-li-Yamen wrote to the ministers to protest his good intentions, assuring them that China did not wish to go to war with Europe.

Once again, the Eanon took it upon himself to track down the Empress and Prince Tchouan. The Hôtel Chamot and the French legation were bombarded. The Chinese entered through an unguarded door, and the small group holding the square was forced to retreat, taking cover behind sacks of tea.

A few hours later, the customs house is surrounded. The Austrian commander Thoinann, who throws himself into its defence, is struck in the stomach by a piece of shrapnel, but the customs house is saved.

The situation is becoming more and more distressing by the day.

The troops are not arriving. We have resigned ourselves to the fact. They will arrive when they arrive; we will hold out on our own until the end.

On 10, 11 and 13 July, a series of intense attacks took place. Two prisoners informed the besieged that the walls of the French legation had been undermined by a mine. A counter-mine had to be dug immediately; volunteers came forward, as the firing left the soldiers not a moment's respite. At midday, the Chinese entrenchments are taken by a charge, and two hours later, there is a firefight at point-blank range in Rue de la Douane. Two mortars explode at that moment, and the cannon fire rages. The barricade at the main gate of the legation is torn down as

a canvas. A swarm of Chinese fills the courtyard. The overwhelmed French take refuge in a trench forty metres away and continue to fire; the Germans come to their aid. A fresh battle ensues, almost hand-to-hand; the Boxers flee, but that very evening they take their revenge by setting fire to the house of the interpreter Filippini. So, for the fourth time, the Tsong-li-Yann urges the ministers to withdraw; he is willing to promise them his absolute protection. However, the ministers, who know full well what to make of such promises, reply that it is these promises they trust the least. Let the Chinese begin to Don't fire, and we'll see...

1. The firing ceases immediately. A sort of truce seems to be taking shape.

On 8 July, the mandarins visit the First Secretary of England. On behalf of Prince Chouan, they request Europe's good offices to help their country emerge from its difficult situation. The Empress, for her part, insists and sends the diplomatic corps, as a token of gratitude, a large basket filled with fruit,

It is peace, and yet it is war again. We no longer know. The Empress sends us fruit, and no sooner have we eaten it than the Japanese Colonel Shiba learns that large reinforcements have arrived in Peking (1,800 men from Shanxi with nine cannons) and that an attack is imminent.

We fortify ourselves, or barricade ourselves as best we can.

At midnight, gunshots ring out. A small demonstration. The Chinese protest and come to say that it was the Europeans who brought this on themselves. The confusion continues. Is it peace, or is it war? We are no wiser yet. And here comes Prince Tching again, gesticulating wildly as he demands the ministers' immediate departure. He declares himself ready to send word of them to Europe, provided they promise not to make any reference whatsoever to current political events in their dispatches. The ministers thank Prince Tching for his message and politely send him on his way.

Hope returns. According to Colonel Shyba's intelligence, the allied troops are now only 10 kilometres away.

Rumours are still circulating! It is said that the court is making preparations to leave, that the whole of Inner China is about to rise up, and that 10,000 soldiers are already encamped near Peking. Meanwhile, envoys from the Tsong-li-Yamen have arrived at the German legation with two letters: the **first**, from the Empress, who, in her capacity as official provider, announces that she will supply the besieged with onions, aubergines, ice and flour; the second, from Prince Tehouan, assuring that peace 'has now been signed and that the Christians may henceforth go about their usual business'. At that very moment, the mandarins make their entrance, as if by chance. One

brings the Empress's melons, the Empress's champagne. We drink to the brotherhood of peoples, we speak openly. The government representatives assert that the whole court is now against the Boxers, that the Court understands the harm the Boxers have done to it and that it is preparing to exterminate them.

And the next day, 28 July, the Boxers are not doing too badly, since, as early as five o'clock in the morning, they resume the firing. The Pei-Tang is attacked more fiercely than ever. So we resume the work of the sap and counter-sap, we reinforce our defences, and the enemy flees, after much gunpowder has been expended.

However, the Allied army is marching on La-Tou, 50 kilometres from Pebin. There is a frenzied sense of anticipation; every evening, volunteers, risking being killed a hundred times over, set off alone along the road to meet them. But they see nothing coming. And Pei-Tang is under ever-increasing threat, its defenders trapped and cut off. One is tempted to believe it. Now the Japanese intelligence service reports that the European forces have suffered a defeat near the river, that there is unrest throughout the Yangtze Valley and that 320 kilometres of railway have been destroyed in Manchuria; the Russians are said to be prisoners of the Mongols. Shooting at the market, barricades breached, official letters from the Tsong-li-Yamen announcing that Li Hun^o Chang has been appointed plenipotentiary...

Under siege, the Chinese, who seem to have given up the fight, are leaving Beijing. All this takes place within some twenty-four hours. It's over. Not yet; more gunfire at three o'clock, at five o'clock, at six o'clock...

But that very evening, a messenger arrives from **Tien-Tsin** with two letters for Sir Claude Macdonald and Colonel Shyba.

The troops have finally set off; on 8 August they were at Tsnt-Tsung, after two successful engagements; on the 14th, at Tchia-Ïta-Ouan. Will they arrive in time? The attacks are growing in intensity. Cannons are still pounding the walls; it is a hail of iron. Marine Captain Labrousse, a French sailor and an Austrian sailor are killed; a shell flattops the Chapel of the Negation of France.

Prince Tehing, delighted with this outcome, requested an audience with the ministers. What outlandish proposals might he have in mind? We shall find out tomorrow. However, the following day, nothing more was seen than on the previous day, as Prince Tching had not deemed it necessary to make the effort to attend. A courier, arriving with great pomp, brings a letter in which the Tsong-li-Yamen declares that, as the Europeans had shown no inclination towards peace (they had killed, the day before, an officer and 26 Chinese soldiers at the Mongolian market), it had become impossible to negotiate with them.

Sir Gordon Macdonald, contrary to his usual practice, gave a very forceful reply to this highly fanciful communication. He threatened China with reprisals

such terrible atrocities and so many other things, yet, just a few hours later, Prince Tching himself officially gave the order to cease fire.

What would have happened if the order had not been official?

At eight o'clock in the evening, the third day, gunfire flares out in all directions. A rush of soldiers crashes against the barricades: death cries, a whirlwind of spears and sabres; two shells explode in the chapel. The small European force spends the night on the ramparts; it is almost hand-to-hand combat. The three guns trained on the Pei-Tang thunder incessantly; the torches spread a blanket of smoke over the city. The attack intensifies, the Chinese onslaught rises like a wave, sweeping everything away—

When, at eight o'clock in the morning, an extraordinary, unprecedented, unforgettable piece of news spreads. It is sheer madness. No one believes it after two months of waiting. And yet one must believe it: two detachments of soldiers from the Anglo-Indian army have just seized the British legation. They entered the city via a sewer. The Americans follow them.

Boxers and regular troops abandon their positions without putting up a fight. Three hours later, a column of marines and three mountain batteries under the command of General Frey emerge.

Then the bombardment of the Palace began.

Eight 80mm guns are hoisted onto the ramparts. The gunners reach the south-western entrance to the Tartar enclosure, take cover behind the ruins of a burnt-out church and open fire. The gate, though defended by three 7-inch Krupps, gives way at the first impact.

11 All that remains is to liberate Pei-Tang, which has been under siege since 8 June. At a charge, they reach the entrance to the imperial city. The Japanese enter first, followed by a company of marines from Nanterre, who, under a hail of enemy fire, scale the steps of the convent. This is the finest display of heroism in the entire campaign. The Pei-Tang lies in ruins, its walls trembling under the impact of the shells. Of the thirty French sailors defending it, seven are killed: Ensign Henry, Petty Officer Joannic and five seamen.

...Within two hours, everything is swept away by a hail of grapeshot; the corpses pile up. The rest flee, covering the plain with retreating lines...

The troops entered the Imperial Palace via the bridge separating the two Lotus Lakes.

Beijing is definitively in European hands.

IV

Tianjin, 1 September.

A very famous serial writer asserts somewhere in his works, and quite rightly so, that the first building one usually stops at when arriving near a town by rail is the station. We have therefore stopped at Tien-Tsin station. But is this really a station? Is it not rather the remains of an Apache or Blackfoot camp, a rampart of Attila, or, quite simply, the work of six months by a demolition contractor?

It no longer bears any resemblance to a station. The train arrives at this desolate spot, and one wonders by what miracle of balance? It comes to a halt amidst the rubble and broken glass.

The walls of the former locomotive depot are cut into lacework, the lace-maker being

H. Krupp of Essen; those of the general store are

pockmarked by bullets and shells, and those of the station itself, remain little more than a memory. I would propose to the various European commissions for historic monuments that they be preserved as they are, in their present location, if only to show to the sinologists and sociologists who have written so many pages on the peaceful spirit of China that China knows how to put the Confucian gospel into practice.

There is nothing left here but ruins: everything is dilapidated, mangled, torn down. Only a small wattle-and-daub hut, in which a lieutenant of the French Marine Infantry, in charge of surveillance, is stationed, emerges from this chaos more or less intact. And there I am, with my belongings, in the rain, asking for shelter from my lieutenant who, very kindly, makes room for me at the back of his hut and gives me a few square feet of matting where the rain falls only sparingly.

All around us, the usual throng of coolies is growing; Japanese and Russian soldiers are wading through the mud, whilst their officers stand watching them. But to ask these officers for coolies to carry my two trunks? I'd have an easier time winning the King of Spain's Golden Fleece. I may well point out the hut serving as my shelter and my unfortunate host who, to make me feel more at ease, is playing hide-and-seek on a corner of his mess tin, yet the small, slanted eyes of the shogun's subjects remain unyielding and the Cossacks pretend to ignore me.

I reckon I'd still be in the navy's barracks if I hadn't eventually come across a wheelbarrow-pusher and his wheelbarrow. But it's raining heavily, the wheelbarrow's old, and so is the man pushing it. After such great effort, the whole contraption gets stuck in the mud; the poor old man does his best to get it back on its wheels, without managing it, so that I find myself obliged to take his place and, helping each other, we finally reach the Quai de France, after crossing puddles so wide you could hide a country house in them.

I immediately recall the description given by I. Marcel Allonier: 'The concessions of Tien-Tsin, a European enclave, a pretty provincial town, a county town of some sort with tree-lined boulevards, wide avenues intersecting at right angles, a quay crammed with goods where, amongst the moored steamers unloading their cargo, heavy barges and tugboats mottled with rust and smoke, the white silhouette and slender rigging of a warship can be seen in the distance,

Ah! What a lovely town, with its beautiful tree-lined boulevards, their branches drooping, broken by the varied combinations of melinite and cannon powder! Ah, the wide avenues! And the streets, a rickety parade of roofless roofs, of beams protruding from the jumble of rubble, like the teeth of a jaw reduced to mush!...

Rue Dillon, Rue de l'Amirauté, Rue du Baron-

In short, the European houses have largely served as targets. The town hall has been set alight; the railway offices have been bombarded; the French consulate has taken fifteen shells. All the blows have fallen on the French concession alone; the British concession, along Victoria Road, is almost intact.

I am trying to untangle, amidst the chaos, a fundamental impression... It seems to me that I have entered a vast arena, and that the leading representatives of the civilised races have entered with me. And we all remain there, less concerned with defeating our common enemy, the Chinese, than with demonstrating our own strength to our neighbours. Deep down, we despise this Chinese man; we know full well that he is not a very serious obstacle, but it is in our interest not to say so, to exaggerate the effort made to defeat him and thus to sum up, in this effort, all the progress made in our armaments and our science of warfare.

A circus-like spectacle: the Americans parading at a gallop on their huge 'horses', dressed as trappers, Buffalo Bill lookalikes, with gaiters up to their waists and cartridge belts. Circus effect: the English, as stiff as Wellington in their khaki uniforms. Circus effect, triple circus effect: the Japanese, who have borrowed everything from us, right down to the sword scabbard, and who display this copy with glorious naivety, their round yellow faces turning pale with pride beneath this rag-and-bone shop

. Circus effect: the Germans. Circus effect: the Austrians, the French, the Russians, the Italians, who send us troops from their elite regiments, to the sound of Verdi's music.

The Universal Exhibition of the Armies of Land and Sea, in the year 1900, did not take place in Paris, but in Tien-Tsin and Peking.

And what a spectacle, what a riot of languages and customs! China is no longer to be seen,

— Besides, there are no Chinese left; they've all fled inland. The streets are filled with the sound of bells and trumpets. Every hundred metres, rifles appear: there's a sentry post there; every night we're stopped by patrols crossing paths: *'Who's there? Who's there? What's going on?'* Sometimes you hear bullets whistling; it's soldiers shooting at the poor stray dogs. They also sometimes kill a coolie by mistake, but that's of no real consequence. One has to pass the time somehow, and target practice is a necessary exercise. The Gosaqties are top-class at this little game. Hiding behind the sacks of salt piled up along the banks of the Peï I(o), stretching for nearly a kilometre, they fire away with gusto; the Americans return fire, and the marines, held back by discipline, seethe with frustration at being unable to join in this concert.

And the days go by, the monotony of yesterday adding to that of tomorrow. All these battalions, regiments and divisions are waiting,

at the ready, for a batch of Boxers to be assigned to them by the Christian authorities who excel at this hunt. Then they march in column, herding a few hundred prisoners and a few dozen mules and donkeys. The prisoners are released twenty-four hours later, on the pretext that there are not enough Boxers to shoot them; as for the mules and donkeys, they are penned in an abandoned garden where, having run out of oats, they gnaw at the bark of the trees.

Ah! How far away they are now, those glorious war raids, from which we returned with silver chests carried by four men, fine marten and fox furs, gold bracelets and fine porcelain Buddhas! When we smashed open the doors of the pagodas with rifle butts, when we ransacked the drawers of the imperial furniture by the handful and smashed to smithereens whatever could not be carried off—that was the time! In the Empress's palace, we found one hundred and thirty million taels, and about double that in Prince Eong's treasury. We can all look each other in the face without laughing, as good accomplices; we have all, to a greater or lesser extent, plundered. Aided in this, moreover, by the Chinese themselves, who saw this as a favourable opportunity to increase their own fortunes, to the detriment of those of the mandarins. It seems that all the great red-buttoned officials now expect nothing more from Europe than a pittance and the right to beg within their own empire. Prince Tching, second co-

The heir to the throne, currently plenipotentiary with Hi Hung Chang, is said to receive **20,000** dollars from Sir Robert Hart. And there is something even more astonishing:

: that this Prince Tching, however second in line to the throne, manages to get his hands on his **\$20,000**, the theft being so well established that all couriers bound for Peking are certain to be robbed en route.

But if only you knew with what ease and cynicism one comes to accept this practice of sharing out the spoils! So, this morning, a Sikh soldier was standing at the edge of the quay, with four delightful little enamelled boxes before him which, of course, could not have come from his father's inheritance. I confess quite frankly that I wanted to buy them from him, as cheaply as possible, when a devil of an English officer beat me to it. I might have had better luck with another Sikh soldier who, all day long, had been hauling a piano on a cart; and also with a Cossack who was desperate to sell me an electric machine.

Unfortunately, I don't like music and I know nothing about electricity. Besides, there's little to do in Tientsin other than buy chain mail, electric machines and pianos. If I had to start over, I'd make a living there. Fortune is at an end. Just think: a sack of potatoes costs 1 dollar, a bottle of wine 1 dollar, a tin of sardines 3 dollars, and a kilo of meat from the butcher could almost be listed on the stock exchange,

at the price of Banque de France shares. As for the cook, he is harder to find than a flawless sonnet writer.

Every day, on Victoria Road and Rue de Pari, there are queues of starving people passing by. And as for hunger, that might just about be bearable. But thirst! The poor American soldier who cannot drink his daily litre of tafia! The Cossack without vodka and the Englishman without whisky! God forbid the Queen should see an Englishman without whisky! So when a convoy of these various goods arrives, the news spreads with lightning speed. All the shops are swept clean in a flash; the owner, aided by his numerous Chinese assistants, need only hold out both hands to have them filled with piastres; bottle follows bottle, a torrent, an avalanche of bottles that are sometimes emptied in one gulp. In the evening, all that liquid consumed means gunshots ring out more and more frequently at the dogs, and the unfortunate shopkeeper is forced to stand guard, revolver in hand, behind his barricaded door, to prevent those still thirsty from coming in to drink for free. These are the only drawbacks of being a grocer at the end of a siege.

Yesterday, I had dinner at Dr Depasse's house—he is the director of the School of Indigenous Medicine—along with a few other officers who have just returned from the war. We spoke of China, naturally, and all these men shared the same view; they all recognised

the danger is real; all are convinced that in ten years' time — perhaps even sooner — we will have to start all over again.

— 'Look,' they say to me, 'at the progress the Chinese army has made since its campaign against Japan in 1894, following the example of Japan itself. And what is Japan, if not an extension of China? Since the Japanese now have the latest model guns, why shouldn't their neighbours have them too?'

— 'They may well have them,' I replied, 'but they will never know how to use them.'

This sparked a long discussion. Is the Chinese man a soldier or not? On this point, only one fact stands out as certain, undeniable:

we do not know one another. The European has shut himself away in his European home and the Chinese live shut away in their Chinese home. At the palace, foreign ministers are received only once a year, at the Emperor's palace, and, in return, they receive the high mandarins only once a year, at one of those ceremonies remembered as a chore. A few glasses of champagne are drunk, a few cakes are eaten, trivial matters are repeated, and everyone departs, after numerous farewells.

Undoubtedly, the interpreters attached to the legations might maintain regular contact with most of the Crown officials, but they are so few in number that they fail to appreciate the political importance of their post! The others

deal with .may ! , professors at the School of Oriental Languages, colleagues of II. Devéria at the Academy of Inscriptions and Literature. They search for old books, translate them, and comment on them; they combine the study of Tatar with that of Manchu. They know at least 10,000 characters, and what they know least is precisely why they are paid.

You can well imagine that a conversation with soldiers who had been on the campaign trail could not focus on linguistics for long. When one finds oneself in a town which, the previous month, had the 'privilege' of being reduced to rubble by more than 5,000 cannonballs, one is quite entitled to talk a little about its history. However, I shall not recount that history to you, for you have been admirably informed by correspondents who had the advantage over me of having been eyewitnesses. In fact, there is so much to mention: anecdotes, opinions, criticisms — oh, nothing malicious, we mustn't upset anyone! This is the first time we have had a European-American-Japanese alliance, and a little leniency is necessary for beginners...

— 'Fancy a few stories?' murmured Captain X..., watching the smoke from his pipe curl up towards the ceiling... 'When the Cliinians were firing at us, hiding behind planks and brick walls, and we had nothing but the corpses of our horses to shelter us from the shrapnel!' Gette jour-

From T2: Oli, we were stuck in mud up to our necks for fifteen hours! And no stretchers to carry the wounded! We laid them on a plank, as best we could... I can still see one very young lad, barely twenty. A cannonball had shattered his thigh. An officer came by and asked me for news of his injury: 'Oh! It's nothing, I've lost a leg, but I don't give a damn... the forts at Tien-Tsin have been taken!' And another man, struck by a shell fragment? The doctor went to pick him up: 'Leave me be, Major, come on, I'm done for; don't waste your time treating me.' And Sabou-raud, the chancellor of the French consulate, who, a few days earlier, had given the same reply! And Lieutenant Piquevez? Returning from a reconnaissance mission, struck at point-blank range, he still has the strength to drag himself along on his hands and knees... And now, listen carefully to this, and tell me if there is anything better in Plutarch? He comes before his commander, stands to attention, brings his heels together, salutes, and cries out: 'Commander, I am dead, but the road is clear!' And he dies.

'Those Chinese we never saw,' continued the captain, 'those Boxers who hid behind the walls and fired at us through the cracks!' Those bullets were falling so thick and fast that the trees were riddled with them! Look, there, on that barricade you can see, to your left, three Japanese were killed in less than two minutes. As soon as one fell, another took his place, impassive...

And the Russians, displaying magnificent bravery, are just as valiant, for they neither know how nor wish to take cover... The Germans, very proper, go into battle as if to a sermon. The Americans, excellent scouts, but as troops they are of less value, for lack of true discipline. And now, what can be said of our sailors and our French marines? The sailors, exemplary; and the marines!...

— ‘For God’s sake,’ I said to those in my company, ‘get down, you’ll have your heads blown off!’

— No danger, Captain, we’d stay in China.

— Had we been up against enemies who really knew how to use their weapons, what losses might we not have suffered at the hands of those madmen who kept getting back up, serving as targets... But the shrapnel flew too high. ,.

At nightfall, I wanted to revisit the Chinese city with Dr L., along the breached ramparts. The soldiers’ camps streaked the flat, bare earth with their yellow patches. Patrols were beginning to cross paths...

Oh, those ruins, all those ruins! That temple, near Pei-Ho, whose Buddhas, fallen across the doorway, resemble monstrous, bloated corpses; those houses of which only sections of wall remain, standing like arms that plead...

those narrow, deep, muddy alleys, sloshing with mud; that citadel, the black mass of its ramparts standing out like bars of ink against the leaden sky! Old men smile in fear and shake their rusty metal; those old women kneeling before us, murmuring curses and prayers; that gunner killed this morning in an ambush, whose body I see being carried past on a bare stretcher... Oh! those ruins, all those ruins... and that death...

Péin, 25 September.

A small man, with a bristly moustache, bristly hair—the whole of him bristly—very authoritative, very resolute, a staunch enemy of abstractions, quick as a powder charge, as fiery as Gyranó and as good as gold. When he speaks—and he speaks a great deal, whilst knowing full well when to keep quiet—when he speaks, in the deep voice of an old captain hoarse from thirty years of command, he cuts out the silhouettes of the Clippe telegraph with his body; he stands up, he sits down, he stretches his arms towards the sky, he brings them abruptly back to the ground, he puts his fist on the table, after having thrust it under your nose, he stands up, he sits down again, and suddenly, realising that for the past half-hour you have not been able to get a word in edgewise, he apologises for it in a charming manner and... starts talking again. This is Mr du Chaylard, our Consul General in Peking, whom you know—

I witnessed the vigorous action during the siege. I went to see him, to ask him for a horse of any sort, capable of making it to Beijing. Oh! Good heavens! What a request! He leapt from astonishment to amazement, he shook my hands, he tore off at least two buttons from my jacket.

— You fool, don't you know that all the horses found after the bombardment are in such a state of exhaustion that they couldn't carry your 90 kilograms for more than 500 metres without dying afterwards!

— Give me a mule?

— No more mules than horses.

— A mule?

— There aren't any left.

— A camel? "

— There aren't any left.

— So what then? ..

— Well, I suggest a junk.

Alas! That's just what I feared. Imagine a boat shaped like a square box. Set, at the stern of this box, a large mast bearing a sail so tattered that it has more holes than sail. Now picture this boat being pulled, in the Cor-Celle style, by half a dozen coolies who take their time, strutting about under their yoke, stopping whenever they please to eat a turnip in a field... Set up in the middle of the deck a shelter made of mats with **just** enough room to sit...

to sleep there with your legs tucked up. Peoples this shelter from fleas, bedbugs and mosquitoes, surrounded by surly, rowdy Chinese, standing at a distance with long poles, which they will thrust into your stomach at the slightest false move on your part or theirs — and you will have an accurate picture of the junk, just as it has existed for 600 years. It travels at about two kilometres an hour and runs aground.

— It is the safest, quickest and most convenient way, says Rue du Chaylard, since it is the only one. We have departures every day.

— And I'll arrive in Beijing...

— Before the end of the year, rest assured.

There's hardly anything better, in fact: stay calm, be patient—an essentially Chinese virtue.

Late the following day, I board amidst a jumble of square-toed boots, all bearing a European flag atop a concrete block. The river is covered. A smell of old cod and strong cheese rises; the quays are littered with the debris of unidentifiable rubbish, dilapidated shacks crumbling in droves... We press on. Representatives of our various military forces—Russians, Japanese, Americans, Italians—crowd together on both banks, in postures which, to say the least, would shock an Oxford Methodist. Some are seen, stark naked, washing their clothes with vigorous beating of the washboard, and others ac-

dilapidated, revealing what is usually hidden with the utmost care in those special five-cent chalets. Life laid bare: rifles piled in pyramids, mules tethered to posts, a steaming pot, slow or hurried bells ringing out across the most mundane landscape imaginable: fields of maize and clumps of slender, pear-shaped trees, like those made by the trinket-makers of Nuremberg. We stop to let the men eat their rice, and set off again half an hour later, along the low banks, in the same endless, monotonous procession. The monotony of rowing, the monotony of rowing again, and the anger of our sailor, the brave Cornillier (32 years old, with a pair of half-gloves, ready to serve you if he were capable of it?) when he realises that other junks are overtaking us speed in this snail's-pace race.

As soon as we arrive, we drop anchor. The deckhand sets up a makeshift table where tins of sardines and corned beef make up the entire menu; we summon up a great deal of stoicism so as not to be driven mad by the swarms of mosquitoes; Gornillier, aged 22, on the port foredeck, tells us about the siege of 'fien-Tsin and his various other campaigns; the two marines serving as his escort seem not to believe him, which makes Gornillier angry again, and he calls them 'good-for-nothings'. And dinner ends in a combative atmosphere.

Every now and then the entertainment changes. We mingle. "Eli! l'rançous! 'Franzous!' the Russians call out to us. They climb aboard, huge, clumsy, encased in their boots and white smocks. They have big, square faces, covered in stiff hair; they have very blue eyes, straining to look us straight in the face, without ever quite managing to understand. Sitting in a circle on the ground, they start to laugh silently, revealing enormous mouths, barricaded with sharp teeth. The 'Frantous' sit down beside them, and the bond is strengthened with hearty pats on the back.

"Roussia! How are you, ieille branche?" shouts Gornillier, after a tremendous shove that bends the colossal back of the Russian soldier.

However much pleasure it may bring, one cannot spend all one's time exchanging Franco-Slavic pleasantries: one must drink. You have no idea of the brilliant yet discreet manner in which our northern brothers polished off a bottle of tafia! The bottle vanished like a trickle of water down a drain. And the good brother, after that mighty swig of 50 millilitres of pure alcohol (10 per cent), shows no more emotion, no more agitation, than if he'd just swallowed a teaspoonful of orgeat. He holds out his glass again; it's filled to the brim; he empties it... He would empty a third, a fourth, a fifth, just as easily. It's mer-
•eilleux 1

"These little experiments reduce my cash flow, but they provide me with valuable insights into the absorbency of the various materials used in the Pe-Tche-Li. Admittedly, I award first prize to the Russian; and yet, a doubt assails me: might I not be being unfair to the American? Should I not at least put them on an equal footing? I recall a resident of Massachusetts who made me drink twelve glasses of brandy in less than a quarter of an hour. He offered me his heartfelt congratulations on having such fine products in my cellars, after which he walked very straight and very dignifiedly over to his horse, which he mounted with ease and set galloping, without losing his balance...

Wang-Tsoiin, where we arrived the day after our departure, at one o'clock in the afternoon, is currently the terminus of the railway line to Peking, the rest having been destroyed by the Boxers. There stands a French post, still amidst the accumulated carrion and filth, a wretched French post set within a circle of gaping hovels. On the surrounding wall is stuck a large poster, an international proclamation, written in Chinese characters, which Mori, a scholar who nearly became a bachelor forty years ago, interpreted for me in the following ungrammatical manner:

'Recently, for the Boxer cause, which has killed quite a few Europeans and many of

Catholics and Protestants and burned their homes and their livestock, and seized all their belongings, many Catholics were killed and wounded. So the Chinese government not only refused to subdue the Boxers, but secretly aided and incited them. Consequently, we foreigners, hailing from various empires, were compelled by fear to bring our troops on an expedition to wage war against this evil. But the blame for this harm does not lie with you, the Chinese people; it lies with your government — and never with us.

‘So far, Beijing has been taken, and all parts of China—since they have already been divided up—are at peace. All of you, residents and merchants, who have fled to various places: if you are truly brave men, you must return home at once to work and conduct your business as you ought. Just as harvest time approaches, return home to gather your crops and provide for yourselves. Whatever you may need in the future, we shall be able to supply it as required. That is why we have written to you, to tell you to return home, to spend your days in peace, without fear or sorrow.’

There is something else to see in Yang-Tsoun besides an international poster: there is a corporal who, alongside his duties as squad leader, acts as a nanny. It is an amusing and touching story, the story of this

three-year-old girl, found by the side of a path, near her mother's body.

The corporal takes her in his arms and carries her to the barracks, where he sets up, beside his own bed, a sort of cradle made from an old tin of tinned food and some straw. The little girl sleeps soundly and eats heartily, under her nurse's watchful eye; but the nurse eventually grows weary and wishes to hand over the task. A woman brought to the barracks, half-dead with fright, is to take her place. The handover takes place with the requisite solemnity. In the presence of all the military forces, the corporal hands over the baby to the new nurse. He has neglected only one thing: to inform the person most concerned.

When the young lady realises that her brave soldier friends are abandoning her, she starts shrieking like a hen being plucked; then, seeing that her cries are to no avail, she decides it is time to take action. So she crawls on all fours, first onto a chair, then onto a table, and just as the corporal passes within reach of her little arms, she hangs around his neck like a necklace, screaming at the top of her voice: 'Hanna! Mama!', which, in every language in the world, is a child's first cry.

From that day on, the unfortunate corporal seems destined for his role as 'Maman Sabouleux'. His 'daughter' tyrannises him, leading him by the nose. He speaks highly of the mother, who is staying with the Sisters of Peking,

"Mum! Mum!" she cries again

‘Mama! Mama!’—in a threatening tone? What will the corporal do? This question preoccupies him more than the question of the partition of China.

After Yang-Tsoun come the post office at Ho-Si-Ou, then the one at Ha-Lou, lost amidst the endless cornfields, behind the hedges of pumpkins. The riverbanks grow flatter and more desolate; its meanders multiply, as do its corpses. A deplorable abundance of boxers’ corpses and others, halted by the tall grass on their march towards the sea; torsos, legs and heads, bloated, greenish, blackish, swarming with flies and maggots... When one has the misfortune to pass by one of these wrecks, cholera, the plague and typhus come out to greet you. One ought to bow and make a swift getaway. The junk runs aground, right there; for a whole hour of manoeuvring, we remain there, holding our noses, practising antiseptic measures amidst clouds of pipe smoke.

At last, we catch sight of a line of ridges against a sky streaked with blue: the hills of Péliin. An hour later, we are in Tong-Tcheou. The lieutenant commanding the staging post receives, in his palace—which he has, for the sake of duty, borrowed... somewhat forcibly—His Excellency Tchcng, Tartar viceroy and director of supplies for the Emperor’s household, a considerable office which the grand mandarin defines as follows

in an inscription placed above his front door:

When I ascend my Tower of the Great Light, at a single gesture from me all the junks come to shore. I must then transport to the capital the province's rice harvest, as plentiful as pearls. To unload all this food, I have over a hundred labourers. Among these hundred men, there are some who are good and others who are wicked. Sometimes many mistakes are made, and as a result we lose a great deal of goods. It is therefore necessary that every day, and at all times, the viceroy in charge of the food convoy be on site to take good care of everything himself."

This is a somewhat lengthy summary of the fable 'The Master's Eye'. We cannot recommend it highly enough to our naval commissioners, for the supply service has been one of the most difficult to organise in this campaign. Tong-Tcheou, which, due to its location at the far end of the navigable section of the Peï-Ho, serves as the staging post responsible for supplying all the troops in Peking, Tony-Tcheou dispatches several thousand rations with each convoy. You will hear much criticism of these convoys. It will be pointed out to you that the carts are too heavy or not heavy enough, that the harnesses are in a wretched state, that the mules can no longer stand on their feet. It will be pointed out to you

You might think that foreign armies have a perfectly organised transport system, and that all goods arrive at their destination in better condition than when they set out. Believe only half of that—if even that much! The American convoys cited as models were hardly any better than ours; on the day we were forced to station horsemen along the entire length of the road to guard the crates that were falling at every step. And what of the Japanese ‘sick woman’ in Colonel Shybn’s convoys, capsizing at the gates of Choang-liiao? And the baskets of champagne found in the ditches by our soldiers, who, being rather indiscreet, left only the bottles behind?.. .

There are only 20 kilometres between Tongzhou and Beijing, but those 20 kilometres feel like at least 1,000! It is impossible to imagine a road more fantastically, more madly, more hopelessly muddy. It defies even a sewer worker’s imagination. (And when it has rained the day before, there is enough to drown horse, carriage and coachman. The clayey earth acts like a suction cup, sticking to one’s heels; ruts are carved out, as wide as riverbeds.

We walked for two days through this lukewarm mud, across endless fields of maize, through abandoned villages, their houses ransacked and smashed, spilling the pitiful jumble of their broken furniture onto the road. Our carts sank into the mud, our mules stamped their feet, unable to make headway. -Apart from the

men took their places, pulling and pushing at the wheels... But a few paces further on, they had to start all over again...

We got lost in the middle of the night; we camped in a hut, open on all four sides; we ate an old piece of Dutch cheese we found at the bottom of our knapsack; we drank rainwater, and we slept as best we could on a mat, even though there were still reports of several remaining Chinese regulars, ten kilometres inland...

Finally, the next morning, we found our way back to the main road. Still the same scene of cornfields stretching out their golden canopies, behind which the sun rises in a bath of fresh morning light, in simple colours à la Corot. Peking is at the end, its delicate greenery of slender trees and its rounded hills pinning a long strip of violet silk to the horizon.

We pass under a rough, heavy, black archway, its lintels gouged by the bulges. Flanked by a foul-smelling canal, this is the street of low houses, the endless Chinese street, yesterday a shifting crowd, a human tide pressing and jostling, and today, a ghost of a silent, empty street, with crumbling ramparts that seem to cut out, in the night, kneeling figures as if begging for mercy after the curse.

Péh i ri, 80 September.

I've seen plenty of dirty cities, but as dirty as Beijing — I don't want to put anyone off — I don't think that's possible. Because it goes beyond the limits of human filth; you have to be Chinese to be that filthy! I know, people will talk to you about originality, picturesqueness and other purely local things, the sum total of which must make up for the few hours spent staring at them, nose plugged, on the Tartar emperors' chamber pot. They'll tell you that there aren't any monuments to speak of, which is true; that the temples are in such a state of utter disrepair that the visitor is constantly afraid their roofs might collapse on his head... that's true too.

Do you know the soul, the famous soul of the Asian woman?
That teeming mass, which, as a matter of principle, does
nothing
, as we do; which carries on the left what we carry on the right;
which takes the ilcuil in vêqlcnienls

white, whereas we take it in black garments?... This crowd, whose social system, intact for so many centuries, rests 'on the noblest foundations of the family' (I would be sorry if one were to believe that this phrase is not from a very famous author), this crowd, one will tell you, is the true originality of China. Perhaps, after all...

"To be honest, I haven't seen that crowd. As I write this, that crowd has not yet returned to its muddy holes. Beijing is full of Pekingites. And an empty Beijing is, more than ever, a wasteland of rubble, filth, congealed mud, potholes, cesspits, stench, rags and manure.

To be honest, I very much doubt that, even for the average person, there is any pleasure to be found there other than that of leaving it as quickly as possible. That jumble of low houses that look like so many little barns scattered amongst the trees, all those little pavilions linked by a string of paved courtyards, the heavy, poetic pillars the colour of beefsteak, those triple-roofed pagodas, fringed with green and blue, form a whole that roughly corresponds to the aesthetic of a cemetery curator. Yes, all in all, Beijing resembles a cemetery. Each low little house represents a perpetual leasehold, but one more comfortable than that of Père-Lachaise. Let us seek no other value in it. Note that I have put some good

wanted. He is well aware that this capital city consists of three towns: the Chinese town, the Tartar or Manchu town, and the imperial town. I have

}38fCOUru These three cities in every sense; I tried to soak up the Oriental atmosphere: I only succeeded in soaking up dust and grime.

Depending on the vantage point from the top of the ramparts, one gets the impression of a certain beauty. These ramparts, enormous masonry structures sixty feet high, pierced by massive, colossal gates, are, along with the artificial mounds raised in the imperial quarters, the key features of this flat expanse of land known as Pókin. From the threshold of the still-standing embrasures, one sees a panorama of gardens divided into plots by walls and triangular roofs; one sees strips of bare earth stretching out as black patches and wide avenues separating these walls and roofs into two parallel rows.

Genes, there's no need to be lacking in enthusiasm, but add to that the fact that these Chinese have, above their filth and muck, a dome of sky that they do not mock. A marvellous sky, especially at the end of summer, filled with an exquisite, peaceful light. That evening, one would wish to be in that vast expanse of clear space; one would wish to plunge one's head into it as into a refreshing bath; one would wish to taste those clouds of snow and sugar that come to melt in the warmth of the great, wide, serene eye. At times, the colour of jade

appear, and then Trianon roses, roses fit for fairy-tale princesses, peacock blues... All these lovely shades come together in a flutter of delicate, soft silks, which only a woman could touch...

When I come down from my vantage point, it is already dark. The whole city seems lifeless, shrouded in an immense, flat black sheet, with nothing to break the canvas's surface but the spires of its pagodas. Along the road, at the foot of the ramparts, the last military convoys are trickling past; one hears voices fading away, sentries standing to attention and marching in step, a few sentries lost in the face of the darkness and solitude of the Mongolian plains where Genghis and Tamerlane once camped...

As you know, the whole tragedy of the siege unfolded in Rue des Nations and at the missionaries' residences, which were situated far apart from one another, right in the heart of the Tartar quarter: at Nang-Tang (the Southern Church), at 'l'ong-Tang (the Eastern Church), at Si-Ting (the Western Church) and at PeI-Tang (the Northern Church) — Peï-Tang, the headquarters of the missions, being the only one situated within the imperial city.

The Street of Foreign Nations, which begins a few steps from the Floatamen Gate, running parallel to the wall separating the Tartar city from the Chinese city, comprises, over a distance of approximately 800 metres, the legations of Italy, France, Germany, Japan, Spain; of Rus-

France and the United States. The British legation has set itself up near the river, on the banks of a canal—or rather a sewer—which has the privilege of collecting the rubbish of the Emperor and his entourage, to carry it to the river; those of Belgium, Holland and Austria are a little further away.

These legations are, moreover, utterly hideous, since they are built on the Chinese model: 'doll's architecture', with small pavilions, small huts, small sheds and small courtyards. Inside, every effort has been made to furnish them in the European style, without much success.

Alas! Most of them were quite right not to go to the trouble of furnishing the place with furniture and hangings! Not a single chair remains from the Italian legation; one would face the same difficulty in finding a seat in the Belgian and Dutch legations; the Austrian legation might perhaps still be able to provide a stool; as for the French legation, in all the minister's private apartments, one finds only mats in place of sofas.

The others have suffered less. England, the main stronghold of the resistance, has been reduced to a shell, but the defences have held firm; Russia is barely scratched, America slightly scorched; Spain, Germany and Japan are intact.

To describe these ruins, after so many have already been described?... To tell you that this Rue des Nations, almost all the way along, is nothing but a lament of stones, of crumpled, charred debris, of

EN CHINE, 1900-1901

iron twisted by the flames?.. To think that with every step, you are still held up by barricades, mine trenches! To think that this ground is so ravaged, scarred and cracked that one might think it had been spewed forth by some volcano! To think of the horror of this sight, of this spectre of war, and the anger that rises within us, as we face our poor French legation, of which nothing remains but the chancellery and the chapel, its roof torn off by two bombs!... And the customs house, the Russian-Chinese Bank, the National Bank, the three Catholic churches, the French hospital—all burnt; the American and Russian missions—all destroyed! There are huge gaping holes at the edges of the streets, hills of rubble piling up, rotting corpses over which dogs and crows fight...

On the city wall, the heavy jumble of the 8th arrondissement's barricades still stands, just as in the glory days! A torrent of rubble falls, shatters into dust and covers the pavement... To speak of the abandonment, the agony, the death of all these things—the crumpled houses, the tall gates decapitated!...

How to describe this feeling, as one walks through what remains of the city, when, at random during the stroll, one follows the imperial path, along a potholed road and a line of huts with worm-eaten doors, of sheds and stalls in ruins covered with old skins and patched-up canvas† When one enters through the Yellow Gate, which leads to Pei-Tang, and when one sees it, this Pei-Tang, blackened

by fire, pockmarked by cannonballs, its stone façade crumbling away in shreds? And there is Jen-Tse-Tang, the orphanage of the Immaculate Conception, surrounded by moats that are as many Chinese mines? The dormitories, which once housed hundreds of little girls, have collapsed; the refectory is nothing but a jumble of timber and ironwork, . . . Everywhere, ditches and ditches, as wide as treacherous gorges cutting into the foot of the ramparts, ditches now half-filled with hideous mud, in which float skeletons, rotting pieces of flesh, skulls of a brownish-purple hue, legs swarming with vermin!

‘Don’t go that way,’ warns the Sister of Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, who is guiding me. There, fifty of our children lie buried in a mine.

And a little further on, in front of a pile of rubbish

:

- This is the room of the Italian midshipman Olivieii. In the very same mine blast that killed our charges, the unfortunate officer nearly became another victim. The entire ceiling fell on him; by the time we managed to free him, he had lost consciousness. God did not want him, whereas Lieutenant Henry, the man who defended us so well at the head of thirty sailors! Ah, what a handsome and brave young man, sir, and courageous, and modest! I can still see him. He was **constantly**

on the wall, in the front row! We used to say to him:

• ‘Descended, don’t put yourselves in danger; you know full well that we’re counting on you alone !’ And he began to laugh: ‘Well , fear not, my sisters, I shall not die until the danger has passed. ’ And he kept his word, poor Lieutenant Henry; he died a few days ago, just as the European troops who were to come and rescue us were leaving Tong-Tcheou. He was there, you see, at the end of that courtyard. He was running to give an order when a bullet severed his jugular vein. Well, sir, would you believe it? He tried to run on; but a second bullet went through his stomach. Then he fell. Ah! Sir, what pain! We were in the chapel at La Yierge when the news arrived. We came out weeping; indeed, everyone was weeping—fathers, brothers, sailors, even our Chinese servants...”

The young nun who is telling me this story has a calm face and the clear, innocent eyes of a Flemish Madonna. She no longer tries to hide her emotion; tears are streaming down her wimple. Other nuns come to join her – very old, frail women – and the tears keep flowing...

These nuns have been in China since time immemorial.

The eldest arrived in 1856 and has never left her post except once, in 1885, to

spend a term in Europe. And this enormous thing, this absence of forty-five years, this long moral ordeal: isolation, the neglect of family, of everything one ought to love in the world—she speaks of it in a flat, monotonous voice, as if it were someone other than herself...

I returned from Pei-Tang, passing through the Forbidden City. I crossed the Marble Bridge, which, for a moment, reconciled me with Beijing. I did not expect to find, amidst its imperial decay, a single line that was not twisted, of baroque strangeness—and yet here I have almost found harmony, sobriety, yes, truly, a harmony that I wish to celebrate on my zither, without further delay. One must picture a very ancient bridge with yellowed marble parapets, spanning a lake carved in the shape of a conch and surrounded by cypresses with slender leaves and carrion. .. But let us leave the carrion aside. ... On the banks, the small, low houses are hooded in ivy, the slender spires of pagodas pierce the sky like grilles, and, at our feet, the water is weighed down by spreading lotuses.

This zither could never capture the old-fashioned, contrived serenity of this little corner of the mandarin's garden. If I were him, I'd come here in a chair, every day, around six o'clock. I would have one of my favourites fill my pipe and listen to a passage from the Ent-ffnp, watching the sun set over my lotuses, creating the prettiest green and gold Byzantine fresco one could possibly imagine.

Alas! How short-lived this scene is! Once past the bridge, past the pond, I find myself back in my sewers and my slums, this time never to leave them again.

At the slow trot of the Mongolian pony carrying me, clearly in a foul mood, I reappear once more amongst the ruins, beneath the pal-lou guarded by the most varied specimens of the **military** species: bearded Indians down to their ears, who present arms as I pass, a sign of deep respect which I thought was reserved for my person alone, whereas it is extended even to the dogs; provided these dogs are of European stock! Japanese clad in tight-fitting tunics trimmed with yellow braids and wearing high-crowned caps with visors, like those of well-bred hunters; Americans in flannel shirts with multiple pockets stuffed with bottles of whisky; stiff, melancholic Germans dreaming of the distant Gretchen... A few Chinese follow the road, all carrying a flag to protect them from the bayonets of the Belitinelles. Some, in their haste, have fashioned their own from flags so garishly coloured that they no longer belong to any of the powers listed each year in the Gotha Almanac. So the patrol leaders ask them where they come from and where they are going, questions to which, naturally, the poor devils cannot answer. They mumble a , an explanation in their local dialect dti Pé-

Tche-Li, the patrol leaders retaliate with a stern warning in their dialects of the Ourol or Brnnde-hourg — and a kick settles the dispute. This scene repeating itself at every turn, on the other hand, my horse having but one goal in its mind: that of overtaking a one-legged man who is limping along ahead of him at a pace of about 100 metres an hour, I arrive at the hotel, which is closed.

II. Marcel Blonnier has already told us of his surprise at the sight of this establishment: • A French hotel, if you please, in Peking, a hotel where one is treated very well, infinitely better, incidentally, than in the luxurious Anglo-American-style caravanserais of Hong Kong and Yokohama.

II. Marcel Non nier had not foreseen the Boxers. The Beijing hotel is now nothing more than a shadow of a hotel, a spectre, an illusion of a hotel. War has ravaged it. If it still has its four walls and its roof, that is all it has. All the windows are broken, the staircases have no banisters, the rooms have only half a door, certainly not a whole one. Fortunately the beds are still standing, but without mattresses or sheets, for these have been used in the barricades.

After much searching, the owner promises me a cracked washbasin, as well as some glue and paper to patch up the most urgent holes. After that, he shows me into the dining room. Oh, what a beautiful dining room this must once have been. Now, all that remains is a large wooden table—

covered with a grubby tablecloth, and, around this tablecloth, by the light of two candles, half a dozen boarders immersed in such dark corners that one can see only their hands armed with forks and knives, struggling to carve up the meagre carcass of a chicken.

I sit on a chair held together by a string tying the four legs. And the presentation begins.

To whet your appetite, as is customary in Chinese and French novels, I shall tell you in my next letter who those half-dozen guests were, gathered around that tablecloth.

VII

Beijing, 40 October.

In the dilapidated dining room, around the rickety table, the six regulars of the Peking Hotel are having lunch. They come here, as if it were a chore, the poor souls, knowing full well that of yesterday's menus, all that will remain for them is regret.

They sit down, sad and resigned, in front of their plates. I sit down beside them. And look how chance works things out: it turns out that these are the very volunteers who defended the French legation with a handful of sailors, under the command of Lieutenant Darcy. For sixty days they stood their ground against several thousand Chinese; they were hit by enough bullets and shells to fill an entire arsenal. They are heroes such as **Hil**, the French doctor, Bartholin, Merghelynck, Pelliot, Feit and **Yérou-dard**. We talk. They tell me of their incredible efforts, their hopes, their discouragement... And

It is a remarkably accurate account of the siege. Now that two months separate us from the end of this nightmare, I believe that, with all the impressions we have gathered, we can begin to the whole picture, to turn it into a true account...

It began on 12 May. Sixty-six Chinese Christians were massacred at Tiao-Lo; on the 17th, further massacres took place at 'fcho-'i'clieou. Mr Favier wrote to the Minister. He highlights the gravity of the situation; according to him, there is the greatest resemblance between the current movement and that of Tianjin in 1870... However, Cardinal Pichon did not wait for the letter from the Bishop of Peking to be convinced of this.

As early as 40 May, he requested a guard detachment for his legation; the following day, he informed his foreign colleagues, but they remained sceptical. It was nevertheless decided that a complaint would be lodged with the Tsong-li-Yamen and, if no satisfaction was granted, troops would be sent. The complaint was sent: no reply — and the troops did not come. For his part, A. du Chaylard attempted to approach the Viceroy of Tien-Tsin to secure the suppression of the disturbances which were increasing daily in his region: the Viceroy was, however,

However, Admiral Gourrejolles insists on forming his own opinion. Accompanied by twelve officers, he travels to Peking. He does not seem to have seen things clearly there, for a few days later he returns to his squadron, convinced that the danger is imaginary

. And on the evening of his departure, posters denouncing the Europeans were put up in the main streets. The Boxers were preparing an attack outside the city.

On 27 May, 11. Bouillard, chief engineer of the Han-Keou railway, receives a dispatch informing him that the line between Lieou-li-Ho and Tcho-Tcheou has been cut; a second dispatch, three hours later, informs him that the repair workshops are on fire. He gathered all his staff at Ghdg-Sin-Thien; Ghang-Sin-Thien followed suit. It was then that he decided to return to Beijing, that return you are familiar with: those thirteen men and nine women, pelted with stones for a whole day.

Finally, on 8 May, optimism wanes. Reinforcements are requested. Alain, the Tsong-li-Yamen, wishes to prevent these reinforcements from arriving. He promises to punish the perpetrators of the massacres at Tao-l.o and Tclio-Zeh\$ou; he promises to ensure the protection of the route as far as Tcheng-Ti fou. Mr Pichon insists strongly that this promise must not be yet another lie...

However, two days later, an imperial decree orders the arrest of 188 Boxers. This is because the French and Russian fleets have landed at Ta-Kou, raising fears of reprisals. After a very lengthy session, the imperial government definitively declares that it no longer wishes to oppose the advance of the European troops. Soon the column arrives

An international force, which, together with the volunteers, is solely responsible for defending Beijing. It comprises 75 Russians, 70 Englishmen, 70 Frenchmen, 50 Americans, 40 Italians and 22 Japanese. All are to reinforce the legation guard, except for 30 French sailors and 10 Italian sailors, who are taking up position at Pei-Tang.

The bloodshed continues. Eighty kilometres from the imperial city, a Christian village is being massacred. Almost all the missionaries in the south have been taken prisoner.

But it is in the vicinity of **Tien-Tsin** that the Boxer movement is spreading most rapidly. Along the railway line, bridges have been cut, rails torn up, and locomotives overturned. People keep watch all night in the European quarters. The diplomatic corps made one appeal after another to the Tsong-li-Yamen, in order to urge him to take decisive action. The Tsong-li-Yamen gave neither a yes nor a no, played for time, and piled delay upon delay.

On 9 June, General Zong Fuh Siang's battalions are ready to attack.

This Zong Fuh Siang is a general from Kan-Sou, a brute who commands bandits. People already seem convinced that he acts solely on the orders of his government. And anyone who doubted this the day before must be certain of it the next, upon learning that Prince Tchonan **has entered the** Grand Council of the Empire.

So, fresh and urgent requests for troops: 500 rifles to be ordered by Admiral Seymour. Fresh and urgent attempts by the Chinese to prevent the dispatch of these troops. But the ministers stand firm.

In the streets, the violence is mounting. The Japanese Chancellor, on his way to the station, is seized by regular troops who slit his throat. A Boxer is arrested in the Rue des Légations — the first Boxer — and it is Baron de Ketteler himself who ties him up. Other Boxers are holed up in the pagodas.

Churches and missionary buildings are burning... Embassy staff organise patrols. Bishop Pichon, at the head, keeps watch.

The final breakthrough took place on 1 June, the day on which the French volunteers, CIII. Chamot, Bartolin, Pelliot, Feit, Fliche and Vèroudard, will attempt to rescue the priests and brothers of Nang-Tang. And after that, the gate will be closed, the barricade erected, the camp entrenched. We shall defend ourselves in Rue des Légations; we shall remain there, covering the retreat, standing firm.

One should be able to convey the tragedy of that day, 5 June, when the Boxers, swinging their sabres in sweeping gestures through the air, surged in red masses against the houses! When the flames twisted their tongues, when, in the Chinese city, the waves of men surged and surged against the

801

At one o'clock in the morning, it was nothing more **than a** smouldering inferno with gaping black mouths. Two thousand houses lay in ruins; the losses amounted to 70 million francs.

And the next day, we received the famous letter announcing that the admirals had issued an ultimatum demanding the surrender of the forts at Ta-Kou. 'The Chinese government, regarding this as the outbreak of hostilities, gave the Europeans one day to leave Beijing.' The diplomatic corps replied that it could not organise its departure at such short notice, that it needed guarantees of safety... And Tsong-Yi-Yamcn gave them those guarantees of safety by assassinating the German minister that very morning and, a few hours later, by opening fire.

From that moment on, it will be a constant struggle, day and night, against bullets, shells and flames. We fear we will no longer be able to hold out

all together in such a confined space; already they are beginning to evacuate the legations of Japan, America, Russia and France to take refuge in the British legation, the largest and best protected by its walls. Yet one realises that this measure will have the effect of handing over the entire street to the besiegers. The order is given to hold out to the very end.

The sailors and soldiers remain at their respective posts with a few volunteers. All the officers and some of their staff, the women

and children, take up residence at Sir Claude MacDonald's house.

The firing continues — now closer than ever, for the Germans and Americans have managed to seize a section of the Tartar Wall, have fortified themselves behind a barricade, and, from behind that barricade, are firing at point-blank range. Meanwhile, the Chinese have set up two cannons on the walls of the Imperial Palace, from which they fire incessantly, pummelling the British pavilion and Prince Sou's residence, a vast park serving as a refuge for 2,000 Chinese Christians and which the Japanese Colonel Shyba is defending with his 22 men.

The attack intensifies. They fortify their position inside by abandoning the outer defences. They lie in wait behind the piled-up bricks, and rifles protrude from every crevice. A French volunteer, Mr Wagner, of the customs service, is killed by a steel shrapnel that shatters his jaw; an Italian captain is wounded. A few days later, the Austrian commander Tho-mann lies at the foot of a rampart, his belly torn open by a cannonball.

Machine-gun fire, burnt-out houses, collapsing roofs. The 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th of July are horrific. Bullets and shells rain down and level the narrow streets; cannon fire comes from all directions; a mine explodes in the French legation, engulfing a quartermaster and a sailor. The Germans charge with bayonets, managing to break free

of an attempt to encircle them; the Americans, from the top of the wall, sweep the road.

Then new peace proposals are made, followed by very lively assurances 'of good friendship'. The Tsong-li-Yamen is pleased 'to see the Europeans in perfect health. He will continue his efforts at pacification'.

The capture of Tien-Tsin seems to have made him wiser. A sort of amnesty is being declared. The regular troops arrive carrying white handkerchiefs; they bring provisions. Then a secretary from the 'Yamen' arrives, bringing nothing but his condolences regarding the death of Baron de Er iteler, who, he says, was murdered by bandits. He takes the opportunity to try to persuade the ministers that, since the presence of the legations alone is enough to satisfy the Chinese, the wisest and most prudent course of action would be to withdraw to Tien-Tsin. A selfless counsel that Prince Tching supports with a most paternal letter and a consignment of watermelons, aubergines, cucumbers and ice.

The order has definitely been given to stop firing. And in the evening, the Chinese soldiers build a barricade. Why build a barricade if you don't want to fire anymore?

'Oh! It's not a barricade,' replies Yung Lu, 'but a path.'

At that moment, a hail of bullets falls. Where are these bullets coming from? wondered Yung Lu himself
Yung Lu. My army, no doubt! It's

you who started it... The hail of bullets continues. The Chinese government protects the Euro-póens.

Finally, on 10 August, General Gaselee writes from Tong. The Allied forces are arriving.

The attacks follow one another, growing weaker by the day. Zching is afraid; he promises, earnestly this time, a complete cessation of hostilities, but Tong Fuh Siang and Tchouan are unyielding. In a tense session at the Tsong-li-Yamen, they demand that the fight be taken to the bitter end.

The fighting resumes. Not for long. The influence of Tong Fuh Siang and Tchouan wanes in favour of that of Prince Teliing. True politics is, indeed, fear. They step up their overtures, becoming supple and insinuating; they promise to open the Mongolian market in two or three days... They are all sweetness and light when the European troops finally arrive on 4 August and rout them in a few hours of fighting.

The operations carried out by the expeditionary force...

The French contingent, until the date of the complete abandonment of Beijing, did not encounter any major difficulties. On 1 August, the French column, having, at the request of A. Pichon, bombarded the palace in retaliation, established its quarters within the imperial enclosure. During that day, the allied battalions occupied most of the city: the British and Americans settled in the centre of the

Chinatown — and the Russians, Japanese and French in the centre of the Tartar quarter.

Regular troops and Boxers still held a few gates and continued to besiege the Pei-Tang. After freeing the ministers, it was necessary to free the missionaries who, for two months, had been defending their three thousand metres of walls with forty rifles.

It was a remarkable display of patience and heroic tenacity at Pei-Tang. Constant attacks were repelled day and night, with entrenchment pitted against entrenchment, mine against mine. It cannot be summarised, nor can it be recounted. There are no striking tales of glory, bravery or panache to captivate and enthral the reader, but rather a profound sense of duty, cool-headed enthusiasm, methodical defence, and the quiet sacrifice of one's life...

Besides, this is more or less what we find in the legions. There, too, there is no talk of glory, valour or panache. Apart from two or three bayonet charges, the war is, from start to finish, nothing but a war of attrition. The Chinese never, or almost never, fire from the open, and the handful of Europeans who wish to drive them back would be quite foolish if they did not imitate them in their tactics. Each man raises his barricade and, sometimes from as little as ten metres away, the shots fly. 'On certain days,' the French doctor told me, 'we could almost have touched one another.'

It is the rumble behind the walls... We

Just like in archery, you scrape your stomach against the rough stones; when you lift your head, a shower of bullets greets you... So, once again, you crawl, you slither, and you take aim at the target... Well then, we set fire to the entrenchments using straw plugs soaked in petrol. (During this perilous exercise, Madame Rosthorn, the wife of the Austrian chargé d'affaires, who, in a very courageous act, had wished to cooperate with her husband in the defence of the French legation, burned both her legs).

Hardly any anecdotes, I said, hardly any brilliant moments to recount. No opportunity, save for a few, to display their personal courage in some grand act of valour that lies hidden beneath the cloak of epic poetry. This life of confinement can provide nothing to Berne-Bellecour and Llorot; it is all the more terrible for it, terrible in its moral tension. To sustain themselves, to encourage themselves to persevere, an unprecedented firmness of character is required. And this firmness of character, it seems to me, they did indeed possess.

In the British legation, where almost everyone has taken refuge, people settle in as best they can, some next to others and on top of others. A central pavilion serves as a meeting room and a war council chamber. Then each person carves out their own task: some

The Christian coolies are building the barricades reinforcing the enclosure, whilst the others are making

shells for a makeshift mortar, some wreckage found at the foot of a column and dating from the time of King Louis; others still are fighting alongside these soldiers, whilst the guard stands behind the makeshift bastions. Meanwhile, games of whist and poker; they read and reread, shelf by shelf, an entire library. Oh! No works from the Guillaumin collection. Oh! Certainly not: novels, tales of adventure or simple love stories. The Belgian minister devours, in this way, a hundred volumes by Alexandre Dumas. The women, throughout the long day, cut fabric and sew bags that will be filled with earth to serve as pots. In the meantime, they too play whist; then they visit one another with the solemnity of yesteryear, as if attending court. I have been told that

One of them, taking her chivalry to the extreme, roïsme, had even set her reception days. But I didn't want to believe it.

What he must believe, for example, is my flirting. There are a number of young ladies who keep a close eye on their purses, the other fixed on the young man who has caught their fancy. We meet up every now and then, and in the evening, when the Chinese put their trumpets to rest, we take a sentimental stroll, from the western barricade to the northern barricade, through the shards of glass and the rubble. We swear eternal fidelity by the light of the fires, And all this will end in marriages.

And so time passes: reading, flirting, games of **cards**,

defence exercises and, every morning an insoluble problem and every evening a solution: 'What shall we eat?' We eat horse, we eat mule; we eat, thanks to the courage and energy of one man, Mr Chamot, who, under fire, organises the supply convoys with as much composure and method as if he were still on the road to his district headquarters. Moreover, from constantly hearing the clanging of shrapnel and the sharp thuds of bullets flattening against the walls, a sort of indifference, a physical numbness, takes hold of them.

II. de Cologan, the Spanish minister, composed the *Boxers' Waltz*. El. de Below, the German First Secretary, never misses a Beethoven sonata; II. Pichon makes a religious pilgrimage every day to the ruins of his chancellery; his only defence is a musket, which has earned him the nickname — disrespectful and almost horrific

— 'Stephen the Armed'. Sir Robert Hart, at first like a father, despairs, panics; he leaves without even taking his cipher with him. Soon he regains his composure; then, he counts the falling cannonballs with the calm of a registrar.

Yet it is still the French legation, for that is where the centre of the defence lies! Ah, what fine fellows these sailors are! And what fine fellows these volunteers are!

On 14 August, when the English and American troops entered the Tartar city, all the besiegers threw themselves upon them to set them ablaze, the

EN CHINE, 1900-1901

carried in triumph; when, as Generals Gaselee and Ghaffee passed by, the Methodist missionaries sang, in very out-of-tune voices, 'Dea H fieu'n', we saw the most famous of them all, Dr Martine, director of the Chinese University, rushing ahead of some of our compatriots and, raising his camel aloft, exclaiming: 'Long live France! And long live the French! You are truly admirable, gentlemen!'

This judgement by Dr Martine, an enemy, the man who, until now, in China, had distinguished himself by his extreme Gallophobia—this judgement, I believe, history will ratify...

VIII

Paris, 20 October.

In short, of this whole Chinese movement—Boxer, anti-European, anti-Christian—the ministers, with the exception of Mr Pichon, have guessed nothing, foreseen nothing, understood nothing... One must not hold it against them. And Talleyrand himself?....

However, I believe that H. de Zalleyrand would have understood... But would H. de Talleyrand ever have agreed to come to China?... So that...

D8 No matter how much the missionaries sounded the alarm, no matter how much Bishop Favier sounded the notes of distress: it was all in vain.

— Ah! Well, it's you again, Professor!... Well, how are you? No more rheumatism, I hope... And that porcelain collection? Have you made any new discoveries?

— Minister, you seem to think that we're going to burn Geo-Le,

— We're going to burn Cao-Lo, well, well!... Tell me, Your Excellency, what do you think of this piece of silk I've just acquired?...

— I think we're going to burn Tcho-Tcheou too, and the Boxers...

— The Boxers? What are the Boxers, Your Excellency?

Mr de Giers does not believe it; Mr Conger, no more; Sir Claude Macdonald, no more; the Dean,

11. de Cologan, might perhaps be persuaded, but these missionaries always exaggerate... 'And, devil take it, if we took too many precautions,' adds the Marquis Salvàgo Raçgi, 'we'd be laughed at.'

Will the German Minister be hosting his grand dinner this evening? That is what concerns the Legations Quarter colony far more than the Boxers.

There is also the American minister's dinner party, the The British minister's 'picnic party'? Who will be invited? And who won't be? And among those who are invited, what place will protocol reserve for them?

For the typical ailment of European China is not typhus or dysentery, as one might commonly suppose. No, it is formalism. Around the official table, those who convince themselves that it is enough to sit down, eat, drink and make toasts, just enough not to roll under the chair, those are the bigwigs or the wolves of the Danube. In reality, the matter is

the most heavily barricaded city we know. In what order will you sit, eat and drink? And if you fall from your chair, whose hands will have the right to pick you up? They have been searching for this formula in Beijing for forty years, without success. It seems, however, that it is easy, as 18 Danube Wolf, for after all there is a diplomatic corps, and this diplomatic corps is subject to the rules of a meticulous hierarchy?

But not at all, or rather, if anything, and all the same, no, that's not it. The diplomatic corps is led by the minister, who is entitled to the place of honour. Obviously. Next comes the first secretary, who is entitled to the second place of honour. Obviously. And then the chief interpreter, who is entitled to the third place of honour. Obviously... Stop. (What will the second secretary say, who is a career diplomat, whereas the other is merely a specialist? You grasp the difficulty. And there are plenty more! Suppose there is also a consul general. Where would you place this consul general? After the first secretary? After the first interpreter? Impossible. So, where? That is what they have been trying to work out in Beijing for forty years.

And suppose, furthermore, that there are other officials holding the rank of vice-consuls and a chancellor, who is also a vice-consul. Suppose there is an aide-de-camp, a captain, a major, an

major. Should they give way or take precedence? Should they sit behind the first secretary? What will the first interpreter think of that? That is not all. There are the European agents of the Imperial Customs Service, Sir Robert Hart's staff. If you put them at the end of the table?... No, you can't put them at the end of the table... in the middle? ... No, you can't put them in the middle either... three-quarters of the way along? ... Yes, but how much tact, skill and flexibility does that require?

Finally, always assume that some of these gentlemen will be accompanied by their wives. Will you spot a 'customs officer' sitting next to a diplomat, or a female interpreter-consul? ... Fortunately, the globetrotters and passing foreigners will be there to save the host from embarrassment. They'll shamelessly stick them at the end of the table: him, the vague engineer on a mission for a US-Italian-Belgian-Swiss syndicate, and him, the vague commodities broker...

And it was to these absorbing pursuits that the inhabitants of Pókin devoted themselves, before the siege. For their part, the admirals, gathered at **Ta-Kou**, must have found other equally absorbing occupations, for they too did not seem to have formed a clearer idea of the importance of Prince 'l'chouan and his party.

However, the ministers' optimistic exaggeration turned into pessimistic exaggeration. It re-

They delayed indefinitely their attack on the imperial capital, convinced that no fewer than 10,000 men were needed to carry it out. They took China too seriously. Had the Japanese not insisted, proposing to set out alone to deliver the city, it is likely that the military meetings would still be continuing over the advisability or otherwise of the attack — and that the refugees from the legations would long since have been reduced to eating the hides of their saddlebags, their mules, their wives and their children.

No one, neither ministers nor soldiers, foresaw what was to come. That, I now believe, is history.

Oh I certainly, before the end of the year, we will have very substantial volumes, very long articles on this insurrectionary movement, on its origins, on its tendencies... We shall have the physiology of the Boxer, the psychology of the Boxer, the psychiatry of the Boxer, the soul of the Boxer; we shall be shown the lobes of his brain, whether his meninges are adherent or not. It will be, at once, quite incomprehensible and highly scholarly. And even a brief study of the reign of Hoang-Ti would not be out of place there, and one might well include a few new observations concerning the Tartar language. I do not believe, however, that it is necessary to go back to the founder of the first dynasty to explain the causes of this effervescence.

One might perhaps be tempted to believe that in Peking,

As in Canton and elsewhere, the people are only active when ordered to act — and always with as little understanding of what they have done as of what they will do. If tomorrow the mandarins who lead them declare that foreigners must be respected and protected, then tomorrow foreigners will be respected and protected. Since nine-tenths of China consists of peasants and coolies, ragged and shivering around a bowl of rice insufficient to feed five, whilst thirty are tearing the scraps from one another's mouths, what difference will it make to these wretches, these four hundred million mandrills, these grumblers, these ragged beggars, that the English, the Belgians, the French, the Germans, the Mohammedans, the Jews, the Redskins, the Portuguese, fetishists and Hottentots come to their country, since these English and these Redskins do not take away their food, but, on the contrary, by creating new tools, increase that food, allowing them to eat their fill, at least a few days a year!

They're ready to shout: 'Long live the English!'

Long live the Cafreg! Long live whatever we want!... ' But they must comply with their mandarins, and their mandarins have an interest in shouting the opposite. And since these good Glinois are the most passive, the most stupid, the most cowardly, the most resigned people on earth, they will always shout whatever their mandarins shout; they will take up arms— —whenever their ten-

They will have their mandarins, and they will try to use them for the sake of those mandarins, for the sake of that emperor, for the sake of that court—which they do not love, which they do not hate, which they have never seen, and which they will never see... In all this commotion, which, incidentally, barely shakes this enormous mass of soft flesh, do not look for the people, do not look for the people any more—look for the mandarin.

Behind every revolution, every reactionary movement, lies the mandarin's selfishness: a privilege to be perpetuated, a dynamic interest to be preserved, yet another means—added to so many already—to exploit, to fleece John Chinaman, to live increasingly off his back, to plunge him ever deeper into his bliss as a greasy, abject, in his indifference, his beastly laziness, driven by a few grains of old-fashioned morality and a whip. There is nothing else behind this eruption that has just set seven European armies in motion; nothing else but a very simple, childish palace intrigue, for everything here, despite the multiple plot lines, the complicated, convoluted form, is childish, enough to make one weep. They wanted to make the Empress a superior woman, a Tartar Catherine, and it turns out she is a complete imbecile, just like the rest of her court.

This solemn declaration stated that the ailing emperor, having arrived at the palace after the @vros, was incapable of producing an heir; moreover, it was noted that this poor man, Su, who, admittedly, had

Having more than enough on her plate tending to her spinal cord, and scheming to strip him of his power, that solemn fool could think of nothing more politically astute than to appoint a new emperor—or rather, his heir apparent. She favoured a ten-year-old boy, son of Prince Chuan, fifth nephew of Shien Fong, who died in 1810. A child who is certainly precocious, for, instead of still playing with toy soldiers, he swore, as Hannibal once did in his temple, eternal war upon foreigners. And this hatred is easily explained, according to Chinese genealogists, ‘when one considers that Prince Kong, the sixth prince, who assumed the regency in 1860, and his younger brother, the tenth prince who succeeded him as father of Kuan Sir, were both younger brothers of Prince Chuan’s father, who, by right, should have been ruling for thirty years’.

There are now, at court, two distinct factions: the ultra-conservative faction, led by Prince TchoUàn acting on behalf of his son; and the liberal party, that of the mandarins who have succeeded one another in power since Kong’s death, that of Prince Ching and of Yung Lu.

And so it is that this old imperial La Je-tè, whom one compares to Machiavelli, finds himself, at the age of seventy, **having** committed a blunder that even Machiavelli himself would have avoided. For Gribouille would eventually have realised that, to rule, it is better to be alone than in a situation

As it stood, Kuang Su, a fool past his prime, was not to be feared—certainly a hundred times less so, at any rate, than this Chuan, whom she had made an implacable rival by appointing his son as heir to the throne.

He knew this was bound to happen. The old-school faction prevailed; a few ambitious figures still joined him: Tang Y, Secretary of State, Prince Iran, Pou King, Tsai Lien and Tsai King, Yu Thien, Governor of Chan-Si, General Tong Ruh Siang, etc. ..

Tthouän 5th became a nationalist. B said to the people:

“Let’s sing ‘The Strangers I!’” A crowd of ten or so joins in the chorus: “Let’s sing ‘The Strangers!’” The Empress, having finally realised the gravity of her blunder, perhaps tries to react, but is politely shown the door. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that the Europeans have done everything in their power to foster the emergence of this heightened patriotism. It is difficult to be more cynical, more brutal than we have been, during these last few months leading up to the 8th. The Germans have pounced like vultures on Eiao-Tcheou, and in every speech in every parliament, in every article in the English, Russian, French and Italian press, they have been dividing, they have been

China, at a distance of ten kilometres.

Here, then, is Prince Chuan, master of a magnificent programme of action. He will lead the final crusade — and he will have an enormous force to aid him: fanaticism, the Boxers, whose **first**

wave took root in the Shan-Tun and began to spread, towards the end of 1899, to the gates of Che-Li, on Beijing.

The Boxer is a madman, a product of extreme physical deprivation. He is part of the great hysteria, just as our ‘ar-dents’ and sorcerers were in the Middle Ages. He is under the influence of the lamas and bonzes; he believes himself to be invulnerable. He is given a banner bearing this inscription:

“Protect the dynasties, annihilate the Westerners!” And war is declared... On 2 May, the first Boxers burn their first Christian village. Imagine Tamerlane or Cenyis in Tong Luh Siong’s place; there were terrible things to be done with these brutes: use their destructive force, hurl them like battering rams against the legations. -. They were thirty to one; they held the high ground of the city; from the top of the high hills rising from the imperial gardens, their cannons could fire on us unhindered; the streets and alleys in a tangle, the small houses tightly packed together, the labyrinths of mud huts, deep ditches, and piled-up rubbish that make up the incredible Chinese settlement—all of this was supposed to help them with their guerrilla activities. They

knew nothing of it.

They allowed their artillery to be captured on their ramparts. Their houses, their mud huts, they burn them down, without realising that these ruins mean fewer weapons for them. Their aim is so poor

that they use up eight million cartridges and ten thousand shells, without hitting more than a few hundred

of Europeans. Their arsenals are still full of cartridges, mortars and shells. They do not know

They don't use them; they just leave them behind.

And they fight desperately, never with their faces uncovered, always sheltering behind piles of rubble. They aim their rifles at random, pulling the trigger whilst turning their heads and closing their eyes. Their cowardice is unspeakable. They shower us with bullets and excuse themselves for the freedom they have just taken by firing them.... Sometimes they try to pull the wool over our eyes by saying that it is our Christians who start it; yet our Christians have no weapons... They spend their time shouting 'Matamoros' when the Allied troops are far away, and flattening themselves like bugs when, after the capture of Zien-'fsin, they hear them approaching on the road. They lie as one ought not to lie, not even to children under seven. They would so much like to kill us... And yet they are so afraid to kill us! Here are the examples: A French volunteer, Mr Pelliot, too bravely, scaled the wall and fell right into the regulars' camp. He ought to have been shot twenty times. Not at all: they took him to Yung Lu, who questioned him for form's sake and gave the order to escort him back under guard.

It was a Swedish missionary, A. Nostegard, who also found himself in full camp of rebels.

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Less fortunate than Pelliot, he received several blows with a stick on the soles of his feet and, limping, made his way to the British legation, where he was confined.

The chief supplier to the besieged, Mr Gha-mot, whose admirable conduct is well known, returns alone with a dozen coolies driving a herd of oxen. A volley of two hundred Mauser shots brings five of his men to the ground. Then, without fully realising what he is doing, he holds out his arms, a gesture which, in every country in the world, signals a request for a ceasefire. And... the firing stops; and the two hundred Chinese watch him pass by, Jui and his herd of oxen, without attempting to stop him!

Here is something even more characteristic: Captain Labrousse is warned by a signalman—

He realises that near the ramparts, in an isolated house, a group of soldiers are working through the night to dig a mine shaft. He sets off with his revolver, the American with his rifle; there they are, both opening the door and coming face to face with the fumes of Tong Fuh Siang, which affect them so deeply that they grab their weapons and start firing wildly. At the intruders? No, everywhere, except at each other—at the walls, at the ceiling, which within seconds are pelted with bullets. The captain and his companion take their time, take aim, and do not miss a single shot. At this display, the soldiers

'tptJisêtit* L8litousse has run out in his cardboard box. Good heavens! Quite simply, he goes out *to fetch some more*, whilst the American contributes, seth, to the game of sacrifice. And this little game could go on for a long time yet, if those who serve as the Bible do not put an end to the game by

Airigi two men manage to take more than twenty-five, putting more than fifty to flight. As for the history of human cowardice, I think the fact remains unique.

Ah well, no! Another fact:

You know that it was the Pradçais, **Ylâl**, Batto-liñ, Fliche, Yéroqard, Pellicot, Fcit, Mathieu and Chamot who set off on 5 June to try to free the Christians imprisoned at Barig-Tang.

There, at the edge of the street, stood a column of about a thousand Cliñois, all armed with muskets. Opposite, in an alleyway, one could still make out several hundred Boxers — some fifteen hundred rifles, against ten. Had the regulars pulled the trigger, had the Boxers blocked the alley, the French volunteers would all now be with the Valkyries.

The mandarins were keeping watch. One of the heroes of this battle, assured me that he had seen, with a bewilderment easy to understand, these good, protective mandarins beating their regulars with sticks to prevent them from firing. 'We were able,' he told me, 'to deploy in skirmish formation,

'to take out a few of those pesky fellows who were getting a bit too close for comfort, and thus ensure our retreat to the French legation, with no other casualty than a straw hat snatched from one of our comrades by a flying stone.'

The new school of history, which opposes generalisation in favour of meticulous scholarship and objectivity, would forgive me, I dare say, for saying that this stone fragment represents the whole of China, that these unfortunate soldiers firing at the ceiling instead of at Captain Labrousse and his American companion represent the whole of China. And the new school of history will, I dare say, confirm my hope that we shall at last be left in peace regarding the 'Chinese peril', which exists no more than the 'Eskimo peril' or the 'Patagonian peril'. The most distinguished Colonel Comte, commander of the French troops in Peking, repeated this to me today:

'With two battalions and a field battery, one can go from Cape Chan-Zoung to See-Tchouen.'

Dress them in red, dress him in white, 'they'll still run away'—just like King Nagone's Neapolitans. The 100 million subjects that make up the empire of Kouang Su have lost — if indeed they ever possessed it — every kind of moral fibre: pride, courage, social energy, devotion to an idea, generosity, the vividness of impressions, character; all lost. A philosophy reduced to a number of trite and foolish aphorisms; an art eternally the

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same, the art of trinkets, ignorant of the broad outlines; a science that still dates back to the compass and the engraved chart...

This is a people of such narrow-mindedness that, when I compare the grazing goat, the ruminating camel and the longol carrying sacks of rice, I see a difference in favour of the grazing goat and the ruminating camel. It is a people mired in a paste so thick, so heavy, so soft, that nothing in the world—no force, no leader, no Napoleon, no Charlemagne—will rouse them from their immobility... It is a people... no, it is not a people: it is a sludge of humanity.

— Yet this rag sometimes has dangerous spasms, as our two months of cannon fire bear witness, a young legation attaché points out to me.

Someone replied:

— On the contrary, I can think of no better example to illustrate his prodigious, incurable military incompetence. At this moment, sir, despite the great courage you have shown, all of you—a handful of Europeans against thousands and tens of thousands—all of you, ministers, secretaries, interpreters, soldiers, sailors, all of you should be dead. If you are not, it is because Tong Fuh Siang, Prince Chuan, their army and even their Boxers—though among the latter there are true heroes—are nothing more than that wretched remnant of humanity of which we spoke a moment ago.

F.i the young attaché at the embassy, in fact, was forced to admit that as long as he and his minister were not dead, in a novel ' by {ôbin, they had no right to believe in the yellow peril...

Pdkin, 3 November.

I've had a strange idea for several days now. Oh! A harmless idea, that of trying with all my might to find out about the current state of the negotiations. Unfortunately, I've come up against a slight obstacle which, admittedly, would never deter an English journalist: the fact is, I don't know much.

So, where do these important negotiations stand? I have no idea. Nobody knows, not even the correspondent in Zimmes, though that does not prevent him, incidentally, from sending out reams of dispatches every hour.

However, I am certain that negotiations have just begun between the representatives of the various powers, on the one hand, and Prince Zehing and Li Hung Ghang, on the other. Yet, when I say that negotiations have just begun, that is not the truth; and when I say that they have not begun, that is not the truth either. f.es né-

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Negotiations have begun. There it is, the truth! At the outset, naturally, the question of precedence arises. The plenipotentiaries of the Tsong-li-Yamen had only just arrived on 20 October to meet; they had to reach agreement on many matters: the punishment to be meted out to the Boxer leaders, war reparations, whether or not to revise the trade treaties, and the maintenance of free communications, throughout the year, between Peking and the sea... Some spoke in veiled terms of a government reshuffle, with or without Kuang Su. **In short, a very extensive agenda**

But there was that date, that troublesome 20 October? Could it be accepted? Sir Claude MacDonald, followed by the majority of his colleagues, rejected it. "It is important to stand firm," he said. "We alone shall choose the date for our conferences."

And China, just as it had withdrawn its Boxers, withdrew its '20 October'. And this was yet another victory for Europe, which, ever since it arrived here, has been content with very little.

Another question. Where, in which premises, would it be appropriate to hold these conferences? At Tsong-li-Yamen's? At the home of the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps? A big, very big question.

In the meantime, Li Hung Chang and Prince Tching are organising their official visits. One sees them passing by, almost every afternoon, accompanied by a swarm of mandarins of various ranks, amidst a

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A cloud of dust, that exquisite dust reminiscent of the face powder that only the capital has the privilege of possessing. Soon the ministers will return the courtesy, and we shall have a procession of chain-bearers in the street.

Following the parade of all these Excellencies, one amuses oneself modestly, obscurely, in the manner of the lazzarone, with one's back to the sun, that poor, friendly sun preceding winter. And we round off the joys of the day by watching, for the two-hundredth time, Emperor William's infantrymen standing as stiff as nails, the cavalrymen of Hachinley charging at imaginary obstacles at a gallop on their fine horses, Queen Victoria's Sikhs with their turbans and knapsacks, the Japanese in their feathersticks and tassels, freed from the yellow, and the camels, silent and enigmatic camels, parading their disdainful lips atop their long necks...

Sometimes, too, we'll have military music whipping us into a frenzy with a double-time march, unless it plunges us into mourning with a funeral march, in honour of some lowly soldier arriving in his coffin draped with the flag. A cold, ceremonial ceremony is held, a chaplain mumbles a mock prayer, and then, quickly, he is hoisted onto a stretcher, hauled off to some corner of the city, some obscure cemetery.

— Come to think of it, what was wrong with that one? Dysentery? Typhus? Poor devil! ...

But people think of other things. Life makes one forget death.

No sooner has the hearse turned the corner of your street than the international throng seems to grow denser, more tightly packed. Convoys of mules, flocks of sheep, pigs, cattle and goats; carts laden with barrels, wheelbarrows heaped high with crates; coolies hauling stones. The clang of weapons can be heard.

Palettes gallop past; squads return to their barracks, take up guard at the gates of the imperial palaces. Europe, America, Japan cover the old, rusted streets with their military scrap metal. At the foot of every *wall*, on the threshold of every devastated pagoda, one can see the white tip of a bayonet.

So, how are these negotiations going? I climb into this Chinese cart and off I go, jolted about, jostled, and jostled again, all the way to the temple of Sieng-Lien-Tsè; we're staying at Li Hung Chang's.

I am shown into a waiting room littered with a spittoon, a rusty stove and two chairs covered in red corduroy.

Li Hung Chang receives me almost immediately. He burps, he coughs, he blows his nose into a handkerchief (if I were a gossip, I might even say he ends up doing worse than that and I would bring up the memory of his exploits at Longchamps)... He asks me about the girls,

Mr Loqbet, {1 weeps over the death of Félis 9quire; he| praises Mr Delcassè, who is a minister, 8u dettimept dt

fl. J)gnotaux, who is no longer with us; he enquires after my age, the number of my children...

— ‘Your Excellency,’ I said, ‘what do you hope to gain from these negotiations?’

His Excellency turns away, walks off and hides in his hut — and that is his only reply.

Fortunately, I still have Lien Fang, the right-hand man of the plenipotentiaries, Lien Fang, the secretary of the Tsong-li-Yamen, Lien Fang who speaks French better than II. Francis Yièlè-(Iriffin.

— What are your thoughts, Mr Lien Fang?

— Oh, what a disaster for the future, Mr Donnet, these politicians! If only you knew how much I regret what has happened! We must be patient; the people are so ignorant...

— I forgive you, Mr Fien Fang, but where do we stand with these negotiations?

— I assure you that I opposed the ministers’ attack with all my might. If only they had listened to me... I have never beaten anyone, Monsieur Donnet, and I give you my word of honour that, as for this Prince Tchkh, I would have done so!... Besides, he has been duly punished. You know that he has been stripped of his titles and sentenced to be excluded from the court. And Tong Fuh Siang! Tong Fuh Siang... When I think of it! I have never killed anyone, Mr Donnet, yet I give you my word of honour that if it were Tong Fuh Siang, I would have done so!... You must forgive us, you see, the people are terribly ignorant!

-- I beg your pardon, Mr Lien Bang, but where do we stand with these negotiations, for you are no doubt aware that we are currently negotiating at the moment?

— Yes, yes... How is Mr Piohon? I believe he has been ill these past few days. Please do tell him that His Excellency has taken a keen interest...

Li-dessris, Mr Lien Fang greets me most graciously and accompanies me to my carriage.

No sooner am I back than I mount my second Mongolian horse and, through ruins and rubble, I head for headquarters.

— ‘I know nothing,’ says the aide-de-camp, ‘absolutely nothing. By the way, aren’t we negotiating?’

— I believe so.

— “Well then, speak to the diplomats.”

— I understand perfectly well. But what are you going to do?

— Not much.

— Anything else?

— Nothing much at all. They were all just there to scare the Chinese. Tin dolls dressed in porpoise-skin jackets would do the trick. We organise a few small police expeditions. We go to Pao-Tingfou without firing a shot; we go to the imperial tombs without firing a shot. That is the end of our role, I tell you. Turn to the diplomats. They alone have the floor now. And he

must be quite stingy with it, for they tell us only the bare minimum.

I climb back onto my Mongolian nag and, through ruins and potholes, make my way back to the hotel.

On the way, I meet Captain X...

— I bet you don't know the story†

— What's the news?

— You know we're negotiating peace at the

— I know that only too well.

— Well! Big, very big news. The Empress refuses any sort of agreement. We'll have war.

— Oh, and who's told you that?

— From a doctor, who in turn got it from a Russian officer, who got it from a Chinese interpreter. It's almost official, as you can see.

A hundred paces further on. Commander Z...:

— You know that Marshal Waldergee is leaving.

— Oh, why?

— Good heavens, because he thinks there's nothing more to be done here. He's going back to Berlin. He's leaving the field open to the diplomats; he's right.

— What do you mean, at a time when the Empress is refusing any kind of agreement, at a time when we're heading for war?

— What on earth are you telling me?

— The truth. It's almost official. I got it from Captain X..., who got it from a doctor, who got it from a Russian officer, who, in turn, got it from a Chinese interpreter.

Good heavens, that's serious, then!

— I'm afraid.

A hundred paces further on. II. Y..., legation attaché:

— You'll see that the siege of Beijing will begin in January. Last night, a gunshot was heard from the direction of the South Gate, and another from the direction of the North Gate. At Tori g-Tclieou, the post has been attacked; at Yang-Tsuen, the telegraph reports a very large group of Boxers.

— But I thought the ministers were negotiating peace...

— Peace? Ah! We're not counting on it. You'll see! You'll see!...

A few hundred metres further on, L.I.C. wonders why there are still troops in the Pe-Tche-Li. The pacification seems to me to be complete and secure.

Two hundred metres further on, LI. T... is extremely wary of the Russian troops who are preparing a major offensive against the whole of northern China,

Three hundred metres further on, it is I. i}... , who, for his part, is extremely concerned about the Germans and grumbles that the French are doing nothing but making a mess of things.

Four hundred metres, five hundred metres, six hundred metres further on, again and again more pessimists, more optimists, more indifferent .

A whole gallery of impressions, opinions, sensations, predictions — and not a single piece of solid information.

And the correspondent from the 2Tues, who continues to send out a barrage of dispatches. The skilful

But I think I'll end up becoming just like him. My stay in Beijing will turn me into a consummate politician, a transformation I never thought I was capable of. I am beginning to learn how to ask questions in half-phrases, quarter-phrases. A hesitation, a gesture, a faint smile is enough. And I have discovered myself to be a physiognomist and a psychologist.

Thus I have come to recognise that the most essential quality in a diplomat is, of course, discretion. A diplomat, wishing to inform you that his barometer is predicting rain, will consult it for a good few hours, in order to ascertain whether the disclosure of such a secret might not lead to continental difficulties. And even then, once he has consulted, he will not simply say, straight away, that it will rain tomorrow, but: 'It might well rain tomorrow. That is a possibility. There are precedents...'

Oh, the sweet diplomatic vagueness!

Among those who possess this quality least of all, we must mention first and foremost our minister, B. P|chon, and his chargé d'affaires, A. d'Anthouard.

I. P|chon, the most probable, the most welcoming, the most benevolent man in the world, of a character...

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and a good-naturedness that never, however, descends into vulgarity.

Mr d'Anthonard, cooler, more methodical, yet very amiable too, very welcoming, with a gentle manner; an intellect perhaps less lively, less flexible than that of his minister, but more patient, more consistent. We saw him in Nadagagcar.

Well, nevertheless, these two men, setting aside all professional prejudices—one of whom has been shaped by politics and the other by active colonial administration— these two men, an elite — and all the more so the others who are not — will never, I fear, succeed in fully persuading themselves that the mystery, the policy of empty talk, has had its day since the time of Poiponne; that, ultimately, everything must now be laid bare before public opinion and that, moreover, by seeking to conceal so many things in this way—most of which, admittedly, are not worth concealing—one risks fuelling the imagination of the informers who, to the great detriment of the truth, embellish, exaggerate, dramatise and make a mountain out of a molehill. Read the English newspapers.

There you have it, in one very long sentence, a very apt observation.

It is not directed solely at our diplomatic corps, but at all diplomatic corps. It seems that these very old people, having grown so accustomed to silence that they no longer know how to speak, and having grown so accustomed to mistrust that they no longer know how to desire.

I also find, through the elite circle of diplomats and the chatter of the common folk, interesting clues to be highlighted, silhouettes to be sketched... The attitude of all these foreign powers, this attempt at an alliance which succeeds marvellously, for there is, as far as I know, no note too high in this concert of such a grand orchestra!

The centre of gravity is no longer in China: it is in Europe. What will Europe do? How does it intend to deal with China? We can clearly see Russia's game from here. Having taken Port Arthur and Liaozhong, and occupying Niuchuang and Shanghai, the Tsar, by completing his Manchurian network, will inevitably, sooner or later, have Inner Mongolia and Tartary as vassals. His whole method consists of knowing how to wait; he will wait until the ripe pear falls into his hand. Hence his conciliatory attitude, from the end of the siege, his desire not to rush anything, to spare the Chinese as much as possible, to leave Guangxu a Beijing empty of troops, so that he might come and settle there at once.

We all have a less clear picture of the German campaign. We see Emperor Wilhelm furious that Ketteler's henchman has been killed. His infantry sets out against the Boxers—numbering a few hundred—in the Southern Imperial **Park** in Yizhou, at Italgan; his artillery promises to burn their villages to the ground. That is not enough: he wants the Empress, he wants Zong

Fuh Siang. He has eighteen thousand men in the PG-Tclie-Li, he has a field marshal eager to act. And it so happens that at Pao-Ting, it is our troops who arrive first, without a fight, moreover; and it also happens that, regarding this demand for the punishment of the insurgent leaders, General von Bülow is far less intransigent than H. Delcassé.

All in all, it seems – without wishing to sound immodest – that we are the ones who best champion the defence of European guarantees. It was the French proposals that were first put forward for discussion by the ministers. Mr Pichon has always insisted, and always with the same vigour, on the punishment of the guilty. I am well aware that we must not exaggerate the significance of this measure. When the head of Prince Tchouan is presented to us on a platter, it is certain that his head will be nothing more than that of a complacent coolie. When we are told that Fang Hu, sentenced a month ago by imperial order, has just died of illness in his room, some sceptics will be unable to resist thinking that this illness is most convenient. And when we are further informed that Yu Lou has been poisoned, and that Pou Ifing, First Di of the First Yang, Tsai Bien and Tsai King, princes of the third rank, have been stripped of all their ‘Lignites, I’ll have a look at the map and say that it’s a long way off, Chen-Si or See-Tchouen, to go and see it?.. . But never mind, there’s a question

of principles, which must be upheld here more than anywhere else.

..
The Americans' game is very simple; they make no secret of their deep desire to get in. As major importers, they want nothing from China but an open door.

England, with its two thousand men in the Pe-Tche-Li, cannot play a major visible role. But it makes up for this in the field of

'realities'. She was the first to take charge of the payment of compensation. Sir Robert Hart is monitoring this matter very closely. He is said to be proposing a loan based on revenue from the salt tax, a property tax and perhaps even the reorganisation of the likins, although this is a very, very big problem. For its part, the famous 'Peking Syndicate' is said to be seeking to secure the coalfields of Khan-Si, and there is talk of a secret treaty for the opening of the See-Tchouen, not to mention another secret treaty with Germany for the Chan-Zoung, not to mention the penetration of the Yang-Tse, not to mention, too, a great deal of idle talk...

That leaves the Japanese. Very enigmatic, the Japanese. They have fought admirably; it is they who have sacrificed the most soldiers at Tien-Tsin and Pei-Tsang — and it does not seem to me that they will derive from this great military effort any significant political or commercial advantages. Here, it is said, by and large, that they are marching in step with Russia, and yet the occupation of Ni'ou-Zhouang worries them; by and large, that they

They go along with England, and to some extent with Germany. In reality, they go along with no one, and their policy is somewhat indecisive. 'We only want to do what others will do. We are not an ambitious people,' one of their diplomats told me.

Well, so much the better! So much the better...

Fogg-Lind, our member.

From time to time, since the capture of Beijing, the military have been asking the following question:

— What on earth have we come to China to do?

And as they are forced to answer, some with: 'Not much!' and others with: 'Nothing at all!', this nothingness does not fail to humiliate them.

Suddenly, they are seized by an enormous thirst for action. They open the map, spot strategic points on it, and say to themselves: 'Tomorrow we'll go there.'

And the next day, in fact, they set off with cavalry, infantry and artillery. They head for Pao-Ting, the Silings and Hien-Hien... At last we are going to fight. Surely we are going to win. The men can see the medal that the Commander-in-Chief will personally pin on their tunics. The officers

are getting used to having one more stripe on their sleeves. Alas! ..

At Crazy Pao-Ting, the Chinese very politely open the door for us; at Silings and Hien-Hien, they are no less friendly. And this persistent politeness baffles the soldiers.

— ‘But,’ asks one of them, ‘how far will we have to go to find a Boxer and his rifle? ... And tell me, what if this Boxer were to be so kind as to shoot at me? What if, for example, he were to attack one of our convoys? Well, what luck!

— Certainly.

— I’d have my platoon lie in the ditch... You lot over there, on the left... and bang, a volley salvo. That wouldn’t drag on. Wouldn’t it, Durand, it wouldn’t drag on, would it?

— POLlr Bt̄r, my lieutenant.

And Durand, after a moment’s thought, adds, with a look of disdain:

‘If I’d known it would turn out like this, I wouldn’t have asked to come to this rotten country!

— Come on, admit it, the Boxers don’t exist. Yes, they tell us: ‘Eh! Eh! Who knows? Maybe? Wait and see.’ Wait for what? *Where* on earth are they? *Where?!* Do you know where they are, Durand?

— ‘As for tonight,’ Durand continues, ‘it’s all in my mind that if *I’d* known it would turn out like this, I wouldn’t have asked to come to this rotten country. For sure!...

As you can see, Durand is discouraged, his

years old. However, General Ydyron hasn't arrived yet, nor has Marshal Wei Derse. Both are relentlessly searching for the returning Ooxeur.

The Marshal is preparing one column for Italgan and another for Chan-8i; and the General, in agreement with General Pichon, who saw this as an excellent means of further humiliating China, is organising the Tong-Ling expedition to the imperial cemeteries of the current dynasty.

This expedition set out on 7 November from Tong-Teheou, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Laurent Chirlonchon. It consisted of four companies of Zouaves, two companies of marine infantry, a squadron of African chasseurs and two sections of field artillery.

I must admit I couldn't quite see the point of accompanying Colonel Chirlonchon on his walk. The Boxers would certainly be no less accommodating if I were there. Besides, this northern region is utterly tedious. Imagine endless fields of maize and sorghum, stretching on and on and on... a few clumps of trees, low houses nestled amongst those clumps of trees — and the sky above, and the dust all around, that horrible, nauseating yellow dust that makes your eyes water.

So I stayed patiently in Beijing, waiting for some improbable event, and Colonel Chirlonchon was already eating his dust, since

Two days later, I was visited by a young member of the French School of Indochina, who was on an archaeological mission in the Pe-Tehe-Li region, 11. Pclliot.

He had come to tell me of his departure for Tong-Ling.

— Good luck to you; try to bring back many manuscripts from the Hliiigs dynasty or elsewhere, perfect your knowledge of the Yellow People, and leave me in their capital.

— No, I'll take you. I have a cart, two mules, tinned food and furs; you need only saddle your horse and, by tomorrow evening, we'll be in Toan-Kia-Ling.

And he insisted so strongly that an hour later I spurred my horse and finally set it galloping in search of the Iloxeur.

As soon as you leave the city walls, you find yourself in fields of maize—unless, of course, they are fields of sorghum. The road to Tong-Toheou is choked with military convoys. People swear in every language; every sort of vehicle is represented, from the little Japanese rattletrap to the American jalopy, pulled by four trotting, clattering mules.

But after Tong-Tcheou, none of this commotion remains. Fields of maize, as they should be; a vast expanse of plain, the sky darkening with streaks of dying sunlight. A
, something infinitely weary, since

monotonous, rises from this bare, barren earth, which the wind scourges.

Flocks of crows fly overhead, cawing; one hears the creaking of a cart jolted by the bumps; peasants, black silhouettes against this vast grey backdrop, are stacking their final harvests... Here and there are clusters of trees with fine leaves, a pale green almost faded, and amongst these trees, behind hedges of sorghum and clay walls, villages stretch out in squares, full of small, low houses with windows covered in paper.

The inhabitants, on either side of the street, watch us enter. The fear— the hundred people—of being killed or plundered by us—who are but two — is written all over their chubby faces. When we laugh, they start laughing; when we frown, they tremble; and when Pelliot asks the bravest among them for directions to Tong-Ling, the whole tribe rushes after him.

Yet, it must be acknowledged that they do not always show the same eagerness. Above all, one must not forget that it was these charitable and helpful Chinese who, having taken a marine infantryman prisoner a few days earlier, had already tied him with his head between his legs at the foot of a tree and were preparing to burn the tree and the soldier, when a German patrol arrived just in time to save them both. This strengthens my conviction that...

oJii n ion: that, if you want to travel safely in Gliine, you need to be at least *two*. Otherwise, you're bound to get roasted at the foot of a tree; but with two, you're sure to get roasted—the whole village and yourself—and if, by chance, there are *three of you, you stand* a chance of conquering the empire and tying the executioner to the tree yourself.

At the gentle trot of our two Mongolian ponies, we all keep following the straight road, rutted with deep tracks, flanked by fields of millet and sorghum, on and on. Night falls in sheets across the cold plain. Our numb hands can barely feel the reins. Soon, we will no longer be able to see or hear, our ears blocked by dust; we will move forward only by feeling our way, step by step. But the kind and helpful Chinese man, who has never let us down so far, comes to our aid. This good Chinese man has a lantern, a flickering light, and this light will serve to guide us to a pagoda, that of P'ing-Kia-Toan, where we shall arrive exhausted, frozen and weary.

We find only one monk there (the other having died of fright when the troops arrived) and, astonishingly, this one too is not dead, though his fear has reached unusual proportions. His legs are like cardboard, his face is made of wax, he has lost the use of his tongue, and we almost have to carry him on our shoulders so that he might do us the honour of welcoming us into his home.

Here is the description of a rather amusing in

A monk's room? The furnishings are simple: a massive table, two massive chairs on either side of the table, a console table piled high with religious books, and the k'ang — and that is all.

The k'ang! Ah! I k'ang! Let those who do not know the k'ang never in their lives seek to know it. There is no more abominable piece of furniture in the whole of China, not even its female counterpart, the cangue. The k'ang is full of pretensions which, moreover, it can never justify. It pretends to be a bed, in which it is mistaken; it pretends to be a stove, in which it is mistaken again. In reality, it is a perfect instrument for catching lumbago, a chest infection or suffocation, take your pick.

Imagine a sort of platform covered with mats and arranged inside in the shape of an oven. You lie down on this platform, try to **fall asleep**, tuck yourself in up to your ears under your blankets, and you're already asleep when—all of a sudden—thick smoke wakes you up, black smoke that catches in your throat, choking you. A fire, no doubt; is the whole house ablaze? You jump up, coughing and spitting, and stagger towards the door... Don't be alarmed, it's the k'ang. It's the k'ang that's just been stuffed into the oven, specifically to warm you up. And the good Chinese man looks at you, all smiles. "What a fuss!" he seems to say, "this smoke isn't as thick as all that, since I'm staying here myself!" And he laughs.

In fact, he stays there whilst you go out into the courtyard, where it's 15 degrees below zero, to wait for the operation to finish.

Once the smoke has cleared, you can go back to your room, with the promise of a chest-warming bath. But no sooner have you stretched out than you have to spring up like a coiled spring and jump off the bed, for you are no longer on a bed, you are on a hotplate. So you flee in search of another k'ang and the same tribulations begin anew. The good Chinese man starts heating it up again, making smoke. You shower him with abuse, which he laughs off — and with one making smoke and the other getting angry, it is usually four o'clock in the morning by the time you fall asleep again. And at seven o'clock, the madman gives the signal to leave.

That morning, it seems as though the village, the sky, the fields, everything has been bathed in a golden light. It is a different China that reveals itself, delicately spread out upon a bed of pale mist... The little houses huddled around their tall trees, forming a lovely scene of a Kansai landscape...

Alain, what a fleeting moment! Now the sun barricades itself behind grubby clouds, now the golden light melts into a single pool of thick ink — and now the indigestible sorghum reappears

Passing Hla-Tien, the narrow backstreet, its dilapidated shops encroaching onto the pavement, and this

same crowd of onlookers with dazed and bewildered expressions, staring at us.

And beyond that lies an even harsher plain, more scarred by the wind, the road disappearing into hard sand, rising and falling through potholes and gullies. Following it brings on a sense of melancholy. I'd rather follow the poor Chinese labourers, who trudge along in ragged, creaking chains. They walk, a stick in hand, slowly, dragging their

legs. They have the same stupid, dazed look as the others. One can scarcely believe that, if necessary, they would tear out your fingernails and drive nails into your skull with hammer blows, so gentle and listless, polite, obsequious and clingy they seem.

In every village where we stop, the scene is invariably the same. The mayor and the wealthiest residents come to bow down at our feet, take our horses by the bridle, and lead them to the stables themselves. It is a triumphal journey. They always ask if Your Excellencies need anything, and, as Your Excellencies always need something, they all return in single file, bearing baskets of grapes, apples, pears and khabis, chickens and ducks, which they ceremoniously present to us, cut in half. After which, a triple line forms around us, and, in the wide-open inn room, mayors and notables, coolies and snotty-nosed urchins, respectfully attend our meals.

As soon as one of our Excellencies makes a cup of tea, immediately a legion of courtiers is at their service. One brings the teapot; another, wishing to ensure that the tea within is hot, finds nothing simpler than to dip his finger in it; but a third, impatient to see that the process is not proceeding quickly enough, plunges his whole hand in. Never have I felt the weight of official honours as heavily as in China.

It is worth adding that these gestures of deference are always motivated by self-interest. These ducks, pears and chickens are offered to us solely to obtain, in exchange, a certificate bearing our official signatures, assuring passing troops that those who receive us are good people who detest Prince Jchouïp and adore the Republic. Sometimes, too, they present us with flags—rags of blue, white and red—on which we shall inscribe these words:

‘Protected by the French.’ All prudent men

They travel with this label, which they pin, for added security, right up to their donkeys’ ears. It is a pitiful, sickening procession, that of all these wretched souls trembling with fear, fixing their eyes—wet with the sorrow of a beaten dog—on the shadow of a European.

‘Never mind, they’ll f*** us from behind,’ the captain said to me... Perhaps, but certainly not from the front! Oh, certainly not. The old ones, especially, are **pitiful**. The resignation of the native races,

ancestral misery, stupidity, ignorance—the old men embody all that! And the young men embody the promise of all that! You see them perched on a trotting donkey, followed by their wives, grotesque ornaments on another donkey...

Honestly, everything here is ridiculous, right down to the story of our first encounter with the boxers, which I'll tell you about in my next letter.

Beijing, 23 November.

Do you remember our triumphant journey through P'ing-Kia-Toan, Hia-Tien, Tsao-Lin and other hamlets, market towns and cities with names just as easy to remember? What care was shown to Their Excellencies, to whom were reserved the room with the fewest cockroaches, the fattest chickens, the freshest eggs! Do you remember how the municipal leaders themselves vied for the honour of holding our horses by the bridle whilst we dismounted?

For three days, our noble people had endured this epidemic of politeness without faltering, until they finally joined the Ghirlonchon column at Pang-h'iun. A weary, disheartened, furious column. Not a Boxer in sight, not even a trace, not even the shadow of a Boxer! We camped there, sadly. Zouaves and marines ate a soup drenched in tears of rage:

— What on earth have we come here to look for

here?... Is this what they call a campaign? It would have been enough to send four medics and their syringes! Ah! Woe upon woe...

When suddenly the shooting breaks out. Astonishment, bewilderment. A bad joke, an accident? Anything you like, except the Boxer.

Well, it was him, the Boxer! He'd just fired a 'Chinese-style' shot — which necessarily meant he'd missed — at a courier from the African cbaSSBurS. After which, surprised at having gone so far, he'd fled — in the 'Chinese style'.

But immediately a squadron set off in pursuit; meanwhile, the six companies gathered and closed the access gates. And then, I was able to witness the delightful 'contact between our two civilisations', the practical application of Mr Friedrich Nietzsche's divine catechism. It was a delightful spectacle, a very well-choreographed production, which I recommend to lovers of rare thrills. There they will find the one, the true great thrill.

The soldiers rush in, battering down the walls of the houses with the butts of their rifles, smashing the furniture to pieces, and beneath the mats, beneath the blankets, beneath the heaps of sorghum, they discover men, women and children, pale, huddled, curled up together, staring at those rifles, those raised fists, with wild eyes, the eyes of hunted beasts that can no longer see, that sink into their sockets and roll like white marbles.

They are seized by the hair, by the skin of the neck, by the feet. They are dragged and shoved; their bodies are thrown onto the ground, their skulls crushed. The children scream, the women wail. Some tear at their clothes and, offering themselves naked and dishevelled, step forward to the front of the troops. Then, when they realise that he is sparing them, they all remain there nonetheless, close by, wanting to follow, nonetheless, the horror of this tragedy — and until the very end, they remain there, now silent, motionless, terrified, almost beautiful in their pain, hatred and resignation.

The men, for their part, no longer try to defend themselves. They lie down, stretch out their arms, baring their chests—and the bayonets plunge into them. Then they gasp for breath and die on top of one another, face down on the ground. Some try to escape; they are about to escape, when a woman drags them back by the hair, and so sudden is the jolt that they fall onto their backs, writhing for a moment like crabs turned on their backs, but the same woman stops them, pinning them down with a stroke of her sabre. And they fall back, and they die, their eyes wide open.

The pagodas are ransacked, along with the armouries and ammunition depots. There are found thousands of rifles, thousands of cartridges and dozens of Blaxim machine guns. They are set alight. The flames rise, tall and long, into the clear sky. The crackling of gunpowder can be heard; the walls collapse

in blocks, covering the corpses with their rubble.

Far away, the looting continues; soldiers scaling the walls of Pisa, entering through the roof when they cannot get in through the gate, come upon women who fall to their knees, and old men who beg for mercy. Dogs bark at the noise, whilst horses and mules, breaking free from their halters, gallop furiously through the village.

And the epilogue to these events was the mass execution of 70 Boxers, among whom the rouaves had once again discovered weapons. They lined up, without a word, without a cry, without a gesture of supplication, fully aware that it was pointless, that it was over. All fell as if the same scythe had severed their hamstrings. Only one remained standing, staggering. His bare chest was intact, but his head was split in two, two enormous holes filled with brain matter. Another had his carotid artery severed, and the blood pooled, almost congealed, around the round wound.... These 70 bodies lying sprawled and curled up on themselves, arms stiffened, legs having already carved their furrows in the dust, these bloodless faces, these faces of the fallen with pinched nostrils, lips parted to reveal teeth fringed with foam!... And those eyes that look at you, follow you menacingly, ecstatically — one reads so much into them, into those eyes!

— Oh! That dreadful swarm of yellow-bodied insects, on the doorsteps of houses and pagodas, in the ditches, in the cornfields, on the roads! There are so

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everywhere. It seems we'll never be done with them

An old marine infantry officer, whom I ask once again for some details of the action, replies brusquely: 'Leave me alone, don't ask me anything. That wasn't war. They didn't put up a fight; they were slaughtered like calves. They just stood there waiting for the bayonet thrust... No, that's not war. And yet, it had to be done; this example was necessary. We had to remember Bishop Hamer, whom they cut to pieces; we had to remember Father Guillou and **Father** Grassi, whom they doused with petrol and burned; we had to remember Father Pogolla, whom they hanged after tearing off his fingers, those eight Franciscan sisters whom they buried alive, those five missionaries whom they flayed and crucified...' We resume our march. The flames from the burning pagodas rise redder and higher into the clear sky. Behind every hedge of sorghum, every curtain of low houses, shadowy figures appear, watching our departure. The dogs are still howling; more corpses lie strewn across the road.... And all this horror and all this blood are summed up, crystallised in the sight of a tiny child struck by a stray bullet. In his blue dress and pink stockings, he looks like an idol, abandoned there by some pi...

bacon.

The plain narrows , now blocked by

tall purple hills that merge into rounded knolls, but the fields, cracked by the north wind, still stretch out, dotted with willows of delicate leaves and villages clustered in clumps. The men follow the straight road, rucksacks on their backs, rifles slung over their shoulders. Zouaves and marines, one hears the clatter of their iron-shod boots on the hard ground, one hears the refrains of their marching songs:

**Ah! How the mothers of today Must be
tormented by their daughters! They've all
got a lover,
Especially when they're young. For a young
and vigorous lover, They'd storm the Bastille...**

Which is perhaps an exaggeration.

And so we press on, with songs to lift our spirits and a few swigs of tafia to help us through the tough bits, until we reach the next stage. Behind us, the huge supply convoy stretches out for over two kilometres. The captain in charge of supervising it rattles off the complete and colourful list of every swear word in the French language; the administrative officer is tearing his hair out. The further we go, the flatter the road becomes and, as if by some black misfortune, the potholes, the breakdowns and accidents of all kinds multiply.

First and foremost are the capricious camels, those whimsical beasts that stretch their long necks into the dust, snort loudly, open one mocking eye, close the other and

lie down; the sensitive camels, those delicate creatures whose every nerve is set on edge at the sight of a horse or a pig, and who then, with a sudden lurch, knock the crates tied to their humped backs askew, and in the process, topple others, also attached to the humped back of one of their fellow camels — which in turn knocks over a third, a fourth...

That's not all. Here's where the mules get involved. And once a mule gets involved, there's no power or person in the world that can stop it from getting involved. There is only one solution: take the mule's place and pull in its stead for a while, then ask it politely if it has decided to pull again, and, if it says no, start pulling again until it finally makes up its mind. Add to all this merriment the carts spilling their loads, the wine barrels spilling their contents, and the sacks of biscuits doing the same.

At last, at five o'clock, we stand at the gateway to the crenellated walls of Ki-Tcheou. We emerge through the great gate onto the main street, now teeming with carriages, carts and escorting soldiers. A few merchants are imprudent enough to leave their shops open for a moment; the soldiers relieve them of the bother of taking stock for the New Year. All that remains are the counters, the display shelves and the desolate shopkeeper.

And then, it's a hunt for chickens and ap

ducks; the cauldrons are set out; enormous *pots* are simmering. These twelve hundred men eating, as night has already fallen, by the light of the braziers and heavy Chinese candles, the clatter of forks and knives striking the iron plates, the shouts, the loud laughter, the call of the trumpets—all this appeared to me as a vision of irresistible force, A triumph of weight and matter. These twelve hundred men could, if they wished, cross the whole of China from one end to the other, burning, smashing, and tearing down all these poor things that surround us, with nothing but a few blows

Poor wretched things... those dilapidated streets, riddled with potholes, littered with rubbish; those ramshackle houses, which time has covered with scaly patches; those interiors with their massive furniture that creaks and collapses at the slightest knock, and these flat-faced creatures, waiting for the rain, their backs bent, waiting for the shove!

Captain Ålasson, of the 1st Company, has just seized, in one of their pagodas, a whole batch of Krupp cannons and more than 2,000 Hauser or similar rifles. And they did not have the courage to set up these cannons and fire these rifles to prevent us from entering. The prefect has no choice but to take 8,000 thalers from his coffers and bring them to the commander of the column, in the hope that he will at least be allowed to keep his head and opium pipe.

... **This evening**, after the streetlights had gone out, I wandered aimlessly through the town, at the foot of the walls. The moon, high in the sky, cast a shower of fine gold upon the earth, a calm, dazzling glow of joyful light. **Everything** was enveloped in stillness; the little houses were falling asleep, one upon the other, one within the other, in beds of shadow; the streets were filled with a soft phosphorescence. The air rang out like bronze, and the leaves of the trees, stirred by the breeze, made the sound of bells. Near the tall, closed gate, through a gap in the stone, one could see the fields of sorghum and millet stretching out beneath a veil of frost... The next day, on the road to the imperial tombs, we passed through several villages whose exceedingly courteous inhabitants had taken care to set up, along our route, small buffets laden with pastries—those exquisite celestial pastries that smell, all at once, of oil, cabbage, nutmeg and sandalwood. What can one say of an adversary who laughs at you? As for me, I remain filled with gratitude. The Chinese certainly love a paradox. At Cheu-Plen, the paradox deepens when the mandarins come to invite us to lunch. But it is impossible

Having agreed, he set off first thing in the morning.

The mountain piles up in broad, schistose slopes, when suddenly the walls part, receding as if pushed by a jack, arching towards one another on either side of the horizon, joining together, closing off the valley. And it is in this valley—

behind which lie the tombs of the emperors. There are eleven of them, all identical, all enclosed by high walls, all scattered across the rocky outcrops. Behind these great walls stand the countless houses of the nobles and soldiers; then a wide moat cuts across the ground, spanned by a marble bridge leading to a portico in the middle of a vast paved courtyard. There, upon a stone tortoise, stands the stele inscribed with the names and titles of the deceased. A second portico opposite the first, side pavilions with low, yellow roofs, a second large courtyard, a second large pavilion: the funeral hall, squat as a redoubt, crowned with blue, green and gold beams. And finally an enormous tumulus, a mound of earth, without grass, without trees, bare.

He lies there beneath that mound of earth.

The isolation of his life continues in his death. It is emptiness; silence, peace. From his past, he wished for nothing but a few familiar objects; the side canopies draped in yellow guard his armchair, his ceremonial bed with satin covers; the great funeral hall with its red panelling, gilded columns, and ceiling adorned with blue and gold coats of arms, holds, in a tabernacle, his sacred letters, the fragments that illuminated him, and, before you, a massive triple bundle, the mushroom, the hole of immortality.

Yet here, in this atmosphere of solemn contemplation, there is something that

draws you away from China, which makes you see it as irrevocably stagnant, in fits and starts, without appeal. All this is the work of a worn-out, old, very old people. A lesson was drummed into them forty centuries ago, and for forty centuries they have been repeating that lesson, unwilling to change a single thing. They were told to build the tomb of their emperor in such and such a way, with bricks of such dimensions, pavilions of such height, with a column to rest upon a stone tortoise — and they obeyed, and they will always obey. This monotony, this adherence to the rule, to the single formula, exasperates you. These people who never complain, who are never in a hurry, never curious, who possess all the neutral qualities that we do not possess, these people are as lifeless as can be. One would like to feel their pulse: they have no pulse; their heart: they have no heart either. Do they feel? Do they get excited about any cause? What cause? And what do they love?... It's a lump of gelatine, it's fried, it's kneaded, it stretches, it shrinks — and it always keeps the same shape.

Do they have a shape, a structure? Yes, but we've known this squat structure for a long time now, since it's the model on which our sheds and barns are built. The eternal low house, with long façades topped by a triangular roof, adorned with shabby or grey tiles, depending on the building

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belongs to the Crown or to the subjects; the eternal little dragons, lions and other devouring beasts adorning the moulding; the eternal pollou, triumphal arches with wooden pillars, a hideous amalgam of blue, apple green, red, lilac and rust, designed to delight all the old maids, who will recognise the colours of their favourite parrot. Do not come and tell me, as a very distinguished sinologist—whose name I shall withhold out of consideration for BP's white hair—that such a ensemble 'recalls Byzantine décor', for that is an outrage and an indignity. Truly, however much goodwill or indulgence one might apply, one cannot associate this garish jumble of beams with anything other than those buildings made of nougat, rock sugar and treacle that confectioners create for festive occasions.

The Egyptians, the Hindus, the Assyrians and the Persians had an architectural tradition. The Chinese, never. We have only ever given them newsstands, and that warrants only very limited recognition.

Deep down, I believe they are really only worth 18 details. They are always interesting as carvers and cutters. They created the trinket. They were, after all, made to be placed alongside it in a display case. The hoard, in their case, is no invention; they had only to crouch down and support one another.

Yet what constitutes the charm of the trinket, of this little art, is its grace, elegance and subtlety.

And grace, they scarcely suspect it; and elegance, they do not suspect it at all; and subtlety, one might as well ask a bear. But they have devoted themselves to the study of the real and have achieved near-perfection in their work.

Their lacquerware, though always depicting the same landscape beneath a cotton-wool sky, will nevertheless be remembered for the finesse of their craftsmanship and the scrupulous choice of materials. Their ceramics, ivories and jades are crafted with a patience reminiscent of our finest medieval artisans. I have before my eyes certain pieces that one might think had come straight from a 15th-century workshop: a vase with clay so admirably kneaded that it appears as though wrapped in gauze; jades in vulture-like and wine-red hues, akin to the background of a Dutch painting; and these ivories, more ethereal than Gothic embroidery!...

These are indeed very fine qualities, but they are secondary. The art of an inferior people. An excellent craftsman in ornamentation, an excellent potter, an excellent ivory carver, an excellent goldsmith; the Chinese will reproduce a dog without omitting a single hair, a fish without omitting a single scale, a flower without omitting a single petal, but he will remain powerless when it comes to invention and composition. Or else, he will have a marked taste for the petty, the contorted, the stunted, the artificial. He will want his trees to be mutilated like his women; he will paint the walls of his pagoda with ani-

March, more shaggy, more ferocious than the plesiosaur, the iguanodon and the tarasque. He will make excessive use of the broken, jagged line, clad in harsh colours that strike the eye like blows from a fist. ..

After all, he is Chinese and we are Greek. Which means we will never understand one another.

Standing on the balcony of the funeral hall overlooking the immense marble courtyard, I see the chaos of the eionlanges encircling the necropolis unfolding. They stretch out their ridges of hard rock, which a cold sun strikes with purplish tones; they rise, a tumult of heavy boulders, hollowed out by roots that stand out like rare etchings on a copper plate. Clinging to its flanks, the Great Wall unfurls its long, unbroken chain... The plain curves like a cradle, a level expanse of fawn-coloured earth beneath the straight, tangled trees. And the tombs scatter their domes and mounds across this biblical landscape...

When I descend from my vantage point, the officers have just concluded their visit, having had the gate opened for them by the guardians of the tombs—a gate through which only the emperor himself is permitted to pass ‘feet first’. They then allow themselves the very rare emotion of standing at the summit of the mound covering the august remains of His Majesty. And that is all.

The French column sets off again for Zien-Tsin. The mandarins cannot believe their eyes

when they see that the lightning, punishing the sacrilegious, has not pulverised us, and an old monk, pointing and gesticulating, is left to his own devices.

This is the story of the march on the Imperial Tombs, which, along with the Pao-Zing campaign, remains the only military operation carried out in China by our troops following the capture of Peking. We killed

300 Boxers, who may not have been Boxers at all — but God will know how to recognise his own. We entered the stronghold of Iti-Tcheou without resistance — and our losses amount to two drorria-darren killed, a broken pennant and a mule that has disappeared, without us being able to know for certain whether it committed suicide or fled, not wishing to serve the enemies of her homeland any longer.

— ‘What can you do?’ Commander S... said to me resignedly, ‘we do what we can. Of course, this isn’t the Battle of Marengo.’

Oh no

XII

Pêhin, 26 November,

Is this a deceptive appearance, an illusion of a city already growing old? It seems to me that Beijing is shaking off its ruins, that the Pekingers are returning to their capital...

New buildings are springing up all around us; the carpenters give us a headache with the clang of their axes, the bricklayers with the clatter of their bricks; the houses are being propped up on their crutches, the roofs covered with tiles and the windows with paper. We have markets; the peasants go there every day in carts — and thanks to them, I can be sure of eating something other than sardines in oil and corned beef from Armour and Co Limited.

The district administered by the Japanese is the busiest. Already, there is a faint smell of mutton and rotten fish; small shops are springing up, with open-air displays of baked goods

Worn-out shoes, faded dresses, chipped porcelain, among which eager collectors, dressed in vintage silk, rummage. The English Quarter and the German Quarter are hot on the heels of their Japanese neighbour; the French Quarter is doing its best to catch up, without much success, for it is the one that suffered most from the aftermath of the siege. And every day brings its own surprise. Yesterday I encountered my first rickshaw, and, the day before yesterday, my first camel caravan. Last week, we inaugurated a theatre. Beijing is certainly keen to make a fresh start and, in a development not seen since the Han dynasty, the Chinese are eager to bring this to a close. This avalanche of international troops has so overwhelmed them that they await, with all the impatience of which they are capable, the moment to settle the war reparations, so that they may then send the Field Marshal Waldersee and General Yoyron.

But then the following phenomenon occurs: the more China is in a hurry to open its coffers, the less Europe is in a hurry to receive the money. Never before have I realised so clearly the respectful and, deep down, tender friendship that Europe harbours towards China. There are countless acts of kindness and constant care. Does this most venerable old man, the Middle Kingdom, wish to leave his gout-ridden armchair to try and walk a little? Arms are immediately offered: 'Lean on me, venerable old man!'

Recently, in a delusion of strength, he had thought he could drive away all these devoted souls who were besieging him, but the poor man only succeeded in making the crowd of eager souls even more compact. Instead of twenty arms, he now has thirty.

— Reverend old man, lean on me. You owe us money. Do you want us to give you some so that you can give it back to us later?

— I assure you, gentlemen, that I have no need of money. I can pay without borrowing, from my own resources alone.

— Don't even think of it, venerable old man; your advanced age is deceiving you. How could you possibly pay 500 million?

— I assure you, gentlemen, that...

— No, no, venerable old man, we have come here to be at your service, so that we may then make use of our financial, industrial and commercial expertise. And all the engineers, all the bankers, all the customs officers who have spent many years in your country in order to develop this expertise have told us, at great length on some occasions, that you could not pay. Therefore
you cannot pay...

1. In a conversation I had with Cheng, the Director of Railways and Telegraphs, **who is widely regarded** as the de facto Minister of Finance of the empire, he **assured me on several occasions** that China **had no need of anyone to pay its debts**. 'If I were allowed to do so,' he added, 'I would pay them off immediately.'

— However, I hereby **certify**...

— Now, now, venerable old man, you cannot pay. You will understand that we must have some guarantees. What would you say to an increase in your customs revenue, either by doubling the current duties, or by adopting a system of specific duties based on criteria designed to generate greater revenue? ' What would you say to a reorganisation of your customs duties? And what if you were to pledge your railway lines to us? It is also essential that you have a land tax, a rental tax, and a new postal administration. Now, as we possess extensive experience in these matters, it is understood that they will be placed under European control. That is not all, venerable elder. To develop your needs—that is to say, to make you rich—for our economists have demonstrated that the greater a people's needs, the richer they are: not only do we not demand money immediately, but we bring it to you. We have just set up capital associations tasked, as the prospectuses sent to our shareholders state, 'with exploiting the unsuspected riches of the Chinese subsoil and channelling goods from the interior. ' We already have the X... syndicate, which is to operate in Shanxi, the Y... syndicate, which is to operate in Yunnan, and the 2... syndicate, in Guangxi. We have the (planned) railway from

Fou-Tsbeou to Canton; the (planned) railway from Flan-iteou to Ganton, from P8kin to Han-Keou, etc., etc.

— éĩaii, meg8ieura, that is a stranglehold on my

— Oh, what a nasty word, venerable old man, and how it offends us! We wish only to be your devoted collaborators in the work of national regeneration. And God forbid we should ask for a partition, let alone a protectorate! ... We have moved from the 'open door' to the 'sphere of influence'. We are asking you for spheres of influence, that is all. It is through spheres of influence that we have managed to bring Africa a prosperity hitherto unknown, he said. Let us believe that in China, we shall achieve the same result.

This, more or less, is the conversation currently taking place between the Powers and Tsong-

)i-Yamcn. The siege of Peking, the siege of Tien-Tsin, the battle of Peĩ-T8ang — we are a long way from those events! Should the

Boxer leaders be punished? Yes, no doubt. Yet, if we were granted some concessions in Fo-Kien or Chan-7oung, we might, in turn, grant the same clemency shown by Prince Tchouan and

General Tong Fuh Siang. Time is passing; the conversation continues.

Llempereur has not replied, as he is in Si N an lou, 50 leagues from 11 — and his ministers are waiting. One moment the negotiations are due to begin the following day, the next we hear that they have been postponed

to the following month, because Tching has no valid credentials, because Li Hung Ghang has neglected to have the imperial seal affixed to his letters of credence... And then everything is sorted out. Rumour has it that Kuang Su is returning to his palace. When suddenly, a new rumour: he is now on his way to Chengdu, the remnants of his army are holding him prisoner, he has been poisoned by the Empress, or he is going to die of consumption...

The lie is here, I repeat, in an endemic

. Everyone lies. We lie by promising China that we will respect its autonomy

— and China, in turn, is lying when, in recounting the history of the Pe-Tche-Li campaign in its own way, it portrays its regular troops and Boxers as victors.

All the provinces, from Nanking to Tibet, are inundated with a deluge of coloured images, depicting, against a crimson background, the European ships sunk by the Celestial Fleet and the European armies routed—Russians, French, English, Germans, Italians, Americans, Japanese, fleeing, abandoning their weapons on the battlefield. And it saddens me to see them caught by the cavalry, tortured and taken prisoner, bowing, their noses in the dust, before the great victorious general, seated on a peacock-coloured armchair.

These well-informed papers tell their readers that • the enemies of the dynasty, the devils

'foreigners were driven out, like vile beasts'. But as this claim might seem hard to accept for some, given that our troops have not left Beijing, the authors, in a stroke of ingenuity, explain that these troops are none other than Chinese men dressed in European style.

In On, after having at length expounded on the torments that ought to be inflicted upon us: blows with a stick to the skull until it split open, crucifixion, livers, and all manner of burnt offerings, all that remained for them to do, 'to leave us with a lasting reminder of our transgression', was to draw up the official list of reparations.

Here is that list. It is overwhelming. Our victors are abusing their victory:

1° The debts of Ghine to the foreign kingdoms are cancelled.

For the costs of the war, the foreign kingdoms shall pay China compensation of 400 million taels of silver.

3. Foreign warships that have entered Chinese ports shall not be permitted to leave them.

• Concessions for foreigners already in force in China shall pay a sum double that of their current value.

5. Wang Yu Wei, the leader of the reformers, shall return to China to face the penalties incurred.

6. All Catholic and Protestant churches

will taxed to become the property of the State.

7. Japan shall return the island of Formosa to China. 8.

Germany shall return Hainan to China. 9. Russia shall return Dalian to China. 10. Foreign missionaries shall return to their respective countries and shall no longer be

permitted to travel into the interior.

10. Annam and Korea shall once again be under Chinese jurisdiction.

10. Maritime customs duties shall be returned to Chinese, who shall take over their administration.

13. Relations between foreign kingdoms and the Chinese court shall be governed by the regulations issued by Emperor Qianlong. Foreign ambassadors shall not be permitted to enter Beijing.

4. Foreign kingdoms shall pay the Boxers war reparations of 100 million taels of silver.

4. In accordance with the statutes of Jianlong, Japan shall pay to China the tribute of the feudal kingdoms

] In official dealings between the Japanese and the Chinese, the former shall observe the latter, the grand rites of Chinese courtesy. 17. Neither Europeans nor

Japanese, to travel within China.

18. The Russian railway will be destroyed.

49. The Ang leterre shall return to Ghine, Si-Ngan and Itieoo-Long.

20. Foreign goods, upon entering China, shall pay duties twice as high as those paid hitherto.

20. When merchant ships arrive in a port, they shall notify the Chinese authorities. Once this formality has been completed, they may enter the port.

22. The export of rice shall be prohibited.

23. Exported goods shall, before leaving the port, pay double the current duties.

Pending payment of these heavy indemnities, the victor is willing to grant the vanquished asylum in his capital, and the vanquished makes arrangements to spend the winter there as comfortably as possible. Having observed that the Mongol coffins, very wide and very tall, would be an excellent safeguard against the cold, a few of our soldiers with delicate lungs, decided it would be preferable to inhabit them themselves, temporarily. They bored holes in the oak caskets, folded down the lids, and these lucky ones fell asleep without nightmares. By day, the coffins propped up against a wall serve as sentry boxes for the guards. And nothing could be more practical. Moreover, all our military installations are masterpieces of 'debr0Hillage'. The marsonin is skilled in every trade and more besides. When he arrived in Peking, he was assigned a lodgings

4 Traduit par l'Écho de Chine,

sheds, and the remains of huts where only two or four beams were intact; within forty-eight hours, he had managed to transform them into habitable structures. Using old planks, he makes camp beds; from the bottoms of chests he makes a door; from dented sheet metal, he makes stove pipes...

And what luxury in the homes of his officials! Carpets borrowed from the neighbouring pagoda, lamas' chairs, mismatched porcelain, crying out to be reunited. But the good porpoise pays no heed. We saw him serving a mutton stew on a dish dating from the Qing dynasty. That day, the archaeologists thought they would die of shock. They collected the precious artefact with infinite reverence, labelled it, catalogued it, photographed it and each, in their own way, wrote a note on its origins. And the good porpoise cooked his mutton stew in another, more modest earthenware dish, never suspecting that he had held a small fortune in his hands.

Did I tell you that last week we attended the reopening of the first Chinese theatre and that I've gone deaf from hearing the gongs blare and the bagpipes wail? And did I tell you that we were terribly bored in Beijing, despite the new theatre season, and that this winter, the mines, the mournful faces, bringing social life to a standstill, grand dinners becoming a rarity,

We shall scarcely have any further opportunity to argue over precedence — and so, since we must pass the time somehow, shall we quarrel and nit-pick over the seat? It has already happened. Let us hope the dispute over the seat does not start again, in which case unity will be reaffirmed. That is what certain missionaries and Sir Robert Hart are telling us; he has just written a disheartening pamphlet on the impending massacre of Europeans.

But rest assured. This is just the ‘imagination’ of...

‘actions’, as Bompard used to say to Tartarin. The truth is less dramatic. In fact, it is no longer dramatic at all. The troops confine themselves to their police duties; courts-martial are held from time to time; there, a few remaining Boxers are tried and shot. Meanwhile, the generals meet to discuss the measures that should be taken later to ensure the protection of the people—obligations. And everyone agrees that four or five hundred men from each power will be more than enough. Station twice that number in Tien-Tsin, with a few corporals and their squads spread out along the railway line, a few guns — and you will have enough to repel all the armies of Zong Fuh Siang and his successors.

You know that there are now scarcely more than two significant military forces remaining in Pe-J’eh-Li: France (15,000 men) and Germany (18 to 20,000). Russia decided, at the last moment, to leave six battalions; the American force numbers only 1,800

men; the British have around 2,000 from their Indian contingent; the Japanese 1,000, and the Italians a negligible number.

And you have long been aware of what these troops have been up to. The march on Pao-Ting was uneventful, with no fighting, except at Siet-Ohouen, where one of our men was mortally wounded; the march on the Zombeanx, where those famous incidents took place, which I recounted to you in one of my recent letters. For their part, the Germans are heading for Ifalgan, spreading out a little to the north, losing four or five soldiers in various skirmishes. And that is the end of it.

Now we are only concerned with patching things up and plugging the gaps.

The Tien-Tsin line will open in a month's time, and the Shan-Hai-Honan line towards the end of January. French engineers are repairing the Pao-Ting section. Trains are already running as far as Ting-Tcheou; engineers are already talking of a terminus to be built in **Peking**, near the Temple of Heaven, on the long Chinese street, two blocks from the Imperial Palace.

How much gratitude will our metallurgists, architects and financiers owe to the Prince of Shu, who has enabled the flourishing of these enterprises! One more Boxer uprising and this time the terminus will be built within the Imperial **Palace** itself, leaving the Emperor with **but one** recourse: to become the **stationmaster**.

Tien-Tsin, 30 November.

At last, I left Peking. It was about time. The river was already frozen over; a team of coolies broke the ice in my wake; but my junk, amidst these small icebergs, was being wrecked. Once again, I had to reach the bank, unload the trunks, have them carried on men's backs to the next station, and board another, sturdier junk, which would row us all the way to Tien-Tsin.

Tianjin, too, has risen from its ruins; a Tianjin restored to new life, its houses repaired, its shops open, the ceaseless comings and goings of goods on the great quays. And yet, despite these outward signs of prosperity, a Tianjin that remains pessimistic. More than twenty gentlemen tell me that the troops are not numerous enough, since the Boxers have attempted to destroy a bridge over the Pei-flo and a German post was nearly massacred...

Don't believe a word of it. These are all just 'fabrications'. Here, as in the North, and in the North as in the South, the Chinese ask for nothing but peace. And this will last ten years, twenty years, after which they will be able to start again, only to be defeated once more and forced to pay another one or two billion in reparations.

In a famous book, the Viceroy Tchnng-tche Tong tells his compatriots 'that they should be ashamed

to see the empire inferior to Japan, Turkey, and Siam.”

The high mandarin is right. But it has been so long that his compatriots no longer know how to blush

girl!...

xiii

Shanghai, 15 December.

It's at the Lazarist convent. A missionary comes to meet me. He is wearing a Chinese robe; he has a plait of hair down his back; thick spectacles sit perched on his nose. He is powerfully built, with a wrestler's shoulders and fists, but he has a very gentle look behind his thick spectacles and, shyly, he speaks in a slow voice, enunciating every word clearly.

— What do you mean, Father, you've just come back from Si-
f'igan fou?

— I arrived this very morning, Grandma.

— From Si-Ngan fou, where is the emperor... From Si-
Ngan fou, where is the empire?

— Yes.

— And did you see Him, Her?

Oh! I barely caught a glimpse.

— Tell me about it, will you?

— I wouldn't have it any other way.

— It was on 3 August, as you know, that the court left Beijing, which had fallen into the hands of the European armies. The entire imperial family, the princes and the dukes, were on the run, from Kuang Su to Kang Y. An escort of 10,000 men, armed with repeating rifles, accompanied them, under the command of General Tong Fuh Siang. They passed through That-Yuan and Tsin-Tcheou, crossed the Yellow River on assembled ferries and finally, after two months' journey—on 2 October to be precise—reached the capital of Ghen-Si.

Before continuing, let me give you a few details about this city of Shaanxi, which I have been evangelising for nearly ten years.

Si-Ngan Fou is situated about 10 kilometres south of the Wei River, almost at the foot of the long Tsin-Ling mountain range. Enclosed within an immense rectangle of rammed-earth walls, with four heavy gates reinforced with enormous bricks, it is a formidable military stronghold for the country, but one which, in my opinion, would not withstand five minutes of fire from European armies. I found it difficult to ascertain the number of its inhabitants. I have been told of 100,000, to be divided as follows: Chinese, **seven-tenths**; **Tartars**, one-tenth; and Muslims, two-tenths. The latter, on their own, make more noise than all the others. Every now and then, they revolt: this lasts for months on end; they are massacred by the thousands. The province falls into ruin, and **even** now,

all we see around us are depopulated towns and villages, with no crops.

Indeed, the history of Chen-Si is steeped in blood. I have seen many times the valley where the infamous Che Hoang had the ministers of his empire buried up to their necks and ploughed over their heads. Here, a few steps from the sub-prefecture of Kao-Ling, the fire took place which destroyed all the books of the Ghine, piled up, by order of the terrible despot, over an area of 100,000 square feet. The villages, the scenes of these horrors, bear names that preserve the memory: Tien-Tche-T'eou,

' e start of the fire'; Hoi-Toei-

P'ouo, 'Hill of the Stone Mound'; Choei-p'ouo-T'8uen, 'Village of the Extinguished Fire'. Later, the massacres resumed against the nascent Christianity, against the monks of Zchang-Nang, against the Franciscans, who had come to the aid of their arch-rival Monte-Gorvino. Not a single century has passed without persecution, and it was, as you shall see, by the skin of their teeth that the very last of these persecutions did not take place this very year.

Amidst the chaos of the crowds at the foot of the eight great walls, amidst the Chinese throng, the rubbish and the mud, we reach the heart of the city, beneath the four-arched entrance to the enormous central tower, the belfry clad in red brick. It is here that the two avenues from east to west and south to north intersect, and where the 68 bags of momentary goods pile up

the mountains, the rice fields stretching from the plain, the carts and seagulls, the shops and pagodas. Nearby stands a new square tower, on which one can read the inscription: 'Literary and military merit adorn our land.' Then here is the residence of Duke Louo, who lived during the Tang dynasty; here is the tomb of the illustrious mandarin Tong Yong, with porticoes adorned with coats of arms, and here is the ancient imperial city, which has now become the parade ground for Tartar soldiers and, above all, a gathering place for lepers and beggars.

Shall I tell you again about the gymnasium where those with their baccalaureate and those with their degree gather to further their studies of the texts? Or of the Han-Siang pagoda, so popular because, at its gate, stand eight acacia trees which, every year, thanks to the generosity of a wealthy family, are laden with fruit of all kinds: oranges, pears, pomegranates, peaches and lychees?

... On Hoan-lo-ae-han Boulevard, five-coloured goldfish are sold in particular. Next come the grand Ta Kong-loan Hotel, which serves as temporary accommodation for visiting mandarins; the grain market, which can hold a stock of 10,000 to 20,000 piculs; the inns and fairs, and the parade ground where two regiments of infantry and cavalry are quartered. Not far from there stands the High Judge's court, with a tower housing an enormous clock of

three metres of conference hall. And soon the busiest street in the city, lined with shops bearing multicoloured signs, the former provincial governor's palace, now half in ruins, and the Muslim quarters, with their seven mosques, one of which dates from 1384.

From the top of the ramparts, Si-Ngan fou spreads out like a lush carpet of greenery dotted with the white spires of its bell towers and turrets. But if one travels along the roads, the filth of the city is everywhere to be found, in its sewage-filled canals and open sewers. And it is truly a miracle that, with such a state of the roads, cholera has not taken hold there from one end of the year to the other.

Around the villages, the thick throng of the suburbs gathers.

Pagodas filled with Buddhist monks, soldiers' encampments; the Nieou-Teou-se Hotel, where, every year, the higher authorities gather to enjoy a gala dinner. And Hicn-Yang, where one can still see the site of the throne room of the former emperors. And Hong-Iliao Hill, where every ten years, on the 5th and 6th of the second lunar month, a theatrical performance is held. During these two days, the village elder assumes the role of President of the Ministry of Rites. He dons the judge's uniform and wears a red-buttoned hat. The inhabitants of the neighbouring districts must attend this festival and take their place in the procession.

The inns, restaurants and stables are filled with... multiply; the horse and mule fairs, including those of the 'Sleeping Buddha' and 'Pous-sah a'. There are also soldiers' camps, pagodas, the Pagoda of the Spirit of the Water, where plays are performed throughout the sixth lunar month, and the Tch'ong-jense Pagoda, which houses a stele bearing Sino-Aryan inscriptions—irrefutable evidence of the existence of Christianity around the seventh century.

And after that, we shall see nothing but fields of rice and rapeseed, undulating green plains stretching to the foot of the mountains...

It is in this setting of an old market town that the entire Court has been residing for over a month and a half. The town, which was already teeming with ragged and tattered crowds, is now overflowing with these rags and tatters. Peasants from all over the province arrive in carts or on the backs of donkeys to see their emperor. The throngs of these people surge up and down the winding streets, trample before the low walls of the yamens, and crush against the gates... yet nothing of the enigma is revealed. The Empress remains shut away in her apartments draped in yellow silk; she emerges only rarely, like a mighty idol, swaying in the arms of her bearers. Then she appears upright, stiff, her angular profile standing out sharply against the golden backdrop of her chair. She is small, gaunt, parchment-like, a mummy with lifeless eyes

lively, very bright, set in an ivory oval. Sometimes she leans out with a slow movement, her hand emerges from the carriage door and, clutched in her fist, throws heraldic dragon medals, which the crowd gathers up with great shouting,

And the procession continues, solemn and imposing — and pitifully poor and grotesque, all at the same time. This Tartar guard, commanded by the former treasurer of the Kan-Sou, this Tartar guard decked out in shabby uniforms, sheltered beneath banners of filthy cloth, armed with rusty rifles, held on their shoulders by pieces of rope tied end to end... Three triumphal arches made of wallpaper and the sad Kouang Su leading the procession, Kouang Su smoking his pipe, always silent under the watchful eye of his terrible aunt. Kuang Su, bored, dazed, emaciated, anaemic, looking at all these things without seeing them, pursuing some inner dream that causes him, at times, to open his mouth in a painful grimace and reveal his yellow teeth. *Yet* he never shows any desire, any will; never does he remember that he is an emperor, or, if he does remember, he would never dare to say so. He passes by indifferent, insensitive, already dead.

With the exception of Tchouan, who, having been stripped of his rank and of his titles, has gone into exile in Mongolia, to Ning-Chia, with a Tartar marshal, his relative, all the princes follow the court. Dana will deprive them of their retinues, their military quarters, their servants and

their wives; they camp in the middle of the city. They have invaded the hotels and public monuments. In the evening, all the restaurants and all the stalls along the narrow streets are lit up in their honour. The theatres are packed; one hears the gong resound, and the little oboes and the monophonic violins and the guitars, screeching, wailing and clanging in a dreadful cacophony.

However, as night falls, the Empress returns to her palace, accompanied by the sorrowful Koiian Su. Then a procession of high-ranking mandarins arrives to pay her a visit. Round, plump faces, set upon large, fat-streaked bodies, descend from palanquins and squeeze through the doorway, after three deep bows. Then come couriers, their boots cramp ,
 i still in the saddle, having just enough time to change horses from stage to stage; dispatch bearers,

tax collectors, monks and eunuchs. The soldiers stop at the doorsteps of inns, on dusty roads and even inside open pagodas.

There are 10,000 men, 20 regiments, along the Yellow River, guarding the crossing, under the orders of the notorious Tong Fuh Siang, who has established his headquarters in the sub-prefecture of Lieng-Tong hien, a few kilometres from Si-Ngan fou. A Tong Fuh Siang greatly diminished, almost fallen from grace. This glutton, who eats five pounds of meat at every meal, had promised to devour Europe with the same ease. He had been mistaken about

his appetite, and he is now so deeply humiliated that he has twice attempted to slit his throat. The Empress would, no doubt, have shown no regret whatsoever. She mistrusts this Tartarin of 'Fartarie'; she fears his soldiers, most of whom are Muslims; she fears this province from which the former commander of the Beijing troops hails, this Kan-Son, a hotbed of perpetual revolt.

— And in all this jumble of castes and influences, what was your position? I asked Father Laurice.

— Bad, worse than bad. For nearly two years now, various secret societies in Shaanxi had been threatening us with death or, at the very least, immediate expulsion. These threats became so pressing that the bishop, Monsignor Pannucci, had to order us to take up arms. And what arms! Old spears used as rifles, or, if we had rifles, they dated back at least to the First Empire. But necessity is the mother of invention. One of our fathers had the idea of smearing the faces of the little girls in his orphanage with Indian ink. The enemy, believing they were seeing devils, fled at full speed. Another thought to stack a pyramid of barrels, nesting one inside the other, thereby attempting to vaguely imitate the silhouette of a large-calibre cannon. And everyone kept a safe distance from this new model **Krupp**.

— However, Viceroy Touang Fang, who

It must be said at once that he never ceased to protect us; he succeeded in capturing the instigators of these disturbances and had them hanged. This example had a beneficial effect, but only for a short time. A dispatch from the Empress was due to arrive, ordering a general massacre. At Tai-Nien Fou, two bishops, Monsignor G rassi and Fogolla, two priests, seven nuns and one hundred and sixty young native girls were quartered, beheaded or flayed. We were already expecting the executioners to arrive; our acts of contrition had already been performed; non-Christians were already taking refuge in the two churches of Si-Ngan fou... It was **death**. When our good governor, Touan Fang, intervened, bringing the raising of arms to an abrupt halt. By contravening the imperial orders in this way, he was risking his own head, no more, no less. He did not hesitate. We owe him our lives.

From that day on, everything seemed to be going more or less smoothly. However, when we were informed of Konang Su's arrival in Xi'an, our anxiety returned, for as soon as the Empress set foot in the capital of Shaanxi, the governor's authority would cease. Our Christians took refuge once more in the churches... but on 20 October, astonishing news arrived: a second edict, forbidding any attack on European missionaries and their works. We were relieved. Eight days later, hidden behind the bamboo trellises of our seminary in Rao-Ling, we could see the imperial procession passing by, this time without danger.

— How long will the Emperor and Empress remain in Si-Ngan fou?

— It is thought that, if they do not return after the peace negotiations, they might go and install—

! i b Khaï Fong, the crop failure in Chen-Si is so severe that half the population there is dying of starvation. The b18, which used to be worth three hundred sapèques a measure, is now worth three thousand. On the roads, how many coolies drag themselves from village to village, begging for a pinch of flour! How many have I met, lying there, without even the strength to fight off the dogs, clutching the scrap of stale bread they had just received! How many have I met, so emaciated that their bones pierced through their flesh, and so weak that they fell—or rather collapsed—like puppets whose strings had been cut! The Governor has indeed ordered that a thousand taels be distributed to them. But what are a thousand taels in the face of such misery? If only the mandarins did not keep half or three-quarters of it for themselves! And, to make matters worse, with Tong Fuh Siang's troops and those of the Warfare Guard, who arrived on 25 October, we now need nearly fifteen thousand more rations every day. Rice and other cereals are being transported in full junks from Hou-P8, but this effort cannot be sustained for long.

— So, what can we do about this famine?

— I'm just returning to Europe for the

. I shall reach out on their behalf. I shall travel town to town, from convent to convent. ..

— How, Father, for those who wanted to !

The good man gave a sigh of resignation, the sort Vincent de Paul must have known, and said in a slow, gentle voice:

— Oh! The poor—they are not the ones to blame! And even if they were, is it their fault that they are wicked, and are we not here to try to make them better?...

XIV

Canton, 10 January 1901.

The most Chinese of all things Chinese, utterly Chinese, overflowing with wild, dishevelled, exasperating Chinese curiosities. A tangle, a jumble, an inextricable, unravellable mass of alleyways narrower than corridors, their roofs almost touching beneath the curtains of matting.

One walks through a thick haze, a smell of opium, tripe, sandalwood and piasat. We walk, stumbling at every step over rough old flagstones that protrude from this extraordinary pavement like stumps from a jaw. Yet these alleys rise, fall, turn, curl up like snails or unfurl, following some whim of a hunchbacked architect. They are endless fragments of walls, streaked with excavation and saltpetre, tumbling one upon the other, staircases with steps that stagger and slip beneath a layer of cabbage cores, erachatB and

of slurry that covers them; black corners where the shutters have fallen from their hinges, and here and there, round patches enveloped by a patch of sky, a speck of sunlight in this gloom, making it seem even filthier, even more foul-smelling, even more Chinese...

And this crowd! This crowd in these passageways, these crossroads and these dead ends! — This crowd, swarming so thickly that one cannot see the ground, cannot see the bodies, and it seems as though everything is a yellow mass, crawling and heaping up in viscous masses, like a handful of earthworms on a laboratory table.

Canton is nothing but a vast marketplace. From one end to the other and on either side of its streets, there are nothing but shops, boutique after boutique, stalls after bazaars, displays packed closely together, like the cells of a beehive. The stalls selling paper ornaments for funerals and weddings display, in a riot of garish colours, vermilion flowers, dragons with blood-red mouths, and storks with long necks. Here is the weavers' quarter; one hears the sound of shuttles passing back and forth over the silk on prehistoric machines, propped up with crutches and groaning with every turn of their wheels. Here are the tobacco rollers, the potters, the cabinetmakers working with black wood, and the coffin makers, filing and planing all day long, their large, hollowed-out caskets
. care, such a perfect pursuit of 'comfort'

'table', one wonders, by what contrast, that the Chinese, who require so little space in life, should require so much after death?

Bundles of vegetables slide right onto the pavement, fish are left to suffocate in tubs of dirty water — and there are enormous chunks of meat hanging from the hooks of *the stalls*, bulging masses of fat that a butcher, caked in grime, cuts into long slices or small, finely minced pieces.

The crowd of buyers grows: the sons of mandarins or merchants , rich men who do not...

They don't complain, and, being people of little means, they rummage through the scraps, gathering together mosaics of rubbish which they then have carefully weighed as if they were lumps of gold. A confectioner lays out his sticky fondants on racks; a pastry chef kneads yellow dough, plunging his hands into dubious creams. Shoemakers, bare-chested, reveal their trade, adding pyramids of supports to the pyramids already rising; cloth merchants and silk merchants block the streets with their wares, strung from one side to the other like scarecrows. The shop signs are crammed with pompous sales pitches.

There are barbers shaving in a most makeshift setup: the customer, seated on a stool, holds the shaving bowl himself in his left hand, whilst fanning himself with his right. There are booksellers, bazaars selling jade and marbles,

with terracotta ware, blue and pink porcelain with sinuous iridescence, jumbled together with European objects, the bric-a-brac of old dismantled barometers, empty tins, pomade jars and cheap mirrors. The cries of the vendors, the shouts of the coolies, the clatter of bells and the clang of gongs. **All** this swirls through the thick smoke of pipes and sandalwood sticks, glowing in their niches by the door of every house... And that sticky smoke cuts all this into harsh silhouettes, lending them a ghostly appearance, so that, in those bare torsos, one might think one were seeing moving bronzes. An old man reads his newspaper, his eyes barricaded behind thick glasses, round as portholes; another, sitting on a bench, cuts his corns; another argues animatedly, raising his voice to the highest falsetto, only to fall back into a cavernous rumble.

A beggar passes by, shaking his alms bowl; but a 'member' of the beggars' guild—in other words, almost a civil servant. Every shopkeeper is obliged to give him a coin every day; if he fails to do so, the 'guild' intervenes. And this proves that trade union tyranny exists in Ghin just as much as in France. And you will see that we owe mutualism to the Chinese! ... Along with strikes, for these very shopkeepers, all good husbands, good fathers, good citizens, obedient to the laws of their country, have recently staged one — a

strike — compared to which our own strikes in Carmaux and Le Creusot are mere exercises in apprenticeship. As the viceroy of the province had sought to impose them too heavily against their will, they closed the city gates for eight days, bringing all traffic and trade to a standstill. The high officials, threatened with starvation, unable to buy so much as a turnip or a leaf of lettuce, were forced to back down and reinstate the old taxes.

And so we dream again of the sellers of paper dragons, the sellers of snuff in bottles; the painters sitting at their easels, toiling to capture the likeness of a model and failing to do so; the little Cantonese boys, fresh as sweets, clinging to their mothers' shoulders, their poor old mothers, withered, shrivelled at twenty, with sagging breasts and wrinkled jowls that look like scars from cold sores. We see the apothecary pounding his medicines in his bronze mortars to a sound as loud as a tocsin; the chess players crouching in doorways, blocking half the street; the soldiers of the Tartar marshal, in white tunics edged with red, sprawled at the foot of the steps, drinking and snacking.

Then we heard a frenzied, epileptic-like clatter of scrap metal and donkey-hide. The old boss, who had been reading his newspaper a moment earlier, looked up, and the clerks deserted their counters.

It was a mariapa passing by, something of a girly, slightly caricatured, slightly grotesque nature: chairs upholstered with flowers in...ipi r r, paper lanterns, paper birds, gilded chairs supported by columns draped in long crimson robes and topped with straw hats adorned with a plume

- p women carrying lanterns and cardboard horses, children carrying spears and shields made of bamboo, young girls on the backs

in)iouri iquet, and finally, bringing up the rear of the procession, musicians, penuillou x rriusicians, in green frock coats, tllllllà0tll'i llüCt (I saw them there, full of brag.

Far away, there was a funeral. The coffin, so heavy that it almost dragged along the flagstones, was carried by fifteen men. The whole family in white mourning dress—mourning attire—and the musicians, the ever-present musicians, playing lively tunes, skipping pizzicatos.

Are we really dealing with a nation of madmen? But, of course, this nation of madmen is asking itself the very same question; when they look at us, there's a good chance that, being mad ourselves, we won't get along straight away...

And I need to know that there is, between our two follies, this enigma, to give me, at least, the exercise of trying to decipher it whilst strolling through the town every day.

Guirlü, thanks to a kind professor at the University of Kouan-Touny, LI. àlartel, consists, morning and evening, of steuple-chases de carrefours, des haltes

endless in the jumble of stalls. We let ourselves be swept along by the crowd — and this crowd leads us wherever it pleases, to the opium den or to the pagoda.

The Pagoda of the Five Hundred Genies, five hundred gilded cardboard dolls, each with a fire-tail, standing on a stone plinth, with incense burners at their feet. ... the Pagoda of the Black-Headed Doctors, sovereign in the cure of stomach ailments... The women recite various prayers, which they interrupt from time to time to take a puff from their pipes and spit on the ground. The monks, wrapped in ragged robes, perform all the duties of their office—which is to say, very little. Singing to a mournful tune, they burn sandalwood, ring bells and kneel before a book whose pages have grown greasy under the pressure of their fingers. The offering altar stands **nearby**, laden with cakes and flowers; to guard it, a devout artist has painted on the door two red-bearded giants in green and gold armour, one of whom holds a great sabre and a dragon in both hands, whilst the other, more modest, is content with a guitar and a rat. Why the guitar, why the rat? This is something that H. H. Martel, despite all his knowledge of Cantonese symbolism, could not explain. I shall therefore have to consult the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. And even then, will they know?

When this motley crew had finished praying,

smoking and spitting; when the monks have finished their laments, everyone goes to the same jar to drink the sacrificial water. Yet there are some who, not satisfied with this display of extreme fervour, wish to expand their stock of prayers and, to be able to recite them more comfortably, purchase the complete collection, **printed** on yellow paper. Others prefer amulets. They shake them in a heap at the bottom of a vase, and those that fall before them first are the best. Finally, the whole affair ends with a volley of firecrackers. The Chinese, on the pretext that they invented gunpowder, make a great deal of use of it. It is not a day—what am I saying, a day? It is not an hour—when a Chinese man, because he has won the lottery, because his wife has just given birth to a boy, because a debt he had not counted on has just been repaid, or quite simply because he loves nothing more than making a racket — There isn't a day that goes by without this Chinese fellow setting off fireworks with a vengeance. It's a mania that causes so many explosions, coupled with so many fires, that insurance companies couldn't cope and would go bankrupt within six months.

Further along, in the narrow, cramped alleys, new pagoda roofs rise like policemen's caps, multiplying the twists and turns of their lines. And there are some exquisite ones. The bas-reliefs, jumbled like ivory plaques, pile up a profusion of their brushstrokes and figures. Crowned princesses play in the heavens

Jade figures, white-bearded old men resembling our stained-glass saints, processions of emperors... Such an intimate scene of a mandarin dispensing justice, with conventional gestures and archaic, bookish phrases, brings to mind the style of our early masters, such as Lippi or Alurano. They knew how to twist the granite and coil, like cables, the sinuous, twisted bodies of dragons around its pink veins. They knew how to multiply the contrasts of colour: purplish browns and broken yellows, subdued or striking tones, blue and green ceramics speckled with grey. They possess an unprecedented delicacy of chiselling. They have carved from massive stones landscapes more delicate than those of Lancret's bonbonnières. And with all this imagination, all this flexibility of form, they are nevertheless not — at least here — true artists, for they are not creators, for all this imagination comes to them from India — and even in the smallest details of the tiniest of their statuettes, one recognises the influence of Hindu art. Yet how they make up for this lack of originality that I reproach them for, my good Chinese friends, when, the following day, in the company of the French Consul in Canton, Mr Hardouin, we go to visit, at his residence, the successor to Le Hung Chang! There, then, is a triumph for national aesthetics! First, the screen rises to reveal the door, with the ever-present dragon striking its sides with a swipe of its tail; and then , the door itself—

the same, weathered, as wide as a Bastille gate, with its two painted guards in the centre, two hydraulic lifts; and then a courtyard followed by a hall supported by red columns, another courtyard, yet another, and another, with herbs fringing the paving stones. ...

At last, our carriages come to a halt; three cannon shots from a wheeled gun salute us. The consul steps down. A crowd of officials in uniforms of various colours awaits him, lined up in rows. A crowd of Morvetian peasants stands respectfully at a distance. Soldiers form a guard of honour, soldiers in uniform, armed with an umbrella. And so we enter.

Lünterpräte introduces us to the entire aristocracy. Then, with a wave of the hand—*that characteristic gesture* where one brings both fists together—he proceeds to shove them, in rapid and forceful succession, right under our noses. After which, our gentlemen set off again, marching through further courtyards linked by arched passages in the wall, and lead us to the vice-king's own quarters. Another shed, but larger than any we have seen so far, lit by wooden window frames where most of the missing panes have been replaced by pasted-up paper.

Oriental luxury exists scarcely anywhere except in the poems of Louis Bouille and the novels of Maîtresse Judith Gaudier. This official from Guangdong, who earns on average one and a half million a year, lives like a farmer in the Beauce. We look for

the kneading trough and the cast-iron pot, and one is surprised not to find them there. It has black wooden armchairs upholstered in cotton, and in the middle of the reception room, a table protected by a Dündienne rug which customers of the 'Grand Magasin des Classes Laborieuses' can easily purchase, for 2 francs 95, complete with hem and lining. The table is buried under a pile of plates piled high with pastries made with sesame oil, oranges, almonds and candied ginger. It is a small snack that our host offers us, washed down with a poor imitation of sweet-and-sour champagne.

And at last he arrives, our host, preceded by a herald who waves his visiting card on a red cardstock like a trophy. He is of average height, already old, wearing a white nightshirt, with four stiff bristles like a brush beneath his chin. He is dressed in a marten coat and wears a cap with a peacock feather. And he scurries around the consul, and he greets him, and he greets me... When at last, noticing that there are some unoccupied seats, he invites us to sit down. The conversation drags on; we nibble on an egg tart, we drink—closing our eyes and holding onto the chair's arms—a sip of imitation champagne; we murmur a yes, a no; we smile. He toasts us, we toast him in return. He tells me that I have all the gravitas of a grandee and that he can clearly see from my face that I hold a very high position...

I reply, flattered, that, whatever I may do, I shall never attain to his stature, and that he is one of the luminaries of China, and that his name will be remembered in Europe as that of a sage, and that I wish him long life and lasting happiness for his descendants... And he replies, flattered, that he is but one of the most obscure servants of the empire... And I reply that he is mistaken, that his merit has 'already crossed the seas' and that we count on his prudence and steadfastness to maintain harmony between his homeland and ours... And he replies that his unworthy person will devote all his efforts to...

When a fit of coughing interrupts his protests, it is time to take our leave. We rise after a final toast, and the entire Mandarin entourage accompanies us to the door.

And I add yet another name to the already long list of rulers and great political figures who have deigned to honour me with their private audiences — from Dinah Salifou, Prince of Rio-Pongo, whom I first met in 1894 in Senegal, to Li Hung Chang.

— 'Would you add a Tartar marshal to our list?' asked Mr Fiardouin.

— Is he really worthy of being included? A marshal, a military man, is such a small thing in China.

— Bloody hell, how dare you treat a blood relative of Emperor Flouang Su like that! ...

— Penh! Emperor Kuang Su is hardly anyone in China!...

— Listen, continues Mr Hardouin, ignoring my disrespectful remark, you should know that a Marshal Lartate is more than a governor, more than a viceroy, since he is the representative of the crown, since he is entitled to the yellow robe to the yellow palanquin, and that his ancestors have been ennobled back to I don't know exactly which generation.

— Oh I Well then, if a Tartar marshal is all those things at once, so be it—I'll interview the Tartar marshal. I'll find out what he thinks of the situation, or at the very least, the current temperature.

— How presumptuous to want to interview a Tartar marshal! As if a Chinese man—and, even more so, a marshal who is also a Manchu Tartar—could be interviewed! Well, give it a go...

— When?

— Tomorrow, at ten o'clock.

The next day, in fact, following the same ritual, we went to visit an old man who, too, treated us to some sweet-and-sour imitation champagne and ginger root. After which, an unbelievable event took place, an event I would not even dare to recount, though several people had witnessed it: for over forty minutes, it was not I who was the interviewer, but I who was the interviewee. I, who was asked how many weeks I had been

stayed in Beijing, which hotel I had stayed in, how many times I had been to the interior of the province and by what means of transport, by cart or on horseback? . . . In vain, I tried to slip in, here and there, a leading question. A waste of time.

And off I went, having gone from interviewer to interviewee, without managing to get anything out of the Emperor's cousin other than his date of birth.

Here it is in capital letters:

On the 4th day of the first month of the first year of the Kouatt g.

And I think I'd do well now to give up on the interview — at least for the time being.

XV

On the Si-kian, between Canton and Ta-loan-kian,;

23 Jan.

How can I describe, once again, those Canton wharves I left behind the other day to head for Si-Eiang? They are no longer in sight. They vanish behind a jumble of bamboo huts and shacks with beams blackened by the smoke from the tugboats... The river, too, is no longer visible. It, too, has vanished, crushed by a jumble of floating hulls, sampans and junks of all shapes and ages. ... You have to push your way through, sounding the sirens. And even then, these hulls brush past you as you go, and sometimes, one or more of them are split in two or four. And it doesn't matter, since for thirty dollars paid to the family, you can drown a man with twelve children, and his wife for five dollars more.

So, we are moving forward in this direction. We

see the edges gradually recede, losing their living masses, the roofs forming from afar like a cascade of checkerboards. The twists and turns of the surrounding ramparts wind around the city — and the city is now nothing but a vague grey murmur, on grey waters, beneath a grey sky.

The plain stretches out, swelling with rice paddies, in undulating waves of saffron yellow; the low banks recede, covered in a carpet of banana trees and rushes, and old canals cut into the fields, old pastel-pink canals with twilight glimmers, or figs, black and heavy, with a sheen of molten tin, at the height of midday. There are rocky outcrops that look as though they have sprung from a heap of testicles, and there are others that gleam with a soft, rich lustre, as if they had been coated in graphite.

At last the two branches of the river converge and spread out into a vast expanse, surrounded by jagged hills. We are on the threshold of the Ganton lines, the forts of Bocca-Tigris. All these islets, crouching at water's edge, are covered with low-lying batteries; in every granite hollow, cannons point their muzzles. There are 80 of them, flanked by their 80 gunners, clad in the imperial red caftan — very timid gunners who would surely vanish at the first shot. And yet, according to the most technically-minded of our artillerymen, this is a **first-rate** position. **And these** red-clad **Cossacks**

They would only need to know how to load a cannonball into the breech and then fire, more or less straight, to prevent all the squadrons from getting through. But this task is so far beyond the capabilities of the soldiers of the Chinese army! Even if China were to buy up all the rifles and cannons in the whole of Europe, and were to drill its troops in their use every day for twenty-five years, I do not believe it would still be possible for it to achieve any results other than killing its own troops with its own weapons. The Chinese elevate the negation of military art to such heights that Napoleon, were he in Kuang-Toiing, would have died in the provinces as a civilian mandarin.

Beyond Bocca Tigris, the thick, flowing river winds its way through the greenery that stretches along the banks. There are expanses of rice paddies and tangled thickets of bamboo—a landscape that only a commander of the agricultural brigade could truly appreciate, for there is none flatter, more monotonous, or more fertile. And no one here would dare to claim that all this farming, all this rice cultivation, lacks manpower, for the number of peasants and their buffaloes who plough, cart or do nothing but nap in the sun is incalculable. At Plat-Saï, at Yung-Ki, the mfirieg crowd together in feasts. Beneath the thatched huts with triangular roofs, Black Flags watch us pass — and, along the road, women staggering, with twisted legs, make their way to the neighbouring pagoda, the pagoda of Sam-

Chan, raising its seven towers draped in ivy. And the river continues its steady flow...

But here, in a halo of mist, hills that rise and draw nearer, and eventually close in, so that they gather all this water into a deep basin. The fig and mulberry trees have gone; there is nothing left here but hard rock, hammered quartz and, in one of their crevices, three fragments of a wall. It was during the reign of Choun Tche, a house of Gonzesses, mad Gonzesses, who renounced their vows by running the pretence of being subjects of the neighbouring village. So, the emperor, wishing to punish them and ensure, once and for all, that they would not do it again, simply had them burned alive.

Do you know the story of 'Petrified Love'? It was, during the reign of Chen Tsoung, of a soldier who set out on a campaign against the Tartars and never returned. His wife waited for him for so long that her body turned to stone and her tears into stalactites. And the story of 'Jade Smile'? This mandarin's daughter was abducted by Yen Yang, the King of Shadows, and taken to a dark cave, where she soon gave birth—if indeed that term can be used when referring to a dark cave—to three twins, as black as their father. These three twins already showed signs of exceptional precocity; at eight months old,

they knew twenty-six thousand five hundred characters, when the genius of Eloquence en returned , driven by jealousy, crept into the dark cave and strangled them .

Poor 'Jade Smile' wept bitterly when she found the bodies of her sons, but eventually she forgot, for that is always how it ends, and. When Yen Vang had forgotten her in turn, she left her dark cave and allowed herself to be married, for money, to a very rich old taotāi from Shan-King.

Shao-king spreads out across its sandy banks and piles up the debris from its crumbling houses. One can hear the rumbling of the Gongs at the foot of the ancestral altar, in shabby pagodas enclosed by crumbling walls. The narrow streets fill with open-air stalls, and on the grass edging the cobblestones, pigs wallow, jostling one another, whilst the piglets pick out their lice and then eat them.

The river widens, but jagged, triangular rocks still dip their basalt pillars into its muddy waters.

We drop anchor at Lui-Ta, in the setting sun. Lieutenant Florius, who is sailing up the Si-Kiang to carry out hydrographic surveys, offers us hospitality aboard his small gunboat. The table is laid on the bridge and until eleven o'clock, between a glass of wine and a cigar, we move with ease from Chinese politics to the Transvaal War, and from wireless telegraphy

to Cléo de l'Ié rotle... Yes, I do believe that's the end of the film by Hérode...

It was one of those gentle nights, the flavour of which I still seem to taste, like a sweet, at the back of my mouth. There was absolute calm, a refreshment of colours and sounds. Barely faded, marked and immediately erased, of soothed and soft half-tones...

A moment later, the first lights of the village come into view: they are huts made of thatch and nets drying by the water's edge. A den of bandits, this Luk-Ta, in fact. As we make our way, we see along the bank, atop stakes driven into the ground, half a dozen skulls exposed to the sun. These skulls belong to former pirates. They have been placed there to serve as a warning to those who might be tempted to follow the same path.

And the procession continues: bamboo stalks standing like plumes on hearse carriages, quartz hills scarred with reddish wounds, small pagodas and houses nestled deep within the thickets. And then comes Zak-Hing, a great city much like all the other great cities of the empire, neither more nor less dilapidated, neither more nor less ramshackle and filthy. The staircase leading from the riverbank to the city gates certainly has as many holes as steps. And one must see its alleys and walls plastered with filth! Here, and elsewhere, and everywhere in China, is the incredible swarm of humanity, the exasperated, worm-like swarm of little Chinese people, of

big Chinese men, their wives and their children. And I shall say no more on the matter, for truly there is nothing else to be said. It is very difficult not to use, over and over again, the same words to describe the same things, and to repeat that there is nothing more pitifully monotonous than these things!

Even the sampans sailing down the river are, too, crammed with big Chinese and little Chinese! They're packed in from every corner! ... the women cook at the front, and the men, at the back, paddle, smoke and spit all at once. And both males and females, throughout their entire lives, will eat, sleep and reproduce on this very same boat, without ever leaving it!

At last, the landscape begins to take on a more rugged character. Jets of red rock shoot up, with pink temples nestled in their folds, and the river, at their feet, meanders, taking its time, striking the soft sandy bank with slow, discreet little blows; the bank crumbles, sliding in clumps into the water and staining it rust-coloured.

A cascade of firecrackers heralds Tu-Ghing, even more rugged than Tak-Hing, and further on, Tao-Fou-Chin and Eong-Han, even more rugged than Tu-Ching and Tak-Hing combined. Just then, a military mandarin is inspecting these various strongholds. And his junk terrifies us, so bristling is it with cannons and unfurled banners, and so full of noise within its holds—the ringing of conch shells and the rumbling of tams-tamas.

11. I suppose there is no need to point out to you that this so-called military inspector inspects nothing at all and that, moreover, if he really did want to inspect anything, one would be justified in wondering what on earth he could possibly inspect. His 'cannons'? You all know they are made of wood. The guns in the two redoubts surrounding us aren't even made of wood; they don't exist at all. They have been cleverly replaced, in each embrasure, by a movable board painted black with a hole in the middle. The larger the hole, the larger the calibre of the gun. It's very simple.

'But if that military inspector doesn't inspect his guns, at least he still has soldiers' * — 'Yes. In principle, yes, there are, there must be soldiers.' 'Every year, the budget provides for an amount

several million for the maintenance of the troops.

These millions are paid to the officers, who keep them for themselves. It is still very *much the same*. *There* you have it: China has no fewer soldiers than cannons.

It does, however, sometimes happen that the governor wishes to inspect the national army himself. On such days, the commanding officer hastens to make up for his missing recruits with coolies, whom he sends away the very next day, as soon as the visit is over.

And it's still very simple.

Thanks to the experience they have gained in matters of bribery, the military bigwigs manage

to amass a small fortune quite easily. Yet this is not enough for them, and they engage in trade to increase their income. I was told of a frigate captain who sold slices of fresh pork on the deck of his cruiser, and of a colonel in the Imperial Guard⁸ who ran a coffin factory.

. fitt and U, on our slow march, there are always piles of brushwood at the water's edge, the spires of pagodas hidden behind granite outcrops. .. And, now and then, a section of a weathered wall heralding a town.

ÀVu-Cliau, a huge city, the last port of call on the Si-Kia-ng before reaching Nan-Ning. A collection of brothels and mines inhabited by Europeans – the poor wretches! The com-
 customs officer, his two clerks, a native, a few Methodists and the British consul.

. He was staring at the official's residence, but he didn't recognise him; the official, it seemed, was a stranger. It perches on an old sampan, or rather on two old sampans coupled together. The first is made of burlap, the second of bamboo, and the whole is covered with mats, furnished with chairs made of wicker, and teeming with mosquitoes at night, and with crabs by day. ... Not to mention all the surprises *in* store for you on a river that can rise by as much as forty feet in twenty-four hours!

The customs commissioner, , , is a website that is not very

well-established. He has a brick villa and fewer servants. The deputy commissioner has a wooden villa, Swiss chalet style, no piano, no gramophone, good vermouth. He makes wonderful cocktails. What more could one ask for? And so life goes on, with everyone visiting one another, exchanging invitations: dinners, lunches, hunting parties, rifle shooting and occasionally balls, to get the colony's sole woman to dance—the unfortunate wife of a wretched pastor who exhausts his strength without managing to convert more than a dozen gentiles in this province, whose religious indifference would have discouraged the Apostle Paul.

And yet these people do not lose heart. There are those—and I have seen them myself, Catholic and Protestant missionaries—who, since 1870, have lived in complete isolation in the depths of the See-Tchouen or the Koei-Tcheou, without ever once wishing to take a three-month leave of absence to return to their homeland

I was left speechless.

— ‘So you pity us?’ Father L. said to me, laughing

— Oh! With all my heart!

— But do remember Saint Simeon, who remained for twenty-six years at the top of a pillar! That was quite another matter!

I replied timidly

— I think I would have preferred the column.

XVI

Wii-Cb in fou (Kuang-Si province),
28 January.

Just as I was leaving Beijing and Tianjin last December, the most pessimistic reports were circulating about southern China. Lao Yun Foc, the notorious Lao Yuri Foc, our old enemy from the Tonliin, was said to be leading his bands, and the reformist party, under the command of Sun Yat Sen, was to follow him. 'An uprising is brewing,' claimed the newspapers in Hong Kong and Shanghai.

This was viewing the events through a highly magnifying lens, for this is how things had actually unfolded:

When Li Hung Chang left Canton on 4 July, he left Guangdong and Guangxi in a state of absolute peace. To achieve this result, he had employed extremely *severe* measures. He had executed 450 people; he had reinstated the notorious 'searching dagger' torture

which consists of cutting a man into as many pieces as fate decrees; this method yielded, during his *reign*, remarkable results. Only the pirates still defied him. Since he could not behead them all, he resorted to a rather bizarre procedure, namely, cutting off their heads and appointing them as lieutenants in his army. This was an honourable retirement and did not in the least prevent them, moreover, from being

pirates, but state-controlled pirates, if I may put it that way.

And now, what was the successor to the terrible viceroy going to do? He was known to be weak and indecisive — and his first act proved it. No sooner had he taken office than he sent a secret circular to the Taoists, urging them to intervene with the missionaries to persuade them to leave their residences as soon as possible, ‘lest the peace be disturbed once more’. Our consul, H. Lardouin, was reluctant to obtain this circular and immediately intervened. ‘If the bishop and his priests leave, it is because you acknowledge that you are powerless to protect them. In that case, my government will be able to protect them itself.’ The Chinese official, taken aback, assured him of his good intentions. He has never written a circular of the sort, for order is now maintained and, whilst he lives, not a hair on the head of any European shall be touched. And his promise seems sincere, when an edict appears in a Canton newspaper that reignites the powder keg. ‘The Allied Powers,’ it reads,

defeated by the imperial troops and ordered to pay 1.3 million in compensation. 'We have converted the natives to Christianity; they have no choice but to return to the gods of their ancestors; if they refuse, we shall certainly force them to do so.'

The mandarins read and reread this official proclamation. The consuls read it just as the mandarins do and hasten to lodge their complaints with the viceroy. The viceroy replies, as he did previously, that he will issue orders to put an end to the unrest. And his promise, once again, seems sincere. However, the edict is even more serious, and in both provinces, attacks begin against the Christians. Bands of robbers destroy houses and chapels, whilst respecting, a detail worth noting, the lives of individuals. Only one is attacked and killed.

So the consuls intervene once more. The viceroy, once again, promises to send soldiers and does indeed send them, but these soldiers, all keen opium smokers and even keener pirates, do nothing befitting their rank and rival the looters in their pillaging.

11 Immediate action is required. The *Comète* and the *Acalanehe*, having come from Hanol, are heading out to engage an English gunboat on the river; a few weeks later, the *Arpès* and the *Vigilants* arrive, followed by another English gunboat and a German gunboat.

This time, Li Hung Chang's deputy took

fear. She raised more troops and issued a counter-edict. She did what she could, until the day a second wave of unrest emerged: the reformists Kang You-wei and Sun Yat-sen, joined by a large number of secret societies, including the Triads, the former Taf-Pings, and also the wealthy merchants of Hong Kong, Singapore and the major cities of the Far East, who called for the fall of the Manchu dynasty in favour of a purely Chinese dynasty.

This cause is not very popular, as the people do not understand it. But certain leaders have money; with money, they recruit men willing to do anything and march on the town of Waï-7'cheou, 120 kilometres from Canton. Imperial forces block their path; there are several skirmishes...

I have before me the report of the provincial viceroy, recounting how 'the members of the accursed societies raised a revolt and how the defenders of the just cause secured victory over these ingrates, after having surrounded them and taken them captive ' I feel I must quote this report to you almost in its entirety, for it is a most curious piece of official literature, written in that most abstruse style, that deliberate vagueness which every good mandarin, four times licentiate and three times doctor, is so fond of:

‘By nature, the people of the prefecture of Wai-Tcheou are as fierce as they are savage. They band together, forming clans that engage in pillaging, piracy and smuggling. In these parts, with such associations, revolts are easily sparked. In Wai-Gbiu and Nun-Chan, members of one of these secret societies (Yu-Tun) have been resisting the mandarins for ten years, pillaging or imposing their will on the markets. The soldiers sent on several occasions to fight and disperse them have not yet succeeded in doing so.

‘It was then, around the middle of the 8th intercalary month (October), that, having learnt that firearms purchased abroad had been smuggled into the sub-prefecture of Ifouai-Chin, I realised the gravity of these acts, inspired by the revolutionaries Kang Yu-wei and Sun Yat-sen. I saw that the danger was great, especially in the region of Sam-Tcheou-Tchen, a mountainous area with many roads. And I thought that if large numbers of troops were not sent to guard these areas, it would be difficult to suppress the revolts. That is why I ordered Admiral Ho Chun Tehen to select, from the various fortresses, 1,500 valiant and vigorous soldiers, to send them first to Sam-Chun, to march northwards and thus penetrate the former stronghold of the secret societies. I also sent warships to patrol the sea and large and small military junks on the rivers, in order to block the

rebels. At the same time, numerous troops were deployed to the borders of Houai-t'hiu. Other marine units were assigned to guard the island and the coast, under the command of Generals Wong Itun Fok and 'fio hiu llin. With these deployments, the road was cut off to the rebels from the TFO2S Côté5. Then the troops from the towns of Waf-Tcheou and Eouai-Chiu marched out to meet these bandits and engage them in battle, but General Tang, who commanded them, considering that he had too few men, ordered General Úlak Chiu Shek to bring fresh soldiers to his aid.

'General Úlak's troops arrived at Kouai'

Chiu, the 10th day of the 8th lunar month (2 October). The rebel leaders immediately decided to raise the banner of revolt. It was 5 October. Their first action was launched against the mandarinat of Sai-Wan, in San-ou, in order to sow disorder in the tributary territory of Kao-Lung. Fortunately, Admiral Ho was there with the brave men; he threw himself into the battle and pursued his enemies as far as Long-Itou. Other high-ranking officers lent him their support. And there you have it, Sire, the measures I had taken to defend the towns and countryside and to combat the members of the secret societies.

'The leader of the rebellion, Sun Yat-sen, was in hiding in Hong Kong. It was he who brought us such great perils and caused us such great difficulties. On the mainland, * at the head of the revolutionaries were Fok Itiu, Lao Wang Wing,

so-called generals; L'say L'iu, Fok and Tchong Ày, so-called aides-de-camp; Ho Sou Piou and Wong Yok Fo, so-called senior officers. On their banners was written: 'Tai-Tchin-ko and Yat-yut (Sun and Moon)'. They wore red turbans, white jackets and trousers with red trim.

'On 2 October, once they had gathered, they seized Long-Kou. From there, they spread out in various directions to plunder, burn and conscript recruits. General Lao Pouh Shenp, with 200 soldiers, and the Prophet of Wai-Tcheou, with 200 new soldiers over whom he had placed the sub-prefect of Kouai-Chiu in command, marched against them. The general charged first with fierce impetuosity; he cut off the heads of Tsay a Siri and Tchong a Fo and killed several dozen rebels; and nothing seemed likely to dampen his ardour when, suddenly, from neighbouring villages, a thousand or more rebels emerged, armed with rifles, spears and shields.

'So we lost a few dozen men; the commander Tong Foug' Ny was taken prisoner, and the towns of Yai-Tcheou and Ecuai-C'hiu were in grave danger. But fortunately, reinforcements arrived. ... Meanwhile, Sam Pak Toug, the 'Glory of the Strong Men', won over the rebels' false prince, Wong-Yong, through trickery and threw him into prison. This false prince was tried and sentenced to death. This act

the courage of our army. The rebels fled in all directions, towards Long-Fa and the mountains of Loui-Eong, with the aim of reaching the Eastern River, but our valiant soldiers opposed them with all their might. Such are the various phases of the rebellion, faithfully reported to His Majesty, up to 9 October. They demonstrate the ferocity and inhumanity of the rebels.

‘These rebels were not yet ready to admit defeat; on 20 October, they attacked Wong-Sa, near Sam-To-Thiouk. The town’s defender, Colonel Tchu y Shen, commander of the European-trained troops, opposed the enemy’s advance with all his might, but was unable to halt them. And the rebels occupied Sam-To-Thiouk. But General Ny Thiou Tak and General Úlak came to Colonel Tchu’s aid. The fighting was fierce, from morning until after sunset; the cannons and rifles made a terrible din. Yet the rebels held their ground. Then General Ny, whose armour was covered in blood, threw himself upon the leader of the revolutionaries, Lao Wang Weng, whom he killed, along with many other second-in-command officers. The enemy’s resistance gradually waned. General Ny launched the entire army of order against the army of ‘disorder’, killing 200 or 600 men, seizing the flags, taking the horses, cannons and rifles, and freeing the captive mandarin, several hundred women and children. In short, he won a resounding victory. Among the eada-

Among the bodies of rebels strewn across the battlefield, it was noticed that one of them was dressed in European clothing. When questioned, the prisoners replied that the corpse was that of one of their generals, Tchioug Su hong. On the same day (20 October), Admiral Ho Tchoun Tchen sent his soldiers into the town of Sam-Tcheou, seized abandoned weapons and rolls of red cloth, and scattered the enemy.

‘But there were still some remaining in the sub-prefectures of Ho-Yun and Wo-Ping. Seeing our forces occupied in Kouai-Chiu, they judged the time ripe for an uprising. But on 21 October, at dawn, on my orders, General Shek Yok Shan made his way unseen, with his troops, to this new bandit hideout, set it alight and surrounded it. More than a hundred heads fell by the sword and even more perished in the flames.

‘Such is the story, faithfully recounted to Your Excellency, of the Wai-Tcheou rebellion, which was suppressed by our valiant troops.

“**Therefore**, Fou Tai, Viceroy of Guangdong, I look back on these events and note that the leader of the secret societies, Sun Yat-sen, a cruel man who escaped punishment, having wandered along the seashore, has secretly returned to Hong Kong. It was he who seduced the members of the secret societies of Waichow; he incited them to do evil, he acquired weapons which he brought in from the sea, he raised

Waving the banner of rebellion, he seized the small town of Sai-Wan, adjacent to the tributary territory of Mao-Lung. Sun Yat-sen's intention was to stir up trouble between the Empire and the foreigners, in order to achieve his aim. This man's wickedness is truly ferocious. He, Kang Yu-Wei and Liong, resorted to trickery; they recruited and gathered members of secret societies over an area of more than two leagues; they stirred up rebellions in all these places. They ran through our province like swine and wolves, their numbers growing endlessly. They killed generals and soldiers, and took mandarins prisoner. In short, they dared to do everything that rebels dare to do. Yet they were like a swarm of locusts scattered by the wind. They committed an incomparable crime, greater than the heavens!

‘Fortunately, protected by the Almighty, the generals and soldiers, acting on the orders of Your Majesty, have put the troublemakers to death and dispersed them within ten days.

A profound calm now reigns where once there was turmoil. The cities are at peace, and the tributary territories are no longer at risk of losing that peace. We can therefore assert that foreigners no longer have any reason to raise their voices against us. Half of the ringleaders and leaders of the rebellion have been killed. The great leader Sun Yat-sen and his associates Kang Ying-wei and Lions first took refuge in Hong Kong and Cacao; later, they...

have fled beyond the Ocean. We had sent word to the foreign mandarins beyond the Ocean to inform them of these men's guilt. I know that custom and the laws do not permit us to arrest them (in these countries). However, we hope that they will not return secretly (to China).

'It should be noted that within each sub-structure of the Yaï-clieou, there were secret societies. When these societies became numerous, they dared to raise the banner and engaged in fierce battles with the authorities. This is madness and a grave act of disobedience. At present, most of the secret societies have been dispersed; nevertheless, it is still strongly recommended to search for and apprehend those affiliated with these societies. Not a single seed of this race must remain; it must be eradicated right down to the very root. Thus have I given orders to this effect to Ho and to General Han Lan. This is in order to comply with the will of our Emperor, the Holy Sovereign, who desires peace on land and at sea.

'In this war, all those in the army who displayed great courage do not, however, deserve much credit. At a time when difficulties with foreign powers are so numerous, we must strive to put an end to our internal strife. This will be of great benefit to

the Empire and its preservation. Would it be acceptable to Your Majesty, once peace has been restored, that I should conduct a thorough inquiry into the causes of the upheaval, and that I should

Which ones should be rewarded? That is left to Your Majesty's magnanimous benevolence. Furthermore, the ministers of the three departments (the Interior, War and Justice) must be consulted separately on this matter. We must wait to see whether the peace restored in the troubled districts will prove lasting.

'I pray and implore the Empress the Great and the Emperor to consider these matters, so that they may give me their instructions. For, although the principal leaders of the secret societies have been defeated, many essential and necessary matters remain unresolved. We must search for them anew and finally find the means to put an end to such calamities. We need active vigilance at sea and on land; we must seek out the members of the secret societies and prevent them from re-emerging. Admiral Ho should be ordered to patrol the coastlines, canals and islands with steam warships. On the mainland, General Tang Plan Lan should be ordered to have companies of soldiers search for secret societies in every town, village and household. If the searches are not carried out thoroughly, and if the secret societies return once more, the generals must be held accountable. . . I implore Your Majesty to examine these various matters and to kindly give me your instructions.'

1. A Chinese-French dictionary by Rev. Lauréat, a **Catholic missionary**

This viceroy had not been overly boastful in his report. Yai-Cheou was well defended — and very fortunately so, for had Yai-Cheou fallen, Canton would have been under threat. Pirates and agitators have now been reduced to powerlessness, or thereabouts. The Christians have returned to their homes, some slightly scorched, others without windows or roofs. Thanks to the French consul, H. Hardouin, who spoke very clearly and firmly, thanks to Lieutenant Floriug, who guaranteed the protection of the eastern river, and to Shek-Lung and Hong-Kun, the provincial treasury has generously compensated them. Calm prevails everywhere. But is this calm due to the governor's energy or to the presence of our gunboats, whose turrets can be seen along the banks of the Si-Kiang? Let us not debate its origins. It exists—that is the essential point. And since a gunboat must always be stationed somewhere, let us hope that it remains, for as long as possible, along the banks of the Si-Kiang. The Thsing respect nothing so much as the cannon.

11 There is, to be sure, still a little stir, a few tentative attempts at posters against foreigners, in a somewhat allegorical style: 'Sons of Han, wake up. Why are you not like your **fathers**? Why do you not regain your **former** strength, to drive out these devilish Westerners who threaten us? It is God who has inspired me with these words. Follow him!' but no one follows the

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God. Neither in Guangdong nor in Yunnan and Guangxi.

And yet, what a flood of reports of unrest, of massacres, of sensationalised stories, churned out by the overactive imaginations of amateur reporters! There were rumours of revolt everywhere. It was said that Marshal Sao, on the Tonbinois border, was unable to quell it; it was said that Sou Kong Pao had requested reinforcements; it was said that Tiao a Pha's bands were growing in number every day... And the shrewdest politicians still suspected Europe of intending to muddy the waters, which were already sufficiently so. England wished to encourage Sun Yat-sen's efforts and thus create fresh unrest in the province, in order to secure the right to intervene... Germany was merely awaiting a signal from its emperor to seize the Boeca-Tigria batteries, which guard the entrance to Canton...

Only the Republic of Saint-Marin and the Principality of Monaco did not join in this international fireworks display...

Good heavens, yes, I know that by always repeating this sort of thing — and in every single letter — that there is nothing, that nothing has happened, I myself come across as a poor, short-sighted optimist, one of those who would certainly not have foreseen the siege of Beijing... I know that I **am depriving** *Mr S.,...*, of the Chamber, of a lecture on the Yellow Peril, or *Mr Z. ...*, of the 'Proletarian' group

'free-thinkers' in an article on the crimes of militarism and clericalism in the Far East. Yet, what can you do? I can only recount what I see and what I hear. Or if I see nothing, if I hear nothing... I am quite obliged to say that I have seen and heard nothing...

I am sorry for Mr X..., and for 11. Z.... and, in general, for all those romantic souls who love dramatic situations, but there is no longer any drama in China.

XYII

On the Si-Ikiang, between Wu-Chau and Nan-Ning,
3 February.

One of these days, I shall be found dead in China, having died of various melancholy ailments, having died from seeing too many rice paddies, too much bamboo, too many water hyacinths and too many Chinese. Oh! Those rice paddies, those bamboo groves and those bamboo trees! . . . And those junks in single file on that river of yellow water!... And those rocks so conveniently placed right in the middle of the current, to rip open those junks!...

You might think, perhaps, that it would be easy for me to smear all this melancholic drivel with literature, that I could describe to you 'the delicate lace' of my bamboo, 'the vibrant green symphony' of my banana trees, 'the light-filled mist' that hangs over my sorrow

Well, no, not even that. As long as I'm on this rickety boat sailing up the Si-Kiang, I

I fear I shall have to give up literature. For, though I am not as sensitive as Mr Pierre Loti, who locks himself away in a turret of wax so that the voices from outside cannot reach his ears, I insist, when I am working, on not being surrounded by more than twenty loudmouths at a time. You will understand that it is unpleasant to be chasing after an epithet and then after one's paper, which some pranksters have just snatched from you, to examine it at leisure, front and back, and that it is even more disagreeable to search for one's penholder for a quarter of an hour, only to find it transformed into a hairpin in the plait of some individual who is not even a pretty woman. I believe that in such an environment, M. Littré would never have translated the *Hères d'Illippoerate*.

And this space is ours, and has been for three days now! For the past three days, we've been surrounded by a tight-knit group of Chinese people—all the passengers on the boat—who are conducting ethnological studies on our staff. All we're missing is a cage, a cor-nac, a big top, and we'd have the full show. If I blow my nose, these learned observers seize my handkerchief. They sniff it and sniff it again, up and down. My cravat interests them wildly, and when I show them my braces, I imagine such a sight will strike them with enthusiasm.

One of them, who has a big flat head with a little ox's face, stands there, almost for hours on end, straight, motionless, staring int ly at me

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with wide eyes. One senses that a slow process is taking shape in his mind. He is trying to make sense of things; he is very wise, truly diligent. For him, it is a struggle, though he allows himself to touch the brim of my hat. Hats, the others... What is the brim of a hat to them? The brim of my hat would not satisfy their appetite: they demand the whole garment and pull at it in droves, to ensure the good quality of the fabric. I'm already missing three buttons. If this fury persists, I'll return to Hong Kong in mid-August.

And when I think that I once read in the Rrttofra *Penei-ale some memorable passages about Lerre and Trier*, stating that the Chinese 'aren't noisy, they live peacefully and quietly'! What on earth would it be like if the Ghl-nois were noisy? And if they make no noise, what on earth would they do? Ever since I've been here, all I've heard is gongs and firecrackers.

Lois, no doubt, the author of *the General History of the Maritime Voyages of the Earth and the Sea*, has never attended a discussion amongst women, for if he had, he would never have dared to vouch for their silence. He was incapable of making more noise than these two sampanières who, in Mong-Kiong, are fighting over a cabbage. They each hold this sacred cabbage by its stalk; the stalk snaps and the two women fall backwards, letting out ferocious screams. They get back up, straighten their hair, and pull at their buns as if at a door

of Gloche and start screaming again. The stronger one punches the weaker one in the stomach, pounding her belly, until finally, breathless and exhausted, victor and vanquished collapse into the mud and end the dispute with the usual nervous breakdown.

Near Ion-Kiang, the hills bordering the riverbanks are peeling away, and it is the shreds of their crusts that litter the river. Villages follow one another like links in a chain, all sunk into the clay soil, with thatched huts dominated by a watchtower perched on three legs, and muddy streams spanned by wooden bridges. Every now and then, one must stop. The junks dock, laden with travellers: old Chinese men clutching their ever-present pipes and umbrellas, old Chinese women with their baskets, and young Chinese women carrying their little ones astride their backs. Old and young jostle for the best places, filling the cabins with a sickly smell of opium vomit, a strong odour of onions, shoes and concentrated urine.

We travel on like this for a long time, all the way to Za•hoan-Kiang, past Ta-hoan-Kiang, on the road to Nan-Ning.
 .. Rice paddies, banana trees and bamboo, bamboo, banana trees
 and rice paddies.. . Rice paddies,
 , and bamboo, and banana trees! Just
 heaven, will you never tire of this, and will the seed never

ever be extinguished, of banana trees and bamboo? He seeks an image to make our boredom more tangible. There is only one that should fit, but I fear to use it... We have become so polite since 1800!

Early January.

... Fragments of a conversation on the quays of Canton, a few hours before my departure, with a very well-informed official:

— 'I'm worried,' he said to me. 'Something's brewing in the province. A popular uprising is planned for the end of January.'

— Oh! Do you think so? ...

— I've seen posters calling for arms... Near Long-Tcheou, the Europeans are said to be under threat. The bands of Sun L'ai Sen and Kang Yu Wei are preparing for the coming revolt.

— You're worrying me,

— Besides, since you're heading inland, ask the missionaries.

I have already questioned half a dozen of them. And here are their answers:

The first

—I don't know.

The second

— I don't know either.

The third, the fourth and the fifth:

— Not either.

And the sixth:

— It's a joke.

A joke, really. No doubt there are secret societies, the famous Triads, the last remnants of the Za-Pings, whose flag bears this naive motto: 'Rob the rich, help the poor.' It is in the vicinity of Nan-Ning and Kouei-Hien that they have their strongest organisation. They obtain subsidies from several landowners through threats and, with the help of these unwilling adherents, engage in rather astute propaganda. You are familiar with their initiation ceremonies, for they are performed every evening at the Ambigu. D'Fnnery used them, and Xavier de Montèpin abuses them. Before an altar erected at the foot of a solitary rock, the fools kneel, three by three, then they pass through bundles of weapons, ranks formed of spears, and, after swearing to reveal nothing of what they shall see and hear, All, at the same signal, pierce their finger with a sharp needle. Their flowing blood is mixed with wine which each Triad must drink, swearing once more that they will henceforth use their strength to plunder the rich in order to aid the destitute. This is, at least in its latter part, the programme of a mutual aid society.

The Chinese authorities, despite their threefold indifference, have finally thought to take action. At this moment, a police battalion is patrolling the countryside. Around a hundred people have just been executed at

Nan-Ning. This example will no doubt deter others from their mission, and the poor rich will once again find peace. From now on, they will have nothing more to fear than professional pirates, the worldly, the educated pirates, organised into a hierarchy, and the soldiers who, they too, are destined to become pirates, sooner or later, because they must be paid quickly and they are not being paid.

Moreover, the trade offers so many advantages that, during the past week, three ships were raided at Tai-Ping Fu on the Si-Kfang, and last month, more than ten were raided. Those in the know estimated that the value of the loot must have exceeded 50,000 taels. Admittedly, this is highly regrettable — the owners of the 50,000 taels will find it hard to console themselves — but it is of no consequence whatsoever. And those simpletons who see in these ‘various incidents’ the prelude to a ‘general revolution’ subsidised by England—such simpletons are simply too simple-minded.

If someone were to ask me my opinion on the best way to put an end to these acts of banditry, ẽerlvalt recently a missl0nnoire from Tchín-Ngan, I would advise him to keep quiet and immediately commission the works of e0u(e de L0ng-2’chèou at the gateway to China. We would thus manage to feed all those idle people who become pirates only when hunger and necessity drive them to it. The Triads would disband, along with their followers, and there would be complete tranquillity throughout

of all these provinces, where the European, at least for the moment, mark my words, will have nothing to fear."

And now, what is this Si-Kiang worth? What is this penetration into Kouang-Toung and Ltoiiang-Si worth?

It was believed to be worth a great deal. The Souang-Si was reputed to be a billion-dollar market. Indeed, one had to secure free access to the river leading there. On 1 February 1897, commercial access via the two posts, Sam Shui and Wu-Chau, was guaranteed to us. The gold-diggers rushed there, having emptied all their holds.

Alas! They had reckoned without the competition: the local bargees, who charge two dollars a tonne. They had treated China as a land of fools, a new country, a Sudan or a Congo, lacking means of transport. They had forgotten that Canton alone possesses 200 steam-powered boats, which, from 1 January to 30 December, tow junks—large and small—all flying the Chinese flag, belonging to the Chinese and manned by the Chinese.

However, a service had been established, running from Hong-Rong to Wu-Chan. It operated until the end of 1889, but with what difficulties, what regrets! It was some time ago that we were informed of the composition of this billionaire's estate. Guangxi is a poor province, with no major urban centres apart from Nanning. In a certain part of

its course, the Si-Eiang cannot be compared to the Yangtze,

Add to the shipowners' woes the fact that they were still forbidden to call at any ports other than those recently opened by the Convention of 1 February 1897. The Hong Kong Chamber of Commerce complained to its government, which was at a loss as to how to respond to console them. It was a difficult situation. Finally, someone found the only remedy: it involved compelling China to fully open the river and abolish internal customs duties, exclusively in favour of Europeans.

'I hate China,' she cried out. She explained that she had initially intended 'to allow foreign steamers free passage on the river only on condition that they complied with her tax laws.' And now to be told that everything was to be changed! This new measure would reduce revenue, and Sir Robert Hart would protest...

There was a long discussion. The regulations were becoming increasingly unclear, because it is impossible to satisfy two parties at once: the provincial tax authorities and European trade. And whilst they discussed and discussed again, the shipping companies were recording a deficit of thirty thousand dollars in their ledgers.

At the very moment when the English were seeking to penetrate Kuang-Si via the western branch

From the river, we were trying to get the railway in t h e r e .

I have heard many arguments in favour of the railways in China. None of them seems acceptable to me at first glance. Admittedly, when one considers that the distance from Canton to Nanking is 1,200 kilometres, and when one considers, on the other hand, that there are only two or three hundred kilometres through valleys and hills from Langson to Nanking, the idea of a railway is understandable. On the other hand, when one considers how all these provinces, with their thousands of boats, possess a means of transport that is simple, durable, unchanging and inexpensive, one wonders: what is the point of a railway?

They'll get there faster. Ah! The Chinese couldn't care less about getting there faster, since they're never in a hurry! Try persuading a gentleman who is never in a hurry to board a locomotive—that is to say, to pay three francs for a journey he could make for twenty-five centimes on a cart. What do you think this gentleman will say to you? He'll tell you to go to hell, you and your locomotive!

And finally, why would there be locomotives in this country criss-crossed by rivers 5,000 kilometres long? Once again, China is not Dahomey or the Congo, a mass of impenetrable bush, inhabited by tribes with no means of communication other than the back of a Gabonese or an Abomean. Build railways

In Dahomey and the Congo, if you believe that Dahomey and the Congo can supply you with enough goods to fill your 'stores'. But what about China? The means of communication exist; they are innumerable, these means of communication, to the extent that one traveller remarked that 'half the Chinese population spent its time transporting the other half'. So, do not build railways in China; make use of its old equipment instead.

After all, it is quite possible that I am mistaken.

I heard, the other day, a railway expert asserting his faith in progress. He said!

'Civilisation advances like a torrent. Steam is the vanguard of civilisation; when unleashed, it sweeps aside all that stands in its way. It has set its sights on China, and it will prevail.'

This march of civilisation, this steam that sweeps through and overturns everything in its path... I must admit that this moved me deeply. I have reflected on it since and have concluded that, in fact, steam must pass everywhere, for without it, our metallurgical establishments would lack...

And I fear but one thing for the time being: that after what I have just written, I shall be regarded as a laggard, a man of the century before last, and that economists will mock me. Yet I have a weakness for holding to the opinion of the economists—

XVIII

Canton, 2 February.

To escape the fleas and lice of the big city, the 150 Ctiropeans living in Canton have taken refuge in a small square, a plot measuring 200 metres on each side, a strip of land by the quay, between the café and the river.

On this mound of earth, they have built terraced villas and a club. And there they spend their time, away from the office or the counter, playing whist and inviting one another to dinner. There are the consular staff, the customs staff, the German trading houses, six English firms, four French firms, and a few rare ladies who organise balls and concerts which the whole colony attends to give themselves the illusion of high society. Yet illusion is impossible in this sleepy atmosphere, this easy, monotonous, monochrome, monotonous and comfortable life...

1. The way business is done in China is straightforward. As the Chinese are a people of traditions and customs, the most important thing, if one wishes to succeed with them, is not to offend their traditions and customs. Hence the need for the trader to use an intermediary, the '*com-pra-loi-o*', who takes on three-quarters of the work, handles relations with the locals, buys and sells, either on credit or for cash, and, should he make a mistake in his calculations, is held responsible and forfeits his deposit.

The export of KoBan g-Toung is almost entirely based on silk and returns to silk. It amounts to seventy million annually. Fifteen million goes to the French, twenty-five million to the Germans, and the rest to the English and the Americans. Alain, when one consults the customs statistics — something I do, incidentally, as rarely as possible — one is struck by a monstrosity, a veritable case of economic teratology. Of these seventy million sent to Europe, it turns out that the Lyon market alone takes fifty-five million. Since French manufacturers supply only fifteen million, this represents a difference of forty million in favour of foreign firms...

Another economic anomaly. In Canton, after silk, some twenty million goods are manufactured, consisting mainly of mats, black lacquerware, porcelain and rattan. All

These goods are still shipped by foreign firms. And French firms alone cannot claim their share, since they have no ships, for the sole transport company that maintains our links with the Far East, the Maritime Freight Company, charges freight rates far too high for the meagre value of these mats and rattan. The Germans and the English possess a merchant fleet which is growing daily, and so well equipped that it enables them to accept cargoes at a rate of one franc per tonne.

And France has just seven steamers in the two major southern ports

‘If we did not have the postal service, you would no longer see a single tricolour flag in the Far East,’ Mr Leroux, our consul in Hong Kong, told me yesterday.

‘Just think that from 1888 to 1890, apart from the ships serving the route from Kowloon to Haiphong, only one schooner—barely a schooner, a rowboat, a decked barge—ever arrived here! In 1891, nothing; in 1892, just one, a single ship that set sail from Pauillac, but with half its freight paid for by the State; in 1895, 1896,

1897, 1898, two sailing ships from Nantes, the *Rerteree-Dane* and the *Duguesellit*; in 1895, a four-masted ship, the *2Fero*... In the past, our sailors from the North set sail every week for the Chinese seas, and today, here is the state of commercial shipping...

French shipping five ships in thirteen years!

‘And what angers me most is the thought that it is the Germans, those companies from Hamburg and Bremen, who are transporting our rice from Cochinchina! They arrive at harvest time and take everything away... Tene2, look at my records, look at these whole pages of arrivals and departures: there are only German ships listed. Even the English have almost been overtaken... Are there no shipowners left among us? And if there are still some, what would it take to bring them back? ›

In the evening, at the club, the small French group sounds the death knell for our national initiative. And I, though my illness is not pessimism, would almost be tempted to hang myself from the bell’s clapper, to ring it louder. Five ships in thirteen years, in a coastal centre such as Hong Kong, whereas France, with its geographical position on three seas and a coastline of 8,700 kilometres, ought to remain at the forefront of maritime powers. Five ships in thirteen years: this is what condemns us.

Do not think that I am merely writing a speech for a parliamentary candidate; in the end, there is every reason to be revolted by this apathy, this indifference, and to despair at this gradual decline, and to feel humbled by the strong and steady rise of Anglo-German industry! I am going to the tailor to order a suit, I do not

I found German sheets; at the haberdasher's, I could only find German buttons and German buckles; at the shoemaker's, German boots; at the hatter's, English hats; at the perfumer's, German toothpaste and German soaps; at the hotel, we eat the English way, the butter comes from Australia and never from Isigny; the cheese comes from Chester and never from Loquefort; the beer is English, the cognac has been replaced by whisky. Only the wines remain French, and even then, these are problematic vintages from Burgundy, Bordeaux and Champagne, bearing the labels of Bremen's Itinisons. Yet here are 18 American vineyards and those of Germany—and Germany again! —which are entering into competition... The whole of northern Ghino and the entire east, as far as Han-Kèou, have been flooded with wretched Californian plonk and watery Rhine blends, which a mere glance from our humble wine connoisseur would send back into the ground. I have drunk, at various tables of Chinese figures priding themselves on their Europeanism, atrocious, foul-smelling concoctions that Burgundian beggars would not even want for their salad. These dangerous drugs were maturing in elegant bottles adorned with labels, crowns and gold medals, bearing **French** names with their spelling carefully distorted: Chefs, Omer, which shielded the theft from the law.

No, I wouldn't have been able to make a name for myself until

How the buyer in the Far East is doomed to the role of victim. This brand-new, loose-fitting garment—don't pull too hard on the sleeves: they'll tear right out of your hands. These shoes, so finely crafted, these trousers are made of gauze. In two days' time, sir, you will be barefoot and naked, for your hat is also made of gauze, no doubt. There would be room here for solid, well-made French products; there would be room for our foodstuffs, our wines, our genuine table wines, our inexpensive Nidi wines; there would be room for our fashions, for our watchmaking, our jewellery—
...And the manufacturers aren't budging...

And, at the club, the conversation continues, sorry.

But since this pain, however acute it may be, must inevitably come to an end—and since the sherrys and cocktails we've been piling up haven't yet done the trick—one of us quips, quite aptly, that the local police chief has invited him, this evening to a dinner of shark fin and bamboo prawns on a flower boat. Do not cry out, do not be indignant. The flower boat has an undeserved reputation; the flower boat is the victim of slander. I would almost recommend a Hontyon Prize for the flower boat, for whilst it is understood that one has fun there, one does so with such dignity that diplomacy itself could learn a thing or two. The wealthy Chinese fear **nothing** more than exertion. Too much laughter is

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an effort. Hence the wealthy Chinese man would rather be bored in silence, precisely because it requires less effort. The wealthy Chinese man comes to the Flower Boat, just as the European goes to the casino. There he plays dominoes or chess; he loses quite a few dollars; he smokes opium and is surrounded by a dozen very young ladies dressed in black silk trousers and lilac tunics. It would seem that here, driven by our deplorable Western customs, such an abundance of young ladies in lilac tunics might give rise to some criticism. Here, in the land 'where morality was invented', the critic would wear out his jaws in vain. These gentlemen never for a single moment depart from this haughty propriety — and you would take them for saints. Never do they address a word to their ladies. If they so much as touch the tips of their nails, it is only now and then, every couple of hours—and with what philosophical disdain, what irony of gesture... A mere brush rather than a touch.

Given this strict regime, the poor girls would much prefer to be idle, but as they have no choice and must keep themselves occupied, they invent a whole host of time-consuming tasks: they paint their lips in the shape of a heart, they dab little circles of vermilion on each cheek, they adorn their wrists with green jade rings, they smooth their straight hair with perfumed glue, and they pile on a whole scaffolding of crowns of pink, or white flowers, at the very top

They scratch their necks, they spit on the ground more copiously and more regularly than a top-mast deckhand, they spit out lotus seeds, they play shrill tunes on the guitar or the tambourine, they sing senseless songs in voices so high-pitched, so high-pitched, that they pierce right into the back of your head, like a fistful of needles; they watch their Chinese masters playing dominoes, all huddled around the table, like a flock of bleating dolls.

And, beyond the limits of human strength, the face, battered by fists, the mouth, a mar-mite's plea. Her mouth so wide and so long that it seems to want to devour the ears; her eyes, two tendrils in two holes of yellow pus. Oh! I cannot

They're not exactly the epitome of temptation. Oh, no. And yet, once you have seen them, they leave a memory of a strange, unsettling creature—one that natural history has not yet classified, a figure shrouded in mystery, set against a backdrop of curled leaves and vibrant colours. Their massive red lips, their marble teeth, their slender arms straining against the width of pagoda sleeves, their hands as delicate as antennae. And that whole tiny, lost body in its stiff silk tunic, **like** a statuette **beneath** a veil, that whole little body, plump and slender as a

However, we have taken our seats in an Im-
huge hall, similar to those used as

A washhouse on the banks of the Saône. This heavy wooden structure is connected to the river by a whole network of ropes, bamboo trellises and narrow, rickety beams – which one can only cross safely after taking lessons from a professional tightrope walker. In the middle of the great hall, furnished like a tavern, laden with mirrors up to the ceiling, with lamps down to the plinths and hanging around a primary-school-style chandelier; in a fine jumble of opium, rickety chairs, and hunchbacked tahniiyeti who make out to be blind and deaf musicians, to scrape out mournful violin tunes for us, with a jerky, jerky rhythm that their dual condition of deafness and muteness barely manages, A table stands, laden with plates piled high with sticky sauces, yellowish or greyish, and we take our seats, squeezed between two Chinese figures. So there I am, with a commissioner, or an inspector, or I'm not quite sure what, from the Gaballu on my left, and a Tatar brigadier general on my right. The French consul and the commander of the garrison, the Oirs, sit at the head of the table, presiding over our host,

The attentive waiter, keeping a close eye on us, regularly pours champagne into our glasses, which we must then drain in one go, before tipping the dregs into our glasses from the front, which are then refilled with a similar amount; then we refill the glasses, and again—

we empty them again — and the endless series of dishes with yellowish, greyish and sticky sauces unfolds. In the first course: swallow's nests, bamboo-steamed lobsters, duck with vegetables, shark's fins, and more boiled duck and boiled chrysanthemums, bamboo stews, fish stomachs, pear tarts, slices of braised pork, de. •
dog sausages and chicken fillets.

For the second course: n8nu-pliar seeds, sea cucumbers, lotus flowers with mushrooms and chestnuts, duck with seaweed, crabs with amber iris, chicken kidneys, prawns with chilli, duck gizzard soups, sliced liver, salted cheese, stuffed fish fillets, chopped cabbage and preserved duck eggs.

Finally, in the third course, yet more flattened duck, glazed duck, boiled duck, flattened chicken, glazed chicken, boiled chicken, flattened guinea fowl, glazed guinea fowl, boiled guinea fowl and, all jumbled together, candied oranges, candied lotus seeds, candied jujubes, pastries as heavy as paving stones and dripping with oil, stringy pancakes, mallow roots, watermelon seeds, glazed nuts and honeyed peas.

Take a dip, guided by your chopsticks, into the countless dishes on this fantastic menu, and you'll understand that, thus submerged in champagne

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and rice wine, the least one can be is drunk first and dead drunk afterwards. My friend, the Tartar general who, at first, maintained an attitude befitting his rank, now saddens us with the incoherence of his manners. My friend, the salt tax farmer, enormous, with a plump, apoplectic face wedged between two pachydermic shoulders, laughs to himself, his wide mouth open, bristling with four yellow teeth like a palisade at the mouth of a gully. He laughs, then falls asleep contentedly, his hands clasped around his belly, barely contained beneath a tea-pink robe.

At that moment, the blind musicians are playing furiously on violins and musettes; the little women are drumming on tambourines, banging on gongs and strumming Chinese tunes on the zither. The smell of tobacco and the smoke of opium mingle. It is a outburst of sounds and smells, something demonic, inhuman, which shakes you, bewilders you, deafens you and sickens you.

And it fills you with despair... A weariness sets in at the sight of the enormous effort it would take to tear down this wall enclosing half a billion fossils. Whatever we might try, these people will never be like us, will never return to us. They will remain as unchangeable, as heavily attached to their tin pagodas, their ancestral flowers and their paintbrushes...

.. But come on, what does that do for us? And as Renan said: 'What must that do \$ Sirius?' The best thing is to sleep like my friend "Ls Gabelle", hands folded around his belly. And let the blind men strum their guitars, the little women beat the tambourine, the Manchu general stuff his pipe with opium, and the Girl hang herself with her pagoda tinsel, on her ancestors and her paintbrushes!

May she hang herself on it and choke to death...

XIX

Kiu-E iañg, 4 March.

End of the somewhat animated conversation I have just had with 11. X..., an old resident, who has some reason to believe he knows the Ghlne rather well, having travelled it from north to south for twenty-five years:

— I'm telling you, we're idiots!

— But then again...

— Complete and utter idiots

— Allow me...

— Bums! Yes, my friend, bums, we, Europe, we, the allied powers! Now we're being all lenient! Now that we're playing at petty politics, we're practising forgiveness for insults!... Forgiving insults, in China! Good heavens, what fools we are!... When what was needed was an exemplary lesson for China, do you hear me, sir, exemplary! We could have given that lesson, we could have

to believe that we could force Li Hung Chang's hand, with a sword at his back. Field Marshal von Waldersee assured him that, around Christmas, his troops would be preparing to return. And here we are in March, and it is still dragging on! ... Two Boxer chiefs were executed last week, two obscure figures, almost unknown, and already the ministers declare themselves satisfied; they are sparing Prince T'liuan, who will keep his precious head on his shoulders and even his rank at court!... When I told you that we are nothing but fools!...

Certainly, Mr X. is exaggerating. Fools, no.

We shall say that we have been clumsy, nothing more. But clumsy we have been, and Europe will have to accept being told so, respectfully.

After **Tien-Tain** and Peking, the Chinese were terrified. With our troops arriving in rapid succession, and the diplomatic corps having just drafted a collective note emphasising 'the irrevocable nature of the Allied nations' demands', all these displays of strength made it clear that we were determined to carry out the crackdown to the very end. The first talks concluded on 15 October. It was only on that date that the discussion of the conditions to be imposed began. The starting point remained the integrity of China, accepted by all.

And the "reparations for the past and guarantees for the future" take the form of six points:

1. Punishment of the principal culprits;
- 2° Compensation for the damage caused;
3. Maintenance of the ban on the arms trade;
- i° Destruction of the forts at Ta-Kou;
5. Establishment of a permanent guard for the defence of the legations;
6. Occupation of the area from Beijing to the sea.

Fifteen days later, the Chinese plenipotentiaries had received this final text. And four months later:

- t° The main culprits had not yet been punished;
2. The amount of compensation had not yet been
3. The forts at Ta-itou had not yet been razed;
- ï• The arms trade was being conducted with as much vigour and ease as before the war.

Apart from this slight delay, everything was going well. The German field marshal organised a few small columns to keep his soldiers occupied and to give himself the appearance that he was serving some purpose; the French general was imitating the German field marshal — and the diplomats continued to meet, whilst Prince Tsing and Li Hung-chang received their communications and failed to reply. Both, though very anxious at first, had gradually regained their confidence, and now, having just weathered this European storm, they knew

that it would no longer erupt, and they fell asleep peacefully. That European thunderclap sounded like such a great orchestra! And that oath that we would only deal with the matter after the death of the chief culprits! What had become of that oath? In short, it seemed that, in this chaotic adventure, only the elite and the state officials are

logical options.

Russia, from the very first day of the siege, withdrew its troops. **For** her, this military effort was sufficient. With the revolt defeated, she would resume her friendly attitude; she was counting on time to re-establish her domination in the North. Nothing could be more logical.

The United States, for its part, sees in all these events nothing but the interests of its trade; it is eager to resume its business dealings. It attaches only very limited importance to punishing the guilty parties. If it were acting alone, it would not press the matter further and would be content with a *formal* apology. And nothing could be more logical.

These are two very clear positions, which leave no room, for a single moment, for ambiguity. The first seeks to seize control of the market and makes no secret of it; the second seeks from China only the freedom to buy and sell there...

But now, we are about to fall, along with the other powers, into the trap of overcomplicating matters and seeking the most subtle and tortuous diplomacy. We are going to play the game of outwitting one another, and through all this cunning, we will almost

Chang Tse-chung's words: '**When the Europeans...**'

Europeans accuse the Chinese of lacking sincerity, the Europeans do not know themselves; otherwise, they would quickly realise that, in this respect, they are as Chinese as the Chinese themselves.”

We see England secretly favouring the reformists. It portrays Itouang Su as a sort of martyr for liberal ideas, and his entourage as the defenders of all reactionary forces. There is a grain of truth in many of these accusations, and this exaggeration has no other aim than to diminish the Russian influence supporting the old Empress. From the very outset of the talks, we see England once again proving very demanding regarding the guarantees to be put in place to ensure the safety of the ministers. And this demand has no other aim than to stand in the way of Russian influence, which would like to extend its reach, alone, in the North. That is not all. It is pushing for the revision of trade treaties, in the general interest, it is true, though its own nationals, being the most numerous, the boldest and the best equipped, will benefit from these advantages more than others. Finally, it is preparing a financial condominium scheme designed to guarantee the payment of reparations, and it fully intends to be the principal creditor, thanks to men such as Sir Robert Hart and his customs staff, who alone, at present, can ensure the resolution of the problem.

'This, in broad terms, is the conduct of

England, still at odds with Russia, its rival of yesterday and tomorrow. Whilst Russia appears eager to bring matters to a close, aiding the return of a regular government, England, in no hurry, finds this outcome anything but urgent. It wishes to believe that the crisis, by dragging on, will create unrest or the semblance of unrest in the Centre or the South. A few stones thrown into its consul's garden will provide it with a pretext to intervene with its ships and the two brigades it keeps in reserve in Hong Kong. ..

Politically speaking, Germany has gained a foothold in China, at Qingdao. It did so with such brutality that the Boxer Rebellion was sparked. Everyone knows this. Taken by surprise by the events of last July, the Emperor can contribute only to a very limited extent to the Allies' military operations. However, when the realisation dawned in Europe that a large army would be needed to capture Peking, he sent 18,000 men under the command of a field marshal. He hoped to strike *!to i*. Unfortunately, he arrived too late. Tien-Tsin had fallen; the embassies had been evacuated. All that remained for the troops to do was to carry out two or three police operations. Which is not much for 18,000 men and a field marshal!

Since he cannot strike hard, he will at least speak loudly, for William must always do something with force. He demands the heads of the guilty; he wants them before the opening

negotiations. He does not have them and does not insist. And it seems he hardly thinks of that demand from the early days. Because in the meantime, he has reflected on his many industrial projects, which will mark the starting point of German superiority in the Yangtze and elsewhere; he recalled that his volume of imports into China exceeded even that of England itself. A demand for concessions, too abrupt, too clear-cut, might, by alienating customers, reduce this volume of imports? So he abandons his vindictiveness to concern himself only with small profits.

Japan, too, stands to gain certain advantages. It, too, has a specific policy, which targets particular objectives and employs specific means. It relies on the affinity of race and language *that* exists between the two nations to play the role of advisor here in the essential reforms.

Add to this specific policy yet further specific points: namely, that it has not forgotten the brutality with which we arrested it in 1895. It is jealous of our successive encroachments in this country, which it already regards almost as its own. But he has become convinced of the impotence of his means of action. He will have to restrain himself, to bide his time—awaiting the favourable moment which can only come later, much later...

France undoubtedly had fewer petty gains to be made in . Its policy in stands out more

more open, less prone to ambiguity... at first, that is, for afterwards she does just like everyone else.

The first, Mr Plrhon, denounced the progress of the Boxer movement. And we know today that if his Russian and English colleagues had shown the same insight, the measures of precaution could have been taken in good time.

The first, again, N. Pichon, following the fall of Peking, calls for exemplary punishment—death—for the instigators of the unrest. ‘It is pointless and unjust,’ wrote our chargé d’affaires, M. d’Anthouard, on this subject, ‘to massacre thousands of poor wretches if the leaders remain unpunished, and consequently remain the source of this

and more threatening than ever. If there is a way to prevent the recurrence of such events, it is to cut off the heads of those in high places as they had

... up to 188,000. It is not impossible: for the powers, it is a question of unity and perseverance...

‘France,’ continued d’Anthouard, ‘has three kinds of interests in China: colonial interests in Guangxi, Guangdong and Yunnan, neighbouring Tonkin; commercial interests and religious interests throughout China. It requires, on these frontiers, order, tranquillity, and mandarins who are at least non-hostile, if not sympathetic. It requires respect for the three powers and the maximum of freedom for its merchants and missionaries. It must therefore demand punishment...

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so that the lesson may serve for the future, and serious guarantees, so as to be able to count on order and the enforcement of treaties.”

Here is a programme which is, more or less, that of the Allied Powers. However, will the ‘Allied’ Powers be able to claim, in the face of their slowness, their indecision, their calculated hesitation, that this programme will be implemented point by point? I hardly believe so — or rather, we hardly believe so — for you will understand that it is not merely my judgement that I have just set out to you in these three or four hundred lines, but the judgement of all Europeans living in France...

P.S. — Regarding my previous letter, in which I had the opportunity to speak to you about the railways, someone has pointed out to me that the full list of concessions granted to foreigners by the government has never been published in its entirety.

Here it is, as I managed to obtain it in Han-Ileou, right in the midst of the construction sites for the great central line, which will one day link Bang-Tse and Tche-Li:

LIST OF CONCESSIONS *CTAYLLRaEflT

i • Line from Shanghai to Yo-Sung, built in 1876, demolished shortly afterwards and rebuilt in 1888. Length: 15 kilometres.

B. The Tai-Ping–Pe-Tang line, from 7’ien-Tsin to 60 kilometres north of the Great Wall, via Cban-Hal-Ouan, then continuing on to Pekiit.

Distance from Ciinn-Haï-Oiiian to Zien-Tarn: 0 km; from

Tièri-Tsin 1 Pdkin- I Jü l:il. ; north of Ptkin ' 65 km. Total: 180 km. — This line was constructed on the orders of Li Hnng C.hang, after 1876.

itGE80 OONC\$OBCB OB2U18 i807

(Under construction or at the **project stage**).

Itussie, — Proposed line (via Tsitsikhar, Ifirin, Yladia-Vostok, with a branch line to Port Arthur and Niou-P.houang). Length of the Transbaikal section from Itussie to Yladia-Vostok: 1,420 kilometres; branch line to Port Arthur, length: 500 kilometres. — These lines run entirely between the Hu8se8 mountains. They are of great strategic importance; they are the shortest route between Europe and the Far East. Begun in 1897, they were completed around 1804-1903. (The Russian network is connected to the Chinese network via the Ghan-Hai-Ouan line to Niou-Gbouang, with a branch line to Sin-¥Iinting, near Mukden).

A yemagnc. — The railway line from Ifiao-Tcheou to Tsi-Nau, and from Tsi-Nau to Yen-Tcheou, and from Yen-Tcheou to Vitro-Tcheou. Length: 4,000 kilometres. It is the shortest route leading from the navigable section of the Yellow River to the sea. The loan was taken out in Berlin at the nioia de

Pt'Drtte-Beigique. - Beijing-Hangzhou line. This is the This is the railway line that an imperial edict ordered to be built in China. The loan was issued in April 1899 in Paris and Brussels. On the northern section, work was commenced by French contractors. The line is completed as far as Pro-Ting fou, 80 kilometres from Beijing, and is now in operation. Construction has halted 100 kilometres from Pao-Tinc fou, and surveys have been completed as far as Chun-The, some 800 kilometres further south. On the Yangtze side, work has been completed as far as Sin-Yany, 8

200 kilometres from Flan-keou. This long line will be connected, via a first junction, to Ai-Yuan fou and, via a second, to Si-Ngon fou.

Angleien (-4 llinagnc. — Tien-Tsin to Teli iix-lfiang line. Length: 1,000 kilometres, with a junction at * Tsi-Nan. The northern section is to be entrusted to German engineers, the southern section to English engineers.

England. — The British government intends to construct the Tai-Yuan to Pou-Tchéou line, 50 kilometres in length.

The *British Chinese Corporation* has obtained the concession for two lines starting from Shanghai, one of which will run north-west to Lou-Fchéou, Tchín-ifinng and Nnnking, and the other south-west to Many-Tchéou and Ning-Po.

CRINB BÈRD1ONHLD

Canton to Flan-Kéou line, with a connection to Hong Kong. Length: 1,000 kilometres. The line will be constructed by a Belgian consortium.

French Tonkin Railway: 1. Luo-ltaï to Yun-Dan line; 2. Hank-Son to Long-Tchéon line; 3. Nan-king to Pa-iihot line.

XX

Han-Ecou, 16 March.

. The Imzintian River, the Yang-'fse, flows steadily in gentle ripples, spreading patches of oil across its yellow waters...

A few tattered sails propelling **junks** with their sterns raised like galleys; a few sampans lost in this muddy current; convoys of timber passing by; the stifled song of the coolie using pole and oar; the white flashes of seagulls. ... We move forward slowly, sounding line in hand, for fear of running aground...

On the banks, mounds of fawn-coloured earth, glazed and weathered, as in those old paintings by Lorrain. The villages of thatched houses and huts with pointed roofs, sunk into the clay — and further on, the expanse of rice fields...

But here we are, all the same, after I don't know how many hours of sailing, having passed Ghin-ltiang, Nanking, the old capital of the Ming dynasty, Wou-

Ho, Kiu-hiaing clinging to a hillside from which the jumble of its crooked houses sprawls, here rocks jut out, with pointed roofs. • pagodas at their summits, some, at the peak, the colour of cork or toasted bread, and others, darker, harder, scarred by the blasts of mines, full of metallic stains.

And now, the banks recede and dip, and the Yangtze becomes lonely once more, dirty, sad and yellow.

Han-Keou, at last, after a journey of 700 miles, comes into view, perched on its bank. It is difficult to imagine anything uglier, anything more resolutely unpicturesque than this wretched town, offering its wretched inhabitants nothing but a two-kilometre stretch of quay along this infamous river, which here, more than anywhere else, resembles a gigantic bathtub full of runny chocolate. (It has been pointed out to me that in two years' time, when the works on the German and Japanese concessions are finished, this quay will be six kilometres long instead of three; so I multiply by four the boredom of those who will be forced to walk along it.)

Han-iteou, sketching on a sheet of **oiled** paper, some twenty streets intersecting at right angles, following the Haussmannian model: the English quarter, the oldest, dating from 1862, with five small streets; the French quarter, with three small streets; the German quarter and the Russian quarter, each with four small

streets, eight small streets, lined with houses with verandas, shops and warehouses, and factories with long black chimneys. Wastelands stretch out like patches of Celades around these buildings. Soon new terraced houses, new warehouses and new factories will spring up here. It is hideous.

But the Europeans who have come here did not come specifically to seek out scenic views. They came to make money and, as there are still few of them and they face almost no competition, it seems likely that they will find it. Buffalo hides, oilseeds, pork, and ramie yielded an annual revenue of 18 to 20 million. And tea, nearly 60 million. Five factories, all Russian, process this tea into briquettes, which large ships, at high water, come to collect to take to Tien-Tsin, from where it is then dispatched to Moscow, via Siberia.

No matter how accustomed one becomes to the bustle of the hives, to that human buzz that fills the riverbank, the surprise remains as intense as on **the** very first **day**, at the sight of these wretched creatures, clad in rags, as they trudge up and down the riverbank, wading through the thick mud, rushing in droves when only a hundred are needed, to unload a junk. It looks as though they are going to storm it. They let out terrible cries, they cross the swaying planks in a mad dash, they **fall**

and get back up and carry on, each one sweating and panting, screaming and shouting to earn a couple of dollars!

And eventually, amid all the shouting and howling, they get carried away. It's as if a frenzy has taken hold of them. They burst into fits of laughter, shrill cries that strike fear into the heart. It is enough for a policeman to raise his baton at this rabble for all their spines to immediately bend, their voices to fall silent, so that this multitude is reduced to nothing more than a heap of wretched souls, poor wretches fleeing the beatings.

However, the traders of Han-lteou almost believed that

these anthropoids would refuse to obey the button. At the time of the unrest in the North, there was not a single gunboat on the river, and it was said that two armies would come to lay siege to the European quarter and that the viceroys, Liu Kun Yi and

Tehang Tche 'long, would do nothing to stop them. We were still unsure of the military prowess of the Chinese soldiers.

Everyone was worried — and quite rightly so. Volunteers stood guard on the 'Bund'

and near the city walls. There were police patrols every hour. No one slept; until the warships finally arrived, putting an end to this sleeplessness. Needless to say, the celestial armies never launched an assault. Was it Ychang Tche Tong who stopped them, or their natural caution? This point in history will never be clarified.

It is, however, important to note that from the day the volunteers were able to sleep again, from that day on, Han-Keou has lived in peace and tranquillity. There are currently some fifteen gunboats, including three French ones, along the Yangtze, from Liang-Yu to Chang, that is to say over a distance of 100 kilometres. This display of guns is sufficient to maintain order.

No doubt the unfortunate sailors would prefer a little disorder... stranded in the middle of the current, they watch the yellow water flow by, they watch the shore stretch out its sandbanks — and they have been watching it for six months. On rare occasions, the sailors go ashore; as rarely as possible, for they have such quantities of alcohol to burn off that they hasten to wash it down with cognac or whisky. Then they throw themselves through the streets, they beat up the fihinoi, out of respect for the Chinese women, tie pots to the pigs' tails, kill the dogs and cats, and return on board, somewhat calmed by the three weeks' confinement which the commander never fails to impose on them. I can assure you that the dignity attached to rank prevents the latter and his entire crew from tying pots to the tails of dogs, although they might well prefer this sort of activity to simply staring at the shore... 'I feel myself slowly going mad,' one of them told me, with a touch of melancholy.

In short, you can see that, despite the pessimistic rumours that have been circulating incessantly in Sanghal—that hotbed of all the fake news from the Far East—the situation here has, in fact, been most favourable. And I am still paying the price for it, I who left Beijing in a hurry, convinced at the time, along with everyone else, that momentous events were about to unfold—fire and blood! And the British, too, have had their fill of it—the British who had sent officers from all the major ports along the river to study the terrain and, coming from Egypt, to stir up a few difficulties.

It is, moreover, likely that, if the envoys from Had Admiral Seymour attempted a coup de force at Kiu-hiapp or Nanhing, the Americans would have tried one, the French another, and the Italians yet another...

Nothing is more curious than the European currently being played out in the Yangtze Valley. Rightly or wrongly, the Bang-lee is regarded as a sort of Chinese farce. When an engineer speaks of gang-The, from the mines of terror: he has seen it at $7^* < X$. Yet he claims that this explosive is the worst of all those devised, that it contains sulphur and phosphorus...

But that doesn't matter, and besides, it's none of my business.

As for exports, the Yangtze Valley provides us with cowhides, tea and soya beans from

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1°• It is said that these are invaluable riches and that they cannot be found anywhere else in

From all over the world, such beautiful ox hides. Is China, no doubt, a leading centre for livestock farming? You might think so; I used to think so. But not at all. It turns out that the Chinese do not slaughter their cattle, but use them only for ploughing; consequently, the number of these precious ox hides cannot increase indefinitely and that, if I had one piece of advice to give to my compatriots wishing to sell ox hides, it would be to go and settle in a country where oxen are slaughtered, for that seems to me to be the first condition to be met in order to get hold of the hides.

Note also that almost everything in the valley (the Yang-) is produced and consumed by its 150 million inhabitants. Our exports are therefore necessarily limited. These 200 million people must, of course, live and eat; I do not believe one could for a single moment consider a plan to drive them out en masse or to massacre half of them. On the other hand, living on their own soil and subsisting on its produce, they have no other needs—or so few—that for sixty years we have managed to sell them nothing but cotton goods, oil, watches and umbrellas. However, with good reason, the Yangtze is regarded as a sort of Chinese land of plenty. And, as such, the navies of the Allied powers, represented by the fifteen or so gunboats I was telling you about just the hour, they watch over it jealously.

If the German gunboat moves from the left bank to the right bank:

— Well, well, says the senior commander of the English squadron to himself, why is that German gunboat moving from the left bank to the right bank? It must have plans for annexation; *perhaps* it wants to take the Yangtze? Let's follow it

And an English gunboat follows in the German gunboat's wake, stopping wherever it stops...

— Oh! Now it's the turn of the senior commander of the French squadron to ask: 'Why are that English gunboat and that German gunboat moving from the left bank to the right bank?'

They must have plans for annexation; they must be trying to take the Yangtze. Let's keep a close watch on them. And a

French gunboat cuts in front of the German and English gunboats, stopping wherever

wherever they stop...

Meanwhile, our consuls are creating new causes for concern: the forthcoming division of 'the spheres of influence in this magnificent valley where all the riches of an admirably fertile soil are concentrated, alongside immense deposits of every conceivable metal.' It is rumoured in hushed tones that the Russians are demanding a concession near Shanghai. Manchuria and Inner Mongolia are not enough for them; they want to take the Yangtze!

It is said that London bankers lend

money to Viceroy Chang-che Tolig; they have taken it, and with it, the Yangtze Valley.

It is said that the Germans have secured the rights to exploit coal mines in the vicinity of Kiu-hiang. 'They are thus, quite formally, setting their sights on the Yangtze Valley.

It is said that the French are eyeing the province of Sichuan. 'However, as the risks seem too great along the river, they will go via the L'onkin.'

And the Belgians? "They are the most formidable," someone assured me yesterday. "Through their secret agreements with the Chinese, and their Han-Keou railway, they've got it in the bag"...

— Who's that?

— The Yangtze, for heaven's sake!

— Come on then! I thought this d8 fBr railway was a Franco-Belgian venture. So if they're running it, we'll run it too, we'll run it, lo Yang-Tse†

— Alas! The railway is a Franco-Belgian enterprise, it is true, but it is King Leopold who has the greatest influence.

— Yet I thought I'd heard that French capital was in the majority?

— **You** were right; but it is King Leopold **all the same...**

So you see, even the Belgians wanted to take the Yangtze!

If I were to say one more thing, I would say to Europe—once again—that its policy in

Cliine's approach consisted mainly in doing nothing here, and if she is absolutely determined to convince herself that she has done so, I could think of no better comparison for this policy than that of a candle-maker, with the same preoccupation with immediate gains.

To support a few commercial syndicates formed with the aim of exploiting the zinc mines in Hunan and supplying umbrellas and kerosene to the provinces of Longhu, we have been from weakness to weakness. We have successively abandoned all our demands: full maintenance of compensation, the death penalty for all the principal culprits, including Zchouan and Tong Fuh Sing.

The powerful man thought it was in his best interests to spare the Ghine, to spare his own skin, so that he could say to her later:

'Since we have not been unkind to you, you will have to give us some sweetener in return, a mine, or a railway, or a corner of a port' The financiers spoke only of the loan; already they were calculating the profits they would derive from it; already Dr Morrison, the Treasury's correspondent, was examining the various reforms to be introduced, through the British, in the collection of taxes.

Europe saw in Peking merely a 'business' to be conducted, whereas it should first and foremost have been seen as a moral situation to be preserved and strengthened.

The first priority was to resolve this moral situation, vis-à-vis

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towards the court; she needed to be taught a harsh lesson that she would remember for a long time; he would mercilessly undermine her self-esteem, convincing her of the absolute superiority of Western nations. And then, afterwards, one would have negotiated—and with what certainty!—commercial and other interests... Revision of tariffs, freedom of action for all coastal vessels, measures to facilitate the investment of local capital in foreign enterprises, and so on and so forth. All these demands, formulated by Mr de Satow, would have come afterwards and on top of everything else.

‘Any solution that would give the empire the illusion of having triumphed must be absolutely ruled out,’ said Satow himself a few months ago. Yet it is precisely this solution that the diplomatic corps is working towards. Our attitude, which is too weak and too conciliatory, is bound to keep China labouring under such an illusion.

So much the worse for China, which a sharp jolt might perhaps have galvanised, rousing it a little—oh, very little—from its age-old lethargy. And so much the worse for Europe, which does not know how to capitalise on victory.

XXT

Hait-keou, 20 March.

The viceroy 'Fchang-Tche-Tong', whom I have come to see today in his capital of Ou-'fchang, is a phenomenon. He is honest – a monstrosity of the first order; he is a patriot – a monstrosity of the second order; and he is an innovator: he does not treat us as complete barbarians, but believes that China would be well advised to stop gazing at its own celestial navel. Finally, he is capable of speaking for two hours to say something. And that is a change from the other great mandarins, his colleagues, who are quite capable of speaking for six hours longer, but to say nothing.

Tchang Tche Tong, like all men of worth, has his supporters and his enemies. Some call him an 'inspired genius' and others a 'lunatic, imaginative and disorganised' man. He is all of these things at once, this little old man with his lively, unconventional gestures. He has convinced people, all too easily, that his country will rise to

contact with a few seeds of Western culture, and he wants to be that servant. He forgets that social change does not depend on the will of a single individual, but on the slow evolution of society. ..

He never had Spencer and Taine translated; he knew neither French, nor German, nor English. All he wants from Europe is a method of reform. As soon as he fancies he has obtained that method, he will throw the Europeans out. Beneath his liberal façade, he has remained Chinese, the most nationalistic of the Chinese, Chinese from the very tip of his coral button to the very tip of his cardboard soles. I am convinced that he hates us with all his heart. And that is because he thinks like a Chinese, because he smiles at the inferiority of his race, because he has found better things to do in his yamen than to smoke opium or collect women, because he shuffles a kilo of paper every day, in reports and plans of all kinds, because he dreams, in times long past, of China's absolute revenge.... In short, because he is supremely intelligent and intuitive, any conversation with him should interest you, for it will allow you to understand this particular state of mind (which would seem paradoxical anywhere other than in China) of a man who is, at once very progressive and very conservative.

And he explains this duality:

'The conservative,' he says, 'is like someone who, for fear of having his throat blocked by a bone, does not

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can no longer eat anything, whilst the progressive is like a compass placed before several paths and which inevitably goes astray. The former does not understand new ideas and the latter is unaware of what the fundamental basis.”

He has a clear understanding of the current situation: the Chinese must not fear—that is to say, they must not fear seeing the empire become like Annam, Bolivia, Korea, Egypt or Poland. The Chinese must learn to change, and grasp the crux of the matter.’

Then the first of the tasks will be to unite the nations, “The unity of wills” lies in the protection of the empire, the doctrine and the people. To protect the people, let us first protect the doctrine, and, before protecting the doctrine, let us think of protecting the empire. If the empire does not command respect through its greatness, the doctrine will not be followed; if the empire is not prosperous, the people will not be respected. ... Should China come to be divided like a melon, in accordance with the senseless parables of the Europeans, then the noble doctrine of Confucius, though very lofty and most beautiful, will soon no longer be practised. The Five Classics and the Four Books will be cast aside like a sack of mud; the scholars, with their caps and ceremonial robes, will no longer have any hope of entering the civil service; the cunning and crafty will fill the posts of pastors, merchants and scribes; and the simple folk will have to pay dearly for all manner of

contributions for people and for things, and will provide the necessary personnel for the army, for manual trades, and for the domestic service of others, and that is all. The people, then, sinking ever lower, will become more and more stupefied with each passing day. After a long period of humiliation and stupefaction, they will fall into misery; then they will perish and disappear.

Yet until now the Chinese have lived happily and in peace between heaven and earth; there they grow and multiply. Although China is neither rich nor powerful, the Chinese, without distinction, have enough to live on; all have enough to be content in this world. As for the Western kingdoms, though powerful and prosperous, the common people silently endure sorrow and resentment. That is why, every year, there are a few attempts on the lives of kings and their ministers. From this, one may conclude that the government of the Western peoples is inferior to that of the Chinese people.

Nevertheless, not everything about them is open to criticism. They have 'good customs and good manners'. Europeans, upon the death of their parents, also observe mourning, of which the colour black is the special symbol. They have no halls or temples dedicated to their ancestors; yet in their homes there are portraits of their grandfathers and grandmothers, whom they honour religiously.

Thus, Europeans maintain the relationship that

must exist between father and son. The precept against lust is also observed among them. The men and women of Lā-has, in their everyday dealings, by Chinese standards, seem to be rather restrained; however, lecherous men are despised by all. There are well-established marriage contracts. At meals and during visits, women occupy the place of honour; they are in the habit of choosing their own husbands; the husband does not take concubines. There are 11 major differences from Chinese customs. It would be a grave error, however, to conclude from this that there is no distinction between men and women in Europe. Moreover, although Europeans, in the love and respect they show their wives, go beyond all bounds, these women are not admitted to government councils, nor to the army, nor to trading companies. Hence one is convinced that Europeans have and maintain the **relations that** ought to exist between husband and wife.

‘There is indeed much to be learnt from you,’ **continued** the viceroy, ‘but we must be careful not to do so too hastily. That was the greatest mistake of Kang Youwei and all those young reformists who supported him. Yes, I know, and I am the first to admit it, that the patriots are indignant or saddened by our current state of affairs. Above all, they are pained to see their country exposed to the contempt of foreigners. Our officials—

Our officers and soldiers do not know how to fight; the senior examiners do not establish schools; the various civil servants concern themselves neither with industry nor with trade. In such a state of affairs, you Europeans speak to us of granting new freedoms to the people and working with them for the betterment of the country. Yet, granting rights to the people according to the Western model is a dangerous idea. Indeed, do we wish to establish legislative chambers? The Chinese people, who have lived until now and still live in profound ignorance, are very numerous. They know nothing of affairs, understand nothing of administration, not even of their own district. They have not yet heard of the need to establish schools, to improve the government, to train soldiers, or to build machines like those you have. Gather these people together: among a hundred men, you will find barely one who is intelligent. What use will you derive from his actions? ... If the idea of granting political rights to the people were to begin to be heeded, the ignorant populace would rejoice, the instigators of unrest would raise their heads and

-the harvests would be ruined... You might say: '(itāoo

'With these concessions made to the people, the Chinese government will still be able to meet the demands of foreigners which the people, having a say in the matter, do not wish to grant.' But this is a grave error: for it is by this very act that we admit we can no longer subject the people to obedience

and then foreigners, by force of arms, will take it upon themselves to do so.

‘Moreover, even if one were to wish to establish Chambers, how might this be achieved? We must await the creation of universities and the gradual training of men of talent. After that, we shall decide whether or not to establish Chambers. Today, the first reform to be undertaken is that of Chinese studies; through study, we shall obtain the men of talent whom we lack. Whilst **maintaining**, as a foundation, respect for our national literature, I propose that we tackle European sciences without delay. Our students must, above all, apply themselves to understanding the classics, so as to clearly discern the thinking that guided the ancient kings and sages in the establishment of their doctrines; they must then examine historical texts, to learn the principles of good government. After that, they will profitably draw from Western heritage whatever may be useful to make up for what we lack; they will seek, in the administration of foreign governments, a remedy for our shortcomings. In doing so, they will take what is good from the Europeans, without ever borrowing from them

) **their** uselessness.

You would not believe how numerous the books on the four main branches of Chinese learning are; they would fill carts and require oxen to haul them. The entire life of a

man, even the longest, would not suffice to read them all. Even if one were to confine oneself solely to the canonical works, the commentaries on the ancient texts, the old commentaries, all these various works are so abundant that they number in the hundreds. On the other hand, the reforms to be introduced throughout the empire are limitless, and, in this state of confusion, one cannot dispense with studying the scientific progress of the West. We must move quickly. Those who wish to retain the classics, should focus on a summary of the most important subjects. The guiding principle in compiling this summary should be to provide the means to assist in the current state of affairs. It is, indeed, highly desirable that scholars should be of use to the administration, but it is not, however, necessary that they should have seen, heard and tasted everything.

‘Before the age of fourteen, pupils learn—

They will read and recite the Book of *Piéfū* *ftii*«ffl, the *Four Llanes* and the *Ctiiq caiioutquec*; they will study history, astronomy and geography, and will examine the most famous authors of the Song, Yuan and *Ming* dynasties. From the age of fifteen, they must devote themselves to preparatory studies for indigenous administration. Once this knowledge has been acquired, the pupils will need only to consolidate their understanding of modern administration, with a thorough examination of European methods and classifications.

‘A man’s power,’ continued the viceroy, ‘comes from the efforts he makes. Man does not possess the physical strength of a tiger, and yet, through his efforts and his skill, he manages to capture it alive. Man does not have the strength to swim upstream against a river or to level a mountain, and yet he halts the river in its course and pierces through the mountain, thanks to his intelligence. Can it be argued that Europeans alone are skilful and intelligent, whilst the Chinese are stupid? China, in the era described in the Z’cno'-en Tsäon, abounded in talent. Its neighbours were savages. Time passed. China retained its ancient knowledge, but did nothing beyond certain fixed limits — whilst the savages became civilised. And today, the five continents of the globe communicate with one another and progress at a rapid pace, whilst China alone remains humiliated at the bottom of the pile. If it continues to follow this path, unwilling to change, the Europeans, already well-educated, will become even more so, and the ignorant Chinese will see the veils of their ignorance lifted.

‘Our great misfortune, then, stems from the fact that we do not know; and if we do not know, it is primarily because we do not travel. Spending a year in Europe will be more beneficial to us than spending five years at home studying European books. How else could progress have been introduced to the Japanese, if not through this very principle? Could

China not, at the very least, match Japan in this respect?

I have also said before that we need schools. The decline or prosperity of the empire depends solely on the educated. You will understand me: he who, knowing the ways of foreign lands but ignoring those of China, is heartless; he who knows the ways of China but ignores those of foreign lands is deaf and blind. That said, **si**

we do not know the language of the Europeans, so

We do not understand their literature; if we do not translate their books, the other kingdoms will surpass us; we shall be defeated by them and will not even realise it; they will plot against us and we will not understand a thing; they will overwhelm us without our knowing it; they will destroy us and we will not even notice. Therefore, we must develop the work of translating foreign books, newspapers and journals. Those who read them today see how much they criticise and condemn our country. You say the harshest things about us. You compare us, by turns, to a drunken man, then to a rotting corpse. You discuss our eventual division, you even deliberate to decide who will take the lead. Reading these things, how can one not be outraged? I think, however, that this is a good thing. In antiquity, our scholars had men charged with their 'correction'. Why should we complain that our empire, at this moment,

Are there any volunteers who would also be willing to correct it?

‘The time has now come for us to set things right. We must change our methods, look less to the past and much more to the future. In recent years, to tell the truth, we have made a few attempts, but we have not succeeded. And this failure is due to four causes: the first is that certain people, preoccupied solely with their own interests, thought only of those interests and neglected those of the empire; the second is that too much attention was paid to necessary expenditure; the third is that the court has at times lacked firmness in its resolutions, sometimes pushing for reforms, sometimes halting them; the fourth, finally, is that, whilst we have the tools, we lack workers capable of using them. Before we have engineers, we buy machines; before we have studied the art of shipbuilding, we buy ships. We are too eager to achieve results and lack the method to obtain them. No sooner have we established a school than we want to see the talented men trained there; no sooner have we established a mine than we demand to be shown the profits made...

‘We must change several methods, and first and foremost the one that enables us to acquire knowledge: the examination. When too much importance is attached to literary form, there is a decline in the intellectual qualities of **the scholars**. **Our ignorant candidates**

rely on luck for success. Although, strictly speaking, there are three examination sessions, there is a tendency to select graduates solely on the basis of their performance in the first session's written papers. the other two sessions being merely a formality. And these compositions that the candidates study contain only selected passages, purchased from booksellers. As for the meaning of the classical texts, no one has learnt anything from them. If, in the examination of the court mandarins, one continues to judge merit by the standard of calligraphy, if promotion to office depends solely on beautiful handwriting, no matter how much we urge our young scholars, ceaselessly and in every way, to follow a different path; no matter how much we urge them to apply themselves to the study of modern matters; no matter how much we seek men capable of aiding the government in the dangers in which it finds itself, nothing will succeed. And the scholars of the court and the provinces will continue to live, as before, in their shameful ignorance and idleness.

'I would like to see our young people learn the broad outlines of the administration of all the great kingdoms of the world, their geography, their institutions, their taxes, their trade, their armies; I would like to see them learn your 'special arts', philosophy, mechanics, acoustics, optics, chemistry, electricity and, in any case, we ought to ban all those endless essays on the four books, which go on and on about trivialities—

Series or on curious combinations of earac-

‘Above all, we ought to strive to give this ‘Modern education’ has a technical dimension. To possess a thousand square miles of stony land is as if one possessed nothing; to have a hundred million ignorant people is as if there were no one at all. Now, if one does not devote oneself to the study of agriculture, industry and commerce, even though China is vast and its population very numerous, it will not be able to prevent people from mocking it as a kingdom whose territory is populated, but whose inhabitants lack education. Anyone who wishes to force the land to yield all it can must begin by learning chemistry. Europeans say that a well-cultivated acre can feed three men; yet in China, when an acre can feed a single man, the land is considered very fertile.

‘Since the cultivation of H-Fieylan tea has become so prosperous, our tea trade has been declining day by day; we hardly sell any to anyone other than the Russians. Twelve years ago, Europe bought 60 per cent of the silk it required from us; but for the past five years it has been Japan that has been selling 60 per cent to Europeans, Italy 30 per cent, and we come last, with 40 per cent. Our cotton fabrics can no longer compete in quality with English cotton fabrics. Our hemp is of no use to us. To develop the national industry, we need

We need workers, for the saying goes: 'Only learned men invent "new things".' We need workers, for another saying goes: 'Skilled men spread the inventions of the learned.' We also need merchants. Ours act too much out of habit and without thought. The profit they hope to make from their dealings resembles a victory in a game of chess by a player surrounded on all sides: it is simply a stroke of luck. The profit they to share is but a pittance compared to that of true merchants; their labour amounts to scraping the hairs from a tortoise's back. And though they amass goods in such great quantities that they form mountains, they are and always will be the humble servants of the European merchants. Why, for heaven's sake, should we not pool our capital with the locals to exploit together the resources of the soil, the mines and the railways? The profit would be proportional to each man's fortune...

'In short, it is essential that **China**

form an accurate and true understanding of things. In ancient times, Confucius therefore uttered this maxim: 'I have heard it said that, when the emperor errs in the choice of officials, learning passes to the barbarian lands surrounding China.' To this saying we must add that it echoes the words of the sages of old in the time of the Te-ch'ien-ts'iu. The philosopher Lieh Tzu, describing the form of his teachings,

says that, because of the travels of King Shou of the Zhou, *people* gradually penetrated as far as the regions of India. Zhou Jen speaks of the sub-prefecture of Tels, situated on the banks of the Eastern River. That is why

The hieroglyphs of Egypt bear a resemblance to the ancient characters of China; indeed, the inscriptions of South America clearly derive their origin from Chinese characters. Thus, Chinese knowledge gradually spread eastwards and, from there, reached the West. The sciences and industries—arithmetic, astronomy, pottery, metalworking, sculpture and architecture—have reached such a degree of perfection in China that the ancients could never have achieved. But we have not stood still, and today it is European science and administration that prevail.

‘What conclusion can be drawn from all this? *I* shall answer you: Chinese science is the science of the inner self; European science is the science of the outer world. I mean to say that the aim of Chinese science is to regulate the human heart, whilst European science suffices for the necessities of external life. Consequently, it is not essential that this science be found in the reading of canonical books; what is essential, however, is that it should not be in opposition to the spirit of their doctrines. Scholars must set their hearts on the heart of Saint Confucius, so that all their deeds may be worthy of

The Holy Man. As for the rest, even if they spend their time operating a steam engine, that will not prevent them from being disciples of the Holy Man. On the contrary, the ignorant, lazy, listless, and indecisive Latins, those great boyars, vulgar and obtuse minds, crouching in inaction, are the cause of the Empire's decline and the destruction of the holy doctrine. Though they wear fine hats, speak with lofty words, always hold the classical texts in their hands and speak emphatically of '*sing*' nature and 'if' essence, yet the ten thousand generations that will follow in the empire will hate and curse them, saying: 'Those people were the worst enemies of Confucius and Mencius, and nothing else.'

'And now, once we have acquired the treasures of European science, we shall have to safeguard them; and to safeguard them, we shall need a strong army. In recent times, certain scholars, seeing China's situation grow more critical by the day, have proposed that we join the European Disarmament Society. Such a project is bound to bring upon us even more terrible humiliations. Everyone talks of peace, yet no one thinks of making it. Germany has taken possession of Kiaochow by force of arms; and Russia of Port Arthur. For twenty years, one has heard of nothing but the expansion of the navy and new expenditure on the army. In

Countries are competing to see who can amass the most cannons and rifles, with no sign of ever stopping. If we have soldiers, the powerful kingdoms will seek our friendship. On the other hand, if we have no soldiers and simply wait for the other kingdoms to abolish theirs, will we not be exposing ourselves to becoming the laughing stock of everyone?

‘In truth, disarmament schemes would achieve nothing but to hasten our ruin. Seeing us so weak and indecisive, the other powers would no doubt all rise up together to divide the empire among themselves. In truth, disarmament would be the folly of someone who wished to travel unarmed through the mountains and hoped not to be devoured by tigers. But you will say that one can have confidence in justice and international law. I would reply that, when a kingdom is as strong as the others, it may invoke international law, but if it is weaker than its neighbours, what good will it do to invoke that law? Never has it been heard that international law has been seriously applied to settle disputes and put an end to the strife between the parties.

‘At present, in the relations between the various kingdoms of the five continents, the practices are not the same between small nations as between large ones; similarly, Western kingdoms do not deal with China in the same way as they deal with one another. Thus, with regard to import duties, the country which...’

EN CHINE,

The recipient of the goods is free to impose whatever tax they see fit; but China cannot. Merchants in foreign countries are subject to the laws of the country in which they trade; this is not the case in China. When Europeans commit murder against a Chinese person, or vice versa, there are two standards: the crime committed by the Chinese is treated as serious, whilst that committed by Europeans is regarded as of little importance. In trials between Europeans and Chinese, the European authorities take part in the judgements handed down by the Chinese authorities (without the reverse being the case when the Chinese have trials before the European authorities). Yet this is not the way in which Western nations act amongst themselves. Therefore, since China is not regarded as the equal of other nations, how can one expect them to treat it in accordance with international law? If one realises that disarmament would serve only to make China a laughing stock, if we understand that international law is but a word upon which we cannot rely, and that we are seeking within ourselves the means to restore the empire's respectability, what other means can we employ, other than that of fortifying ourselves?

— "And what do you make of the current situation?" I asked the viceroy.

— Everything seems to be on the verge of collapse,

Provided that you do not prove too exacting⁸ when it comes to punishments, for you would thereby undermine the authority of our Emperor; anarchy would reign, and the security you seek for your merchants would be lost to you.. The court **will return** as soon as your troops have evacuated the J'che-Li and only the minimum number of soldiers that you deem necessary for the defence of the legations remains in **Peking**. And on that subject, please do make it clear that the understanding between the Emperor and the Empress is complete and that both are determined to carry out immediate reforms. There are about ten of us high-ranking mandarins who will do our utmost to support their efforts.

— Not more than that?

— No. But I am counting heavily on what has just happened, on this peril we have just witnessed at such close quarters, to change the minds of others and finally bring them round to the idea of a rejuvenated, revitalised empire.

— What about your agreement with Russia regarding Manchuria?

— Oh, it hasn't been signed yet.

And just as I was about to finish my cup of tea—which, in China, signals that the audience is drawing to a close—

— 'Just one more word,' he said to me. 'Let the Europeans be lenient with us, let them respect our Emperor, let them not diminish our influence over the people. And since you are French, I am addressing France in particular. Tell the French...'

that we are determined to change; tell them to remember their old traditions of generosity by not making our task any more difficult.

And after promising to convey all this to France, I took my leave of Zehang Tche Zong, who accompanied me to the second gate, offering various greetings.

XXII

Han-Seou, 1 April.

Every day, I take a regular stroll along the banks of the Bang-tse-hiang, and every ten minutes I say to myself: 'Don't forget that before you lies the greatest river in Asia and that you are at the heart of the world's greatest and oldest empire, for whilst your ancestors roamed the forests of Gaul clad in animal skins, the Yellow People were already wearing the cosy, comfortable garments that you still see on the backs of their grandsons today, and had discovered printing and gunpowder. You must therefore regard these men with respect; you must strive to be moved in the presence of their antiquity; you must likewise strive to form some general idea of their political future.'

Thus I reason in the manner of H. Bergeret. Yet emotion does not improve matters, nor does respect, nor political insight. And, whatever I do, I cannot find, in a pagoda dating from Roe Zsoug,

but a pile of 'styleless' bricks; in a conversation with a viceroy, but a pile of stylistic flourishes devoid of ideas; and from these trifles, amidst the scrap metal, the rags, the overflowing stalls, the dust rises with the fleas, the manure and the latrines. . .

On the outskirts of Han-Keou, this rubbish piles up to such extraordinary heights that one might well believe it forms part of a new mountain range. Lush vegetation of cabbage-like plants covers the summits; ravines of dry, cracked earth gnaw at the slopes. And the Chinese housewives lament this desecration of the rounded forms of their artificial mountain, busily setting about correcting its contours with bucketfuls of rubbish. They dig their little spindly feet into the stench like tendrils; they bend down in search of a leaf or a stalk still clinging to yesterday's cabbage stalk. A swarm of children accompanies them, inspecting, at their side, this rubbish, along the riverbank. The corpses of dogs continue to swell and rot.

There, masts stand in a swarm of junks, wooden huts, huts of palm fronds and thatch, strewn haphazardly, the remains of crumbling, dilapidated walls, furrowed with damp patches. . . On the sandy ground trampled by the coolies, the acrobats and conjurers, performing their feats, swallow sabres with the regularity of a pump and hold out their hands to the crowd, which hurries

to put nothing in them. The poor devils sheathe their sabres and return in a rage, followed by their trained dogs.

They come from the borders of Tibet, from Hunan or elsewhere, stopping in the villages, eating a handful of rice for lunch, and nothing at all for dinner. They have spent months in the back of a dugout canoe, and they carry their misery in their rags. However, as they are the only strangers on the street, the only ones who break the eternal stereotype of the Chinese crowd, watching those two scruffy lads marking time with their feet, I spent a delightful half-hour, recalling my classics, Baron Giraud and his lively *Saooyard*. I' I would still be, if

11. X... , stopping by my bedside, had not called on me to discuss the Yellow Peril and Tchang-tche-Tong's plans. We strolled up and down the *Dunn*, then went to the club. After that, it was time for dinner — and that is no trouble at all.

I consider the Europeans living in Tihine, those from Üanton, Shanghai, Han-Keou and Peking, to be people who practise the most effusive hospitality one could possibly imagine. We've known each other for just ten minutes and already the question arises, in telegraphic form, to save time:

— Are you free tonight? Then do come round to the house, no fuss...

- Don't say 'but'. You'll come.

And off you go. And the next day, you go back, and the day after that, and the following week. The elderly residents cannot remember ever having eaten on their own, not even once. Life is spent entirely in each other's company. People meet on the Bund, at the club, at tennis, on hunting trips, on fishing trips, for lunch, for dinner. In some cities, such as Canton, the circle of social relations is so narrow that at any hour of the day or night you meet the same people, and the regularity of these encounters is so great that it resembles the forced stroll of travellers on the deck of a ship.

Remarkably, this stroll never descends into fistfights or duels, as one might normally expect. Whilst there are a few such incidents, reconciliation is always just around the corner. Rivalries over political or economic influence can be very intense; yet they are rarely on display. One quickly learns to get to know one another and to assess each other. This handful of Europeans has felt the need to remain united in the face of the Chinese multitude that surrounds them. What they must defend, above all, is the prestige of the white race. The English, on this point, prove unyielding. Yet, by virtue of their numbers and the importance of their commercial and financial position, they set the tone for society, which, in Tien-Tsin as well as in Han-Beijing, eats, drinks and thinks in the English manner, racial prejudice is

the full force of English intolerance. The Taoist from Kiang-Sou province and the admiral of the Japanese fleet were refused entry to the Shanghai Club because they belonged to the yellow race rather than the Aryan race. Never has a mixed-race person been admitted into European society.

This milieu is that of big business, of major trade. They come to China to make their fortune; and once their fortune is made, they will continue to remain in China, thanks to the mechanism of easy speculation. In this barely opened country, competition does not exist. The market is in the hands of a very small number of people, who earn whatever they please. The proletariat is unknown. The lowest-ranking commercial clerk earns no less than five hundred francs a month. He has a horse and carriage, a squad of servants to attend to him; and in his pursuit of comfort, he pushes it to the very limits of his five hundred francs.

These men, whom we in France might be tempted to regard as somewhat rough, still half-pioneers and trappers, conceal a very broad intellectual outlook. Even in the smallest hamlets of Sichuan, they have their libraries and their newspapers. One man, who has not left Yitui-Kiang for twenty years, asked me yesterday for the titles of recent historical publications. The women do not go so far as to ask for the titles of recent historical publications, but we must be grateful to them for maintaining a taste for and harmony in these cosmopolitan circles.

(A few balls, a few soirées create the illusion of high society, and we are grateful to them for deigning, amidst this mass of vulgarity and feminine horrors with greasy hair and swollen legs, grant us the charity of a little charm and elegance. Moreover, they have a philanthropic role to fulfil: they must settle us in China, for life there will only become possible on condition that they are there with us. Young women seeking a husband, with no hope of finding one, must, on reading these lines, tell themselves that all is not yet lost, for if a fifteen-hundred-kilometre journey by junk, on the Blue River or the Si-tiang, does not frighten them, they will find there fine young men who ask for nothing more than to increase the French family.

Once you have counted the number of thatched huts lining the quays; once you have followed the Han, a tributary of the Yangtze flowing down from the Qingshan Mountains and emptying into the Yangtze;

Once we had explored Ou-Tchang, the capital of the RYill0n8, with its glazed tiles, red lacquerwork and endless little rock-filled gardens. And when one has wandered through Han-l'ang, where one sees absolutely the same scenes as in Ou-Tchong, and the factories of Hwang chow, where tea is made into bricks, and the shops where soles of shoes and buffalo hides are piled high, it seems there is nothing left to do but board the boat again to return to Shanghai, for, if one were to push on as far as I-Tchiang, a few

Hundreds of kilometres to the west, this would certainly be less interesting than a stroll in Joinville-le-Pont. One would have to travel from I-Tchang to Chungking, following the river route of the See-Tchouen, through rapids and gorges, but such a journey would take at least forty days at this time of year. Forty days, alone, in a junk pulled by a rope, eating boiled rice and boiled chicken, sleeping on a mat, one would long for some incident to break this monotonous routine: a gunshot, an attack by savages, a whirlwind...

I prefer to stay in Han-Yang, where Viceroy Chang-Tlie has invited me to tour his arsenal and blast furnaces—creations of which he is so proud that he has no doubt that one day Europe will be defeated by them, (In the meantime, he is squandering three-quarters of his fortune on them, because the furnaces are of an old design, as are the tools). Guided by the factory director, a mandarin who spares me not a single machine for drilling, tapping or machining, I learn that they manufacture there

2. > rifles a day, 500 rounds of ammunition, and that all the technology is entrusted to German engineers. Which does not seem to surprise anyone here, because we are in China and in China one must get used to taking the opposite view of everything that is right, though this does not cease to be **strange** when one considers that we have forty thousand soldiers and that
our forty thousand soldiers

could be attacked by troops armed in the German style and commanded by Germans.

On leaving the Hanyang Arsenal, I had to visit the military school, founded four years ago by the indefatigable Chang Tse-tung. A series of small courtyards and small buildings divided into classrooms, canteens and students' rooms. Three former officers of the German infantry still give lessons there every evening, very regularly, just as they do in Berlin at the Nirepscú«/e, covering siege tactics, topographical surveys and artillery formulas. In the large lecture theatre, one can see models of shooting silhouettes representing European infantrymen in uniform. It is truly impossible for the instructors to show any greater courtesy or devotion.

The viceroys of the Yangtze thus have at their disposal nine thousand men who are suitably equipped and disciplined. These nine thousand men, during large-scale manoeuvres, would be able to march in step and cross bayonets, for the Chinese are like monkeys: one need only make a movement in front of them for them to imitate it immediately. Flats to the fire?

— 'If it were a fire, that would be a different matter,' their captain assured me. 'They have no initiative. I think they'd lose their heads completely...'

Such was the story of the brave standard-bearer Zsing Long, whom Colonel Lion Tchen had stationed at the edge of his camp to report on all the enemy's movements.

— Yes, great man,' replied the brave standard-bearer Tsing Long, 'it shall be done as you command. The enemy shall not be able to take a single step forward without my devoted wing detecting it and my agile foot springing forth, ready to warn you.

Colonel Liou Tchen, reassured by these words from Assas, returns to his tent, lights twenty-two opium pipes, dreams that he is victorious, decorated by the Emperor's own hand with the Double Dragon Star, and falls asleep.

An hour later, the brave standard-bearer Tsing Long begins to doze off in turn, when suddenly he thinks he hears the clang of weapons just a few metres from the observation post. There is no doubt about it, it is the enemy. He shakes the snoring sentry. The startled sentry grabs his Mauser and fires it in all directions. Tsing Long, alarmed, grabs his own and continues firing. The colonel woke with a start, imagining he was surrounded, and fled into the middle of a maize field; the brave standard-bearer Tsing Long went to join him, as did the sentry; the soldiers from the camp scattered into the... tall grass; the following morning, a Russian company found them more dead than alive. And that is how the brave standard-bearer Tsing Long prevented Colonel Liu Chen from smoking his twenty-third opium pipe, from being stripped of the Double Dragon insignia, and from winning the Battle of Fou-Keou, near Pe-Tsang.

XXIII

Nanking, 17 avril.

On this Yangtze, following at random a jorique setting sail, a timber raft zigzagging adrift, one ends up, all the same, stumble upon a slender, ever-slender glimpse of the picturesque: a tree, or two, or three, in a chilly countryside; a quaint little corner of a village; an old, moss-covered gate. And then everything fades away. China has already grown weary of appearing interesting. The fields are covered in dust, the river continues to carry mud, and the sky, playing its part in this scene of melancholy, is shrouded in grey clouds.

But we have on board a gentleman whose
This situation saddens me far more than the state of the sky.
This gentleman carries with him a fine assortment of pencils and brushes, leaving no doubt as to his profession: he is a painter. Every morning and every afternoon, he comes out onto the deck to follow

the banks that unfold scrupulously the same, to the right and to the left. And then, faced with this commitment to permanence, *as if exhausted*, he folds up his easel, puts his pencils back in their cases, his brushes in their pots; shrugs his shoulders, murmurs the same phrase again:

‘No, I’ve decided there’s nothing to be done today’ — and goes to rest.

Yet yesterday, as he stepped onto the deck, as was his custom, this gentleman almost fainted. He wondered where he was, for he no longer recognised his ship. His Yangtze had burst its banks the day before and was now flowing with yellow water. Before him lay a valley with trees—real trees—green grass and thatched roofs. A triple wall wrapped its black mass around this valley, and ruins strewn everywhere, shards of brick, littered the ground. A jumble of things that still seemed to be suffering, twisted and broken... Shreds of ancient China lent a touch of historical grandeur to this otherwise ordinary setting...

Three-quarters of the city of Nanjing were razed to the ground during the Taiping Rebellion. One can still see the traces of the fires: rows of broken-down walls and, amidst the thickets of bamboo, pagodas with their roofs **levelled**.

There is one of which only the stele, covered with inscriptions, remains. It was erected in memory of Judge Fang who, in 1850, during this same Taiping **Rebellion**, refused to abandon the party

EN CHINE, 1900-1901

of the court and paid for this loyalty, first with his ears, which were cut into fourteen pieces, then with his nose, split into four, and finally with his teeth, all pulled out at once—an operation which succeeded marvellously, since it resulted in the jaw being torn out along with the teeth and, to top it all, the patient's life, t

Yet the legend has preserved the memory of the faithful mandarin. It tells how the god Fo rewarded him for his martyrdom by granting him the power to restore teeth to those who have lost them. All one needs to do is rub one sapèque against another bearing his likeness. After two months of this rubbing, the roots begin to sprout, and before the year is out, one can already eat a tooth as easily as an egg.

The towering lines of the Great Wall of Nanhing appear even taller, more gigantic, outlined as dissolving cubes against the pale canvas of the horizon. At their feet, a still lake holds waters that look as though they were filled with ash. And the earth, which a moment ago was green and grassy, is now peeling away, encrusted with rocks, bearing, with every step, the scars of landslides. In this moorland, a few herds of goats and ragged children, prodding their mules laden with goods with sticks. All this, harsh and bare as a page from the Bible, a corner detached from Nazareth or Bethlehem. Through a multitude of paths that streak the landscape

From the fawn-coloured carpet of the ground, we reach the mounds of

empires, preceded by an avenue lined with stone elephants and lions. The elephants have scarcely retained their form, nor the lions. The former have no trunks, the latter no paws, and the tombs themselves—or rather, the tomb itself, for only one remains—are crumbling, their granite skin flaking off in places. Its marble medallions are coming loose and falling onto the steps, and the symmetrical
bite its own tail.

One can only grit one's teeth in anger, for the few soldiers paid by the viceroy to guard him and the remains of Emperor Aling Thai Tchieou, who died six hundred years ago, display, to the full extent of their hearts, a lack of respect bordering on the crime of *lèse-majesté*. Just think, they have laid out little vegetable gardens at the foot of the artificial hill where the former sovereign rests, and they wanted to sell me, for 2 francs 50, a picture of that wretched dragon, the pillar of the throne!

— 'What can you expect,' murmurs Father Y. sadly, who is accompanying me on this visit, 'the Chinese have no sense of religion.'

— What, for that matter, can the Chinese possibly feel?

— I'm not quite sure,' murmurs Father Y... even more sadly.

— You seem discouraged

— No, but...

— Well, things could be better.

— It could be better.

— How many have you clicked on throughout the empire

— About 70,000.

Out of 100 million inhabitants?

— It's not much, is it? And yet, it's already a great deal. If only you knew them as well as I do... And so we chat. He tells me about life, the life of all those isolated missionaries. They set off by cart, on horseback, on the back of a mule or a donkey, with their small travel bag, a change of clothes, a blanket and everything they need to celebrate Mass. Never any provisions.

They sleep and eat in Chinese inns. Now, I have ũéjā said, I think, what an auber was _De cliinoisc!

There they are on the road. Days and days go by. They doze on their donkey; they wake up with a start on the ground when the donkey stumbles. They climb back into the saddle and the journey continues, punctuated by the usual stops, at the usual times.

At last, they arrive at one of the 577 'churches' in China. Half the congregation accompanies them, whilst the other half merely watches them pass by, setting off firecrackers. And it is in this manner that they open their church, a sort of hut some 20 feet long, with an altar mounted on two trestles and wooden benches for the congregation. Nevertheless, they pray, and

hymns are sung all the same , in Lutin.

1. Once the blessing has been given and the holy water distributed, the missionary may then retire to his room, four walls of green turf. On the small table, beside the camp bed, he places his crucifix, his alarm clock, his breviary, his prayer book, and the three or four books that make up his library. It is the only comfortable room he will ever know.

To tell the truth, however, his parishioners do their best to provide him with as much comfort as possible. They shower him with tea and stuff him with castor oil cakes, a delicacy which the Father must, out of politeness, at least attempt to taste. After which, no doubt, he would like some peace and quiet, but his flock do not see it that way and, on the pretext that he is preaching the holy word, they take the opportunity to listen to him until two in the morning. Young and old flock to the hut. The young shout, the old spit, and the children do the rest.

The next day the mission begins: teaching the catechism, hearing confessions, performing weddings and baptisms. It keeps him busy for a full eight days. At the end of this time, the good missionary considers that he is leaving everyone in a state of sufficient moral health. He climbs back onto his donkey and rides off to eat castor oil pasta elsewhere, until the next 'Christian settlement'. And so he flees, for 365 days of the year, and starts all over again, for the 86 days of the following year.

But this is a pastoral scene that I have just

to paint a picture of him. The good missionary warmly welcomed by his flock: the saying isn't always true. Sometimes this good flock wraps the good missionary in straw and throws him onto the straw. Other times . The account of the deaths of Father Fantogsati and Father Joseph will show you what this good flock is capable of

Last July, Bishop Fantossati was in Lai-Y*ng, in Hou-Nau province, to oversee the construction of the church, when he received a letter warning him that a band of malicious individuals intended to set fire to his residence in Heng-Tcheou. He set off immediately, accompanied by Father Joseph, but no sooner had they disembarked than two hundred men surrounded them, stripped them of their clothes and, shouting 'Kill the Europeans!' they began beating them over the head with sticks. The unfortunate men, dragging themselves along, tried to rejoin one another, so that at least they might die together. They were separated, and a spear, piercing their bellies, pinned them to the ground

For five hours they remained there, *enduring it* nonetheless, for five hours, praying, encouraging one another to martyrdom!

Soon they could no longer see each other: their eyes were gouged out; they could no longer hear each other: their ears were pierced. And yet they lived on! Their flesh still quivering in a pool of blood! . . . Finally, when evening came, at last dead, the guards tied a rope round their necks and dragged them to \ang-ling-òlia.

The two bodies were placed in the same pit; it was set alight, and the next day the ashes were thrown into the river.

I have many more gruesome stories to tell you. That of the three wives of Protestant preachers, tied naked to a post, whipped, raped and disembowelled; and that of the unfortunate Kay family: the mother disembowelled, the little girl split in two from her loins to the nape of her neck, and the father forced to witness the scene from a seat of honour lent for the occasion by a mischievous mandarin.

— ‘These are just the little drawbacks of the job,’ Father Y. told me... ‘But rest assured that the true Chinese are not to blame; we must see this, above all, as the work of secret societies.’ The harmonious coexistence of ‘pagans’ and Catholics, right up until the first conflicts, is a recognised fact. Alas! Religious sentiment does not have enough hold over this people to make them fanatical and persecutory. A new faith needs Neron and Diocletian. Yet China is the land of ‘lukewarm souls’. I am not far from believing them to be atheists, despite their triple layer of superstitions. It is therefore truly absurd—and I insist on this—to blame our propaganda for the current disorder, as some are trying to do. If the missions are unpopular, it is solely because of their solidarity with foreigners.

— We have been forced to wear a ponytail at the back and shoes on our feet; we are certainly not Chinese enough for that. They know full well that we remain agents of European influence and propaganda. By striking at Fantossati, it was not the priest of Christ they were striking — heaven forbid it should be that one! — but no, it was the European, it was the invader...

— However, you live with the authorities, almost on good terms.

— Ahem, ahem! There is their bad faith. For forty years, we have been fighting against it, to hold on to our hard-won positions.

— What are these hard-won positions?

— Firstly, the treaties of 1860, which guarantee freedom of the Catholic faith throughout the empire; the Berthelot Convention of **1865**, which allowed missions to acquire on Chinese soil immovable property and real estate of any kind and to exercise, subject to no conditions other than those provided for by local law, full property rights; the decree of 11 March 1899, which draws a parallel between the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the Chinese administrative hierarchy, establishing a number of formal equivalences hitherto unknown to the Chinese. Bishops are, in rank and dignity, the equals of viceroys and sovereigns. Vicar-generals are authorised to request an audience with the treasurers,

provincial judges and intendants, etc., etc. There are still certain measures, continued

Father Y. . ., who, without directly overseeing the missions, would nevertheless provide them with new security guarantees. Thus, the very clear statement that, following the murder of a European by the Chinese, the matter cannot be considered settled merely by the payment of financial compensation, but will result in criminal proceedings; the establishment of a procedure guaranteeing, following the destruction of a Catholic or European establishment in general, the punishment of the actual culprits, regardless of their social rank; a body of laws aimed at * abolishing the existing restrictions. And indeed, the widest possible expansion of the movement to penetrate China, for every step forward in opening the country to trade and industry, to modern science, is a success for our cause...

It was one of those subdued twilights, when rootless clouds crept very low, almost touching the ground, softening the contours of things, as if placing tufts of fluffy wool in their corners.

All that remained of the Ming Emperor's tomb was a troubled, confused mass, torn by shadows.

Father Y. had stopped. Around us there was a sort of tranquillity of nothingness.

I looked at him, already old, his back hunched, very weary

I asked him.

“Will *you* be returning to France one day, soon?”

He replied:

Then he fell silent; then he spoke again, searching through his memories

— . In France, twenty years ago . . . yes, I spent two weeks at my aunt's, who was still living there at the time. It all ended after that.

— But now?...

— Oh! ‘ ’ now!...

He had a vague look on his face, as if to say: ‘Why bother?’ And I understand that this man, who had faith, was now regretting his wasted life, his pointless sacrifice. .

We returned to the banks of the Yangtze, without saying a word.

The next day, Father Y. . . boarded a junk and set off for Sichuan, two thousand kilometres away, to find his Christians and his poor, dilapidated church.

XXIV

Tianjin, 11 May.

I open the newspapers and read: 'The few bits of news reaching us from Peking are of only secondary importance.'

You are quite honest. 'The few rare bits of news that reach us from Pébin are of no importance whatsoever.' That is what one ought to say. I left Banking, where nothing was happening, to head north, where nothing more is happening. The 'Allied' fleet, in the middle of that delightful harbour at Taltou, is still making circles in the water, whilst Admiral Pottier composes Latin verses, his officers play cup-and-ball, and his crews play the lottery.

As we move on, we see the same warlike activity. The English gunner, with his little baker's cap perched on the corner of his cap, yawns; the German in his spiked helmet yawns; the Zouave, in his maroon uniform, and the infantryman in his red uniform, yawn. .. Every dra-

shelter people 'who would like to leave'.

Yet, Lien-Tsin is stepping up all his operations around them. The roads are being widened along the Pei-Ho; the Great Wall of China is being demolished; on the grand central avenue, old houses are being repaired and new ones built. There are supply shops everywhere, selling a pair of braces for no more than four dollars, which is a very reasonable price.

And the number of cabarets, just like that of the shops, has grown remarkably. A reveller in the street can, in ten minutes, polish off his four whisky and sodas and his four aniseed liqueurs in four different establishments: 'At the Boris Diabes', 'At the Renowned Zouaves', 'At the Triumph of the Naked Men!', not to mention the whole string of shops where beer is sold by the barrel.

I questioned several of these merchants. All of them assured me that their profits, over the past month, had reached between 20,000 and 30,000 piastres, or between 5,000 and 10,000 francs.

— And what would we have gained if the Russians and the Americans had stayed? 'Oh sir,' they added in unison, 'what men! No one can drink like them!'

— 'Oh! Oh!' I said, my national pride stung, 'it seems to me that our Marine Infantry...

— Pah, sir, a bunch of wimps, sir, they're nothing compared to the others! Come on, I'll give you three to one on it.

And I didn't dare take the bet, remembering that good Cossack, whose story you already know, who downed sixteen glasses of rum without seeming any more bothered than a seven-year-old girl after her cup of lime blossom tea.

This remarkable capacity for absorption both amazes and worries the army commanders. They wonder where it will end. It is not against the Chinese now that the 'penetration' tactic is being directed, but against their own troops. How can they be prevented from indulging too much in the products of Pernod and Noilly-Prat? He keeps them in their quarters for as long as possible, organises guided tours of the various palaces in the imperial city, and unleashes a torrent of police and prison raids upon the hardened offenders. . . Nevertheless, Pernod and Noilly-Prat still triumph, and with them, in the allied camps, the various owners of the Scotch Whisky and Kirsch For4t-hoire brands.

All in all, I believe there is no better a more valuable measure than that of alcohol. Depending on the small or large number of litres of alcohol a people consume, that people is at the forefront or the rear of civilisation. Look at the English, at the forefront, and the **Turks**, at the rear, who drink nothing but water! If ever the country

is signed, to use Mr **G.-II's** words around, the signature will certainly be blurred, for we shall have mixed alcohol into its ink.

And already this 'campaign' in China is preparing for it. I have often seen French, German and Russian soldiers, arm in arm, lending each other mutual assistance, all three united against the ground spinning before them. Just last week, yet again, a new cabaret opened its doors.

Yet another pretext for socialising and drinking; yet another triumph for CM. Pernod and Noilly-Pret. The Marshal had authorised his band to mark the occasion. It was almost an official event. An international atmosphere of revelry reigned throughout. At daybreak, one came across a rifleman clutching a Saxon soldier to his chest, and further on, a gunner who, having no doubt wished to resist this outpouring, was sleeping all the same, face down on the ground, but with half his nose broken by a fist.

A broken nose, now and then, does no harm to the harmony necessary for the allied armies. However, when there are too many broken noses, when, after breaking an ally's nose, one breaks his head, as sometimes happens, the soothing influence of Pernod and Noilly-Prat ceases and harmony diminishes.

And then politics gets involved, and harmony is gone for good.
In Tianjin, a British railway line

runs across land belonging to the Russian engineer. The British want to pass through, the Russians want to prevent them from doing so. And so a threat of conflict arises.

X. The English, in a fit of bad temper, issue an order forbidding French soldiers from entering the concession, on the pretext that the French soldiers are obstructing traffic in the streets. The latter, furious, take their revenge on the Sikh troops, who can do nothing to stop them. As soon as one of these harmless Hindus passes by, they seize him and throw him into the Pe'f-iJo. The Hindu, who swims like a fish, gets off with a forced swim. He splashes about in the mud at the bottom, makes his way back to the bank, goes to dry off in the sun, and the harmony essential to the allied armies is not yet too badly affected.

But one day, the French made a mistake. Somehow, they mistook a major of the Horse Guards for a Djat. The major was given such a terrible beating that he lodged a complaint with his minister. It was almost a diplomatic incident. The German and Russian soldiers take our side and, that evening, in the Jardin de Ville, boo the English whilst the band plays 'The *Blue Danube*'.

It is now, quite rightly, a diplomatic incident, which we finally manage to resolve through a series of mutual apologies.

Everything is sorted out. Nevertheless, these repeated scenes of ' ' are enough to make ' ' become ' ' dangerous,

than a blow to the head followed by a blow from fire..

— You never know, said Dr 1) to me... with those dark-skinned, strapping lads, doing nothing but getting into trouble... Just the other day, they got into a fight with the Americans. The Americans were in the wrong, it must be said; but it must also be noted that three of them have just spent two weeks in hospital following that little evening's do. Just the other day, in Ta-Kou, did you hear about that brawl between the French and the Italians?...

And what of the Chinese? What has become of them amidst all this turmoil? The Chinese? It has been a long time since anyone spoke of them. Only a few hyperbolic dreamers concern themselves with them and take the trouble to concoct the usual little serialised novel, which the British news agencies churn out in lengthy dispatches. They recently announced to us that Prince Chuan and General Tong Fuh Siang were marching on Beijing with 10,000 men, under the command of eight European deserters; that, for his part, the Emperor, or rather the Empress, would attempt a final offensive effort, and knowing this, Marshal Walder would organise an expedition in pursuit of Huang Su... In Manchuria and Korea, the Russians would encounter great difficulties; the Japanese would be preparing for war. And with the Chinese against the Germans, the Russians against the Japanese, the whole of the Far East in flames, the balance of the world would be shattered!

Blais, you can well guess that the only threat is

the mental stability of the gentleman who, quite seriously, comes up with such nonsense.

And yet, no, now that I think of it, he isn't entirely mad, this alarmist gentleman. By the way, we had another war in April: Germans and French against the Celestials. I must tell you about this campaign; it will show you, once again, what the Yellow Peril is,

The Count of Waldersee, who dared not look his marshal's cap straight in the face, so idle did he find it, woke one morning with the fixed idea that Liu Quan and his 15,000 regulars, massed at Ting-Sin-Sliien at the foot of the Great Wall, were a hindrance to him. But he reasoned that, since Liu Quan and his 15,000 regulars were a nuisance to him, they must, a fortiori, be a nuisance to the French troops, whose outposts were situated very close by, on the Tolieng-Tin to u line. It was therefore necessary, through a joint operation, to drive these Chinese out of the Great Wall and back into their Shanxi. He set out this plan of war to General Voyron, who replied that the 1,000 regulars did not hinder him at all. So the Count of Waldersee looked once more at his marshal's baton, and, finding it decidedly too idle, resolved, to keep it occupied, to send forth immediately 1,000 men to drive out that scoundrel Liang Quan. And General Yoyron, who could do no otherwise on territory falling at all under his for surveillance, sent 6,000 of them.

The 10,000 Germans are concentrated at Hoî-Che; the 11,000 French at Houai-Lo and Ping-Chan. The fierce Lion Quan is caught between two fires. How will his 11,000 regular troops respond? Oh, my God! It is very simple: the 10,000 regulars are retreating. It was realised that they were wrong to camp at the foot of the Great Wall and that they would do better to go and camp in Shanxi. Immediately, obediently, they left the foot of the Great Wall and went to camp in Shanxi.

That marked the end of the Huai-Lo campaign, which would go down in history, alongside those of Jean de Nivelle, as one of the least deadly. One last time, the Marshal's baton remained untouched.

I tell you, I shall end up loving these Chinese, who approach war in such a delicate manner! Following the success at Houai-Lo, the dispatches were able to announce to you with certainty that the 'Boxer uprisings in the Tche-li had been entirely quelled'—indeed, 'quelled' all the better for it. As if they had never existed

But one must to be mindful of the soldiers' self-respect.

General Volron, whose self-esteem would suffer as a result, believes that the evacuation of the province by our troops can begin and that it is finally appropriate 'that mandarins duly appointed by the Emperor should resume the direction of police duties, as our officers had **hitherto**

had the duty to ensure". In other words, General Yoyron believes that it is time to authorise the Celestials to govern the Celestial Empire.

After much hesitation, the Germans have now come round to this view. Count von Waldersee left Ta-Kou in the first few days of June, taking with him the bulk of his army. The roads are now filled with nothing but military convoys on the move. Soon, only 2,000 men from each force will remain at Peliin and Yien-Tsin, not including a few detachments at Chan-Ilaï-Kouan, Tong-kou and at various points along the Pao-Ting line...

It is the end...

XXV

Beijing, 18 May.

The railway line running from Tien-Tsin to the coast has been thoroughly repaired. I remember my first journey by junk, two weeks after the siege, amidst the mosquitoes and corpses littering the river. And my journey from Tong-Tcheou, through the sorghum fields soaked by the rain!.. Happy!k . . .'

We were still living under the threat of the Boxers. We We had all seen, or thought we had seen, at least one boxer, and this experience bolstered our self-esteem. Not to mention that, every morning, there was also the prospect of witnessing some execution, or of riding out to observe troop movements with the comforting certainty of returning unscathed in the evening, for the Chinese never fought. Ah! Those were the heroic days.

Whereas today... Today, I have settled comfortably into a carriage made of soft wood

soft wood, and if I have had to show any heroism at all, it was only to stow my luggage there, seized by a sudden urge, which I had to wrest from the soldiers of all the nations present.

The train sets off in a whirlwind of dust, curses and shouts, crosses yellow fields dotted with stunted trees, and stops, two hours later, at Yang-lsuen. Yang-Tsuen, which I struggle to recognise; once a ruin, a heap of rubble, crumbling walls — and now, almost a town...

The Zouaves have set up their headquarters there. There's even a canteen and a buffet at the station, run by a young man from Clignancourt, standing by the door, who's on hand to throw back at you, with a twinkle in his eye, any jokes—witty or otherwise—you might dare to make at the expense of the canteen lady and her buffet. I have never seen a more poignant image of suffering. He doesn't beg much, the little one; he just looks at you. He watches the Europeans passing by and stays there, for hours, for days, upright, motionless, weeping, his eyes wide open, tears streaming down his face as if over a stone mask. His whole family has been killed by Russian cavalrymen. All he has left is a brother who is crippled and paralysed. Sometimes he lifts him onto his shoulders and the two of them go off to watch the Europeans and weep as they watch them...

But after Yang-Tsuen, we'll have fewer

at least the need to be sad, for the country is green enough and the Chinese sufficiently consoled by their defeat. Life is resuming everywhere. The vendors shove their baskets right under your nose and, near P8liin, it will already be Peking itself that suddenly shoves, right under your nose, its well-known smell, that triple extract of chamber pot and Icrmentös chloroform...

The locomotive enters triumphantly, through a breach cut in the heart of the Great Wall. And it is almost painful to see it, this gash that split the old imperial enclosure and now leaves it open, gaping like the two lips of a wound that will never heal...

Along the vast avenue that the railway follows to reach the Temple of Heaven, where the station is located, we pass through neighbourhoods where rows of houses stand submerged in dirty water. The crowd there is so dense that one wonders what kind of gunpowder, what kind of insecticide powder one should use to rid oneself of some of this multitude? And when one has left the station, oh! then, one comes to wish for a fourfold plague, a fivefold plague, mixed with insecticide powder and gunpowder!... 'And even then, there'd still be plenty left,' murmurs a wretched traveller beside me, with a touch of melancholy, who, in less than a minute, has been buried under a shower of biscuits, had his cane, his hat and his suitcase snatched away, and is now beating the retreat

So he tried these three essential items, but to no avail. Add to this huge crowd, to the feet trampling over yours, a fierce wind whipping up a cloud of dust. The wind blows in gusts; the dust rushes in gusts beneath the high gate of Tsien-Hen, along with the carriages, wheelbarrows and carts creaking, the beggars weeping, the merchants shouting.... Along the rutted, potholed streets, it all staggers and jolts. From time to time, wheels break, mules bellow in the carts, there are funerals, weddings, processions... These processions glide, amidst this swell, I'm not quite sure

By what miracle of osmosis?...

First comes the procession of women hidden in their carts. All one can see is a face, a pumpkin-like face painted red, and the shapeless mass of a crouching body, clad in pink trousers. Next comes a whole legion of pot-bellied men, some walking on foot and others, legs dangling, on the backs of small donkeys. Finally, the procession itself: heralds in dishevelled tunic-like robes, topped with a boiled-leather hat surmounted by a green feather, musicians in tufted caps, beating on tambourines and blaring into large zinc trumpets, bearers of chairs garlanded with flowers, chairs covered with gilded inscriptions, chairs of many colours and shapes, and tables laden with pears and apples

and edible treats that the faithful nibble as they pass, unaware that they are committing a sacrilege.

At this moment, the wind and the 18-knot gale form a whirlwind, shrouding everything in a grey veil, which tears in places and reveals a mass of chaos—a jumble of civilians, soldiers and women. Blinded, suffocated by this human throng, we feel our way forward and find shelter between the legs of a camel, or in a dung-filled pit, or in some other hole...

It was actually at the bottom of a hole that I saved you, Pèkiri, for the second time. The mule seemed so determined to get into that hole that she felt she had to climb down into it to make herself more comfortable. She paid for this exploration with her life, the poor thing, whilst I, who had accompanied her into the den, accompanied her to the den, I was there for an abominable encounter, for which I hold the United States of America responsible, since this encounter took place in the sector under its command and could never have been given to me; tp4 Calis the port, where we had opened the rotundas, the boulevards, which were inaugurated a few days ago, all in the presence of the Minister and General Y0yron, at a banquet which I attended

Li İlqn\$ Gbanq, the Tohing delegation and all members of the diplomatic corps,

the Chinese performed pyrotechnic wonders there; the ladies and young staff officers danced quaфра and cotillon, including

zealous commissioners had gone as far as Shanghai to procure the necessary supplies, and, around midnight, the marshals, great organisers, brought the festivities to a close with the illumination of the Imperial Lake.

The Count of Yaldersee, keen on gambling, in his turn, hastened to inaugurate something; the Japanese plenipotentiary would also inaugurate something. Then we witnessed races, a triumph for the French and English teams...

And with the processions, races, banquets and balls, I believe you now have a clear picture of one of the latest manifestations of the Yellow Peril in Peking.

. In the alleys of the Tartar quarter, with walls covered in a thick layer of ivy, children play in the ditches, whilst coolies return from work in long lines, hunched over and their heads buried beneath their blue rags. Outside the courtyard of a rgandarin, famous for his loyalty to the Ming dynasty, where stone dragons guard the threshold, a blind man strums his guitar.

The coolies stop and crouch down to listen more closely; the children come to nestle beneath the dragons' wings; the women block the doors with their short, stocky bodies, curled up like balls. For centuries, the same scene has been repeating itself here, in this very spot.

One understands the immutability of this race, this rigidity, this social paralysis, whose recent convulsions we had mistaken for a burst of energy, whereas in fact

were nothing but the final mark of decay and death...

A fate, to tell the truth, that is hardly long in coming, especially for Prince Tehouan. The grand master of the Boxers, 'authorised' to commit suicide (such euphemisms are used in China), does not, as yet, appear to have made use of this authorisation, nor has his commander-in-chief, Tong Fuh Siang. The other leaders are showing an equally marked reluctance towards suicide, and are keeping themselves safe from the Europeans' vengeance in some remote province. Kang Yi, already stripped of his rank, will be executed 'as soon as the government is able to do so', which is a very flexible phrase...

Besides, one must resign oneself, in this Chinese venture, to never finding firm ground. It is always uncertainty and vagueness.

Take, for instance, the claims for reparations made by the powers; you will find that, after ten months of waiting, none have been fully settled.

The edict suspending official examinations in the towns where Europeans have been massacred has yet to be signed.

Likewise, the edict ordering the posting of the penalties incurred by troublemakers in the prefectures and sub-prefectures, and, likewise, the edict forbidding Chinese subjects from belonging to anti-foreign societies, and the even more important one holding mandarins responsible for any harm to the life or property of a foreigner...

The principle of establishing a security cordon around the legations' quarter also raises a great many obstacles. Some, like the Germans, wanted to build proper barracks in Beijing, whilst others, like the Americans, wanted nothing more than a small detachment of soldiers to accompany their minister on **days** of formal audiences.

But what is that compared to the major, very major issue of indemnities, which will not be resolved until 1902, or 1903, or later... We do not know

A financial commission is examining China's resources, seeking what all financial commissions throughout the world seek: a means of increasing revenue and reducing expenditure, so that the imperial treasury may, within twenty or forty years, repay the one and a half billion *it* owes to Europe. The only reliable sources of revenue would be customs duties, at rates increased from 0 to 10 per cent. According to Sir Robert Hart, there is also the possibility of introducing new taxes: a stamp duty, a tax on opium, and another on property. The British want them, but the Americans do not, and the Germans remain neutral...

Opinion is divided into two camps: those who are convinced that the empire's economic decline is so severe that it would prevent it from even paying the interest on its debt, and those, on the contrary, who are convinced that, in a country so

extraordinarily populous country, such a debt is of little consequence, since it would take only a few 'cents' per inhabitant to pay it off.

The latter are right, but the former are not entirely wrong. China, though dead in terms of active occupation, has nevertheless retained, from its recent past, a bundle of neutral forces, which, by nature, are very poor and yet almost rich.

XXVI

Peking, May.

China is a country of contradictions: it is both very poor and almost rich, well-governed and very badly governed, with a social structure that is both very simple and yet very complicated.

Here you have a people who are united and yet extremely divided, monarchists and democrats... What else? Patriots? Yes and no — and rather no than yes...

Truly, a study of China seems to me the simplest thing in the world, since one can, to a large extent, either tear it to pieces or shower it with praise, without ever fearing to be wrong.

I would very much like to strike a happy medium. But there you have it, the difficult part! It is so difficult to be impartial. The Chinese are ignorant of the art of winning our friendship, and nothing in their character could make us like them.

The good-natured, childish, lying, drunken,

are likeable, because they know how to laugh, because they know how to cry, because, like a dog, they know how to recognise the hand that cares for them, and yet we are so certain of our superiority over them!... Whereas the Chinese, for their part, have never done us the courtesy of admitting that they need us. They humiliate us with their presumptuous claim to want to live alone. When we preach our superiority to them, they look at us with their little comma-shaped eyes, they wrinkle their round faces, they seem to say to us:

‘Speak, my friend, speak. You’re wasting your time. Despite your phonographs and your railways, you’re nothing but a fool.’

And however much we may have convinced ourselves otherwise, this assertion, repeated for so long, remains unsettling.

That is why we do not like the Chinese. Therein lies, above all else, a matter of pride.

Well, even if we do not like the Chinese, at least they do not leave us indifferent. Their commitment to immobility piques our curiosity. And our history, which tells of nothing but change upon change, looks on their history—where nothing has happened for so many centuries—with astonishment.

What constitutes China’s originality, what truly makes it unique, is—as you know—the complete subordination of the individual to the family. It is the family

to powers that are fortified, ceaselessly growing, becoming the State itself.

You will find peoples where the family is everything, but the State is scarcely even suspected, such as primitive peoples and, even today, the nomadic tribes of the Llaures and the Tuareg.

You will find societies where the rights of the family have been elevated to the highest degree of power, where a father may put his child to death; yet the state nevertheless preserves its complete autonomy, with full authority to intervene, to restrict and, if necessary, to override paternal prerogatives.

You will find peoples where the family has retained all its authority, but an authority that is almost exclusively moral, which the law cannot fully define —.And the state, dear people, has a different social conception from that of the family; it often even struggles against it, tending to absorb it, thereby increasing individual freedoms, separating the son from the father at an early age, and leaving the latter with ever narrower limits on his former absolutism.

You will find societies based on oligarchy, monarchy, communal governance, republicanism... but you will not find any other quite like China: the family merges with the state, and the emperor is the 'father and mother of his people'. It is truly a unique model. And this is both its strength and its weakness at the same time.

Strength: because this maintains its moral and social discipline, basing it on the only two elements that can make it indestructible: love and respect.

8. Weakness: because this discipline, when understood in such a narrow sense, strips it of any notion of criticism, with the result being rebellion. A nation that does not revolt does not progress; a nation that does not progress fails to fulfil its human duty, failing in its primary duty, which is to aid the full development of the individual through ever greater freedom, truth and justice. A nation that does not progress does not exist. China does not exist.

The more you study the Ghinoia, the more enigmatic he seems, though he possesses nothing superior, merely terrible, indomitable yet mediocre faculties. No nervous system, absolute patience. Wherever he lies down, he falls asleep, on a step, on a stone slab, and remains there, motionless, like a tree trunk. Cut off one of his limbs: he will barely cry out.

He is admirably built to be happy in life. He is persevering, robust, a hard worker, thrifty, industrious—and yet he does not cling to life. At the slightest setback, he tears open his belly and dies, a stoic enigma.

He does not cling to life, and yet one might think he does, for in wars, one sees him running for his life at the slightest danger.

Engine, yet another enigma.

A mystery in every respect, even in his religion. Is he a monotheist, a polytheist, or an atheist? He is a little of all these things and, as a result, is none of them. The advent of a new faith, Buddhism, did not alter his original beliefs. On the contrary, it is he who has shaped Buddhism; he has moulded it in his own image, and so thoroughly that all that remains of the admirable Siddhartha is a distorted, almost obliterated silhouette.

So no metaphysics, no search for first principles. The Chinese are positivists. Having spent fifty centuries Voltaire and the just Comte, he recognised his powerlessness to unravel the lofty propositions concerning the nature of God and the immortality of the soul. And, for fifty centuries, the Chinese have not moved an inch. Nature, conscience, character—all remain intact. The ancient national sages have spoken; he still listens to them.

Listen to Confucius: 'He who fulfils his duties does not wish to rebel against his superiors, and it never happens that he who does not wish to rebel against his superiors seeks to stir up trouble in the realm. Filial piety and fraternal respect are the fundamental principles of humanity. In short, serve your father and mother to the best of your ability, devote yourself to the service of your prince, and in your relations with your friends, always show sincerity and unwavering loyalty. Pen-

While your father is still alive, observe his wishes carefully; after his death, keep your eyes fixed on his deeds. During the three years following his father's death, a son who, in his conduct, does not deviate from his father's ways may be called *endowed with filial piety*. For although one who acts thus might be regarded as uneducated, I would certainly call him an educated man."

The family, always the family, the apotheosis of the family! The Chinese man is subject to his father, to all his ancestors, to all his dead... The Chinese man is governed, tyrannised by his dead. As the dead lived, so he himself wishes to live, for any change would be an insult to their memory.

And the further he goes, the more jealously he sinks into his dream of immobility.

And the further he goes, the more the contempt of our entire scientific and social apparatus is laid bare in all its harshness. In his eyes, we are 'poor philosophers' incapable of thought, 'illiterate barbarians', skilled only in the mechanical arts, 'good workmen, skilful conjurers' and nothing more.

But will he not change his mind one day? There are those who are convinced of it. Already they see him transforming his land, covering his soil with railways; they see him, through his formidable mass, becoming the great conquering horde of the new Genghis Khan who will swallow up the West.

These predictions inspire little fear. The Yellow Empire is too ancient. Ever since the Titan Pooian Kou, one of the Chaos Gods, who shaped the earth's crust and, his work complete, merged with nature, leaving on earth only the vermin that covered his body—that is to say, the first beings... since Fu Xi, the first king, and Yu the Great, the founder of the dynasty that reigned before the birth of Abraham... since Huang Di, who drove back the Huns and built the Great Wall, the Yellow People have lived for thousands upon thousands of years. They are weary. Nations wear out just as the men who make them up do: they grow old and fade away.

Just as Egypt has died, Persia has died, India has died, and China — by what deviation from the laws of nature? — will it not, in turn, come to an end as well?

To these lines I wrote in 1899, following my first journey to the Far East, I find little to add. No, truly, even after the sieges of Tien-Tsin and Peking, after the threats from Tong Fuh Siang and Prince Chuan, I continue to place my faith in my coffin. I was no more, I maintain, in danger from the Japanese, than from the Eskimos or the Patagonians.

Caught between his family structure on the one hand and his religious void on the other, the Yellow Man is already dead, suffocated. Expect nothing from him but the daily repetition of the same actions, in the same mechanical labour. His great-grandfather was a bell-ringer,

his father was a sampan boatman, and he, the son, became a sampan boatman in his turn... And what will the grandson be? Nothing but a sampan boatman like his father...

The Chinese have always disregarded the desire to see their nation grow greater or more powerful. Engaging in public affairs has always seemed to them the best way to waste their time,

since 7% of the mandarins were paid for this work.

Obviously, he is not a patriot in the sense we understand it; he is one in his own way, through his attachment, his clinging to national customs and habits, to the customs and habits of his ancestors. That is his sole strong quality; it is the only thing that makes him truly invincible. Tomorrow, Europe may divide him into as many pieces as it pleases; he will remain no less Chinese, for it is impossible for him to conceive that one might be anything other than Chinese in life. And that, all things considered, there is nothing wrong with being Chinese. Never aiming for the best, having never learnt anything, never wanting to learn anything, content with their tattered clothes, their bald heads, their lice-ridden bodies.

Every year, thousands of them die of **cold** or hunger, or of typhus, or of cholera, or in floods, or of famine. His indifference remains unshaken. As for typhus and cholera, he considers this lot to be quite bearable,

He maintains a wise detachment from general and abstract ideas, a similarly wise lack of ideals, a profound materialism that manifests itself in a single form of worship: the ancestor.

He is an idiot. He is happy.

XXVII

Beijing, 2 May.

These four hundred million fools are led by a handful of mandarins, barely a few thousand. Yet it is true that, in turn, these few thousand mandarins are led by their hundreds of thousands of ancestors, and one must go back, all the way back to Confucius and even further still, to Emperor Fu Si, to find the link in the great chain that bound all the Chinese by the nose.

For the longer I live amongst them, the more I am convinced that the Chinese, in fact, have walked through their history in the manner of their camels.

The nose of the second Chinese has always followed the nose of the first Chinese, the nose of the third Chinese that of the second Chinese...

And so, tail following tail, right down to the last-born of the empire's last nose, they advanced, their eyes

fixed on those who went before them and, in this way, saw nothing but their own backs.

I am well aware that there are a few, such as Li Hung-chang and Fe-hang Zche-tong, who, being more inquisitive, strive to see something other than the backs of their ancestors. But it does not seem that they can see much more clearly. And, besides, even if they did see things more clearly, what could they do, alone against this mass of noses that stubbornly refuses to lift its head, always following the same rut?

It is an incorrigible habit. Traditions, social and religious customs, and education have only served to widen the rut, and will continue to do so.

A few weeks ago, whilst I was in the south, **I was able** to visit a Chinese school recently opened by the provincial viceroy. There, the national teaching method was followed with respect—the first, the true, the contemporary one from before the flood—and the teachers who taught it, decrepit, dilapidated, spitting out shreds of their lungs into an old, crooked spittoon after every sentence, seemed to date from before the flood.

This school, which goes by the euphonious name of *Qvoo-hoo* (pronounce this word with the cheerful tone of a hen that has just laid an egg), this school, just like ours, with slates and desks, holds about a hundred pupils, all dressed in their long black smocks and seated on wooden benches.

They all have round, full-moon faces;

they are very calm, very well-behaved; they never laugh, they never speak to one another, never make any inappropriate gestures. Admittedly, they are completely unaware of the European custom of greeting, for they know full well that, to be admitted to sit the examinations, it is necessary to have 'a reputation for honesty, modesty, filial piety, brotherly love, chastity and gentleness.'

In other words, as Lao Tzu said, the principle of higher learning consists in 'bringing to light the principle of reason, and renewing the forms by setting their ultimate goal as perfection'. In yet other words (the Chinese are masters in the art of repeating the same things in thirty-six different ways), in other *words*, 'one must set aside metaphysical studies, as being beyond human understanding, and firmly establish the doctrine of truth, goodness and utility'. And, to put it yet again, 'to ensure harmony, respect for parents and the elderly, deference of the younger towards their elders, and the reciprocal duties of sovereign and subjects, officials and scholars.'

Now that's an excellent aim. It's a very fine moral principle. By following this doctrine step by step, one becomes a model citizen, a good husband and a good father. And when the Jesuit Intorcetta advised his missionaries never to attack Chinese doctrine, he was right, for Üonfiicitis **wrote, 500** years before the Evangelisation: 'Do not

‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.’ So, my little ‘bonshoimea’ students at the Quoc-Hoc are right when they pore over their exam syllabuses. They are working on improving themselves. But, come to think of it, what do these syllabuses actually contain? What philosophy? What literature? and according to what rules, what spirit of observation?

The following table will tell us:

*Subjects required to obtain the
of Bachelor, Master and Doctor.*

BxcHIELIER Bī LIC¥iNCI . — I propose: A commentary on one or more texts from the Chinese classics: The Books of the Doctrine of Confucius or the Sacred Books: the Shih-King, the Book of History; the Chi-Ting, the Book of Poetry; the I-King, the Book of Changes; the Li-ti, Book of Rites. Books of the doctrine of Confucius or classical books: the Lun-Yu, Discussions and Conversations; the Zhong-Yong, Doctrine of the Mean, that is to say, of the state of equilibrium and harmony; the Ta-Hio or Great Doctrine; and the Zi-Li of Liang-zi;

£‘ dpreut>B: A poem of eight verses and a fairly long ode;

6• dpr'sooo: Essay in verse;

4• Epreuve: New examination paper;
new ode or essay in prose;

Docisun. — First test: Three commentaries on classical and sacred texts;

2nd paper: Drafting of an imperial proclamation or an address to the emperor;

3rd test: Philosophical essay; 4th test: Poem and ode;

5th examination: Prose essay on a topical **subject**: history of the reign, taxation, administration, etc.

At the end of these examinations, the grand ceremonies for the announcement of the successful candidates take place. Those who have achieved the mark 'perfectly' in all four compositions are awarded a licentiate; those who have obtained the marks 'good' or 'passable' are awarded a bachelor's degree. As for the doctorate, it is awarded by the court itself.

Many locals study in this way for eight or ten years, fifteen years, twenty years. In some provinces, an interpreter told me, there are a few villages where successful candidates live peacefully, with no ambition other than to enrich their minds, without holding any administrative post.

And they adorn it conscientiously, their minds, my little men in traditional dress! But alas! And with what brazen rhetorical devices! What exaggerations, repetitions, contrasts, sorites, enthymemes, antitheses and dilutions! ... They discourse on subjects drawn from the five books

sacred; they comment on subjects drawn from the Five Sacred Books; they interpret subjects drawn from the Five Sacred Books; they compose verses on subjects drawn from the Five Sacred Books. Their method is Confucius. **Their** rule is Confucius. Their spirit of observation is Confucius. And note that Confucius himself did nothing but expound upon and expound upon other Confucius, for he said: 'I explain the ancient texts; I do not compose new ones. I have faith in the ancients and I love them.'

The whole of China is encapsulated in these few words.

What place do the physical and natural sciences hold? "Ask Confucius." And mathematics? "Ask Confucius." But Confucius wrote nothing on the subject—no paraphrase, no proposition. Confucius knows nothing of the cell or the three cases of triangle equality. And his little disciples at the Quoc-hoc, 2,500 years after him, will be just as ignorant as he was

et sans blush.

Si Had Laplace and Darwin realised the folly of being born on the banks of the Huang He, they would have become doctors of the first degree, and, throughout their lives, would have learnt to read. For that is, after all, all that young and old schoolchildren do: they learn to read. And that is no small thing!

Consider that Chinese is a logographic language, that it is therefore written using pictographic characters, and that there are approximately 50,000 such characters—a number I consider barely

sufficient to capture the diverse expressions of human thought. I believe that objects are represented by strokes that recall their forms or their essential characteristics, and that abstract concepts, feelings, passions, and mental processes are expressed by symbols or combinations of symbols. Thus, one may say, with Abel Rémusat, that 'in no other nation has writing come so close to the spirit'.

Every scholar commits to memory as many characters as possible. When he knows 6,000, he is a bachelor; when he knows 15,000, he is a doctor. But 15,000 characters out of 100,000 – that is very few indeed! So the unfortunate doctor strains his memory, always seeking to increase his stock of characters. And when he reaches 10,000, he dies content. But 10,000 characters out of 50,000—that is still very few! So the poor doctor leafs through his dictionary all his life; whenever he wants to think, he leafs through his dictionary.

The little men of the 'what-is-it' will die content, for they too are learning to read; they too will know some 10,000 characters. What am I saying, 15,000? I am sure that young Luong Meo, standing there with his arms crossed, looking like the very embodiment of Attention, will know 25,000 all by himself, if he persists in his love for the study of the five sacred books. He shows just how seriously, qttol

respect, 11 lrBCP ali brushes his haGhi8 hieroglyphs! And then one must hear him read them in ' his voice properly monotonous nasalised voice.

The teacher indicates the value of each written syllable and all the pupils repeat his interpretation together. Alas, as luck would have it, they never agree on the meaning of their texts, just like at the Académie des Inscriptions.

— Excuse me, sir, I asked the respectable teacher of young Luong Ilco, a bespectacled doctor, would you be so kind as to translate a passage from the volume you are holding in your hand?

— ‘With pleasure, sir, I am at your disposal, sir. Which passage would you like, sir?’

— Good heavens, sir, I assure you I have no preference?

— But still...

— Well, that one there, here, if you like... And I pointed, at random, to two lines in the middle of the page,

— That one, yes, exactly, sir, that one, yes, that one, sir... It's very easy, sir, very easy... It's by Confucius, sir. By Jove, I'm sure of it, as the brave Captain Poignet used to say at the Battle of Essling. It

It would be a fine thing if that weren't Confucius

— Oh! Very **easy, sir, very easy...**

EN CHINE, 1900-1901

And the distinguished professor, having gathered his most expert disciples around his spectacles—including the young Luong—immersed himself in his deliberations and eventually jotted down, word for word, on the paper, this cryptic sentence in which even Stanislas Julien himself would have struggled in vain to make head or tail of it:

Z, 'iomme — éme — y/ocs — //fiet — pe«pfe
at possible — l'aire — Commeftit - to have —
ϕNmg ĨR.

— It could well be nonsense, suggests my travelling companion, Captain F., .

Perhaps someone else will find the right answer. We must go and consult the Prefect of Studies. This prefect, who holds a doctorate of the first degree, must surely know more than his subordinate here present, who holds only a doctorate of the second degree.

We went to consult 31. Khou, the Prefect of Studies at the Quoc-Hoc. 11. Ehou, in turn, immersed himself in his calculations and eventually jotted down, word for word, this sentence on
Mr Stanislas Julien would have searched in vain once more for a head and a tail:

the man — being — islands — ffens — /öuie —
and osstble — to come to i — comiiteiiJ — human

To tell the truth, however, there had been progress. The glossator had just introduced a few felicitous variations: thus he gave us fiers 4 in place of fi/ef and /o«ie in place of people.

— That is very ingenious, Mr Khou! If only we could understand! But we do not understand, Mr Khou! Could you not be a little clearer?

à. Hhou redoubles his efforts. The more he tries, the more the riddle he is trying to solve takes on tortuous and labyrinthine aspects, and I had to leave the quoc-hoc without knowing the text of Confucius.

As night fell, I still remember that we went out for some fresh air... (But why am I telling you this? I really have no idea, and I'll never bother to..... for you will understand that if one had to explain, every minute, the whys and wherefores of one's thoughts, when more often than not one has no thoughts at all, the writer's trade would soon become impossible and today there would be none left but Mr Ferdinand Brune-tière to practise it...

In the evening, when had fallen, I remember that told us We went to get some fresh air on the road to Ta-iloan, near the Si-Kiang, which looked like a river of opium—heavy, tranquil, its banks glazed with fine grasses. There, old pagodas were nestled amidst groves of banyan trees, in the corners of the streams the monkeys came to drink in droves, and swarms of thin, tanned, almost naked people passed before us, passing and returning in small, hurried, swaying steps, laden with baskets, nets, mustard, frogs and

bananas... passing by and disappearing, as if by magic, into the depths of a few clumps of cacti that stood at the doors of their huts... More and more passed by and vanished into the depths of a new clump of cacti... And so it went on until late into the night...'

So we were left alone on that path in Ta-Hoan, beneath the moon that shone brightly overhead. We hardly exchanged a word. We sat down at the foot of a tree and the hours slipped by...

And I shall never forget those hours, when we were so far from our troubles, those exquisite, real hours, without action or desire, where we were nothing but two poor little men of flesh and blood, two Chinese, ours too, lost on the plain without a path, beneath the moon that burned high above with a clear light...

XXVIII

Shai•lai-Kuuan, UO mni.

The life of the mandarin? Not the official mandarin, mind you—the one decked out in brocade, surrounded by allegorical monsters. No, the other one: the mandarin in his private life—his rising, his ablutions, his death, how he spends his time, his hours of work and leisure...

Will all this interest you?... I believe so, for I have gathered a wealth of observations on the mandarins. I have just seen fourteen of them in a row, starting with the governor of Tien-Tsin and ending with the prefect of Nei-Kiu. I have dined at their homes fourteen times. I even nearly choked myself one day on a shark fin. And it seems to me that having thus risked my life under a shark's fin, in order to study Chinese psychology, must entitle me to some sort of qualification, if not a high rank in the Legion of Honour. I know them, I tell you, I know them.

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First of all, convince yourself that the Mandarin is the smallest creature in the world, the most ignorant and the most gullible. His gullibility is so boundless that he still imagines we have a mill in the middle of our stomachs and that we can see twenty-five leagues underground. Any conversation with him is as tiring as it is pointless, because he never answers the questions asked, because he is hopelessly and incurably vague, and because he wears himself and you out with smiles, half-smiles, quarter-smiles and distinguished greetings. He is in the habit of bowing after every sentence, prostrating himself after every compliment, uttering a grunt by way of thanks, and no human or superhuman power could ever succeed in making him precise, concise or definitive.

A Ghinois—and all the more so a Ghinois who is also a civil servant—has never spoken his mind, not even in the most honest of terms; he is constantly on his guard, and walks sideways, morally speaking, like a crab.

And his private life and domestic habits are just as empty, just as devoid of substance as his mindset. Let us follow him into the small, damp and cold room that serves as both his bedroom and his bathroom. As soon as he wakes, the mandarin's first duty is to clean his mouth and scrape his tongue, a very long, very complicated and very noisy operation.

After which, he squeezes his belly into a pair of linen underpants and goes to wash. He trots off

He appears with a greasy tea towel; he coughs, spits and belches; then he takes off his underpants, puts on another pair, looser-fitting, with a pair of stockings; he wraps himself in a long robe — and there he is, already looking almost elegant. He can begin to receive his few wretched suitors... as briefly as possible, for he still has much to do: his tea to drink, his pipe to smoke, his nails to file. Finally, once this business is done, must he not change his robe and climb into a sedan chair to go and pay his visits?

The clock strikes ten as he returns from his walk. He then smokes a second pipe and orders his meal to be brought to him. He eats alone, as is fitting, for dining in the company of his wife and children would be a serious breach of marital discipline and paternal authority. He eats alone a large bowl of rice and numerous dishes containing sour cabbage, smoked ham, prawns, rats, cat's , boiled cat's paws, and bamboo shoots; he swallows his sip of brandy and it all ends with several cups of tea, a third pipe and a nap. A long nap. It is at least three o'clock when our mandarin stretches, rubs his eyes and sits up. He asks for his pipe again, chews melon seeds, leafs through novels, poems, a few pages of Confucius, calls for his wife, deigns to converse with her for a few moments and **then** dismisses her **with a curt gesture**. He eats again

With his sour cabbage, his fried ratatouille, his bamboo shoots, he takes another sip of Y10 water; he calls his wife and asks for reinforcements at his side. It is the end of a fine day.

He must be terribly bored.

But no, but no, you Westerners, so set in your ways, so artificial, who find pleasure only in variety, in change, in not repeating today what you finished yesterday. So recall these words of the philosopher: 'Constant, ceaseless agitation, the constant need for distractions, clearly indicate that one is not happy. One must learn to rest.' •

The Mandarin loves to rest. Boredom never visits him because he daydreams under a tree, or because he smokes his pipe on his bed of straw. Boredom is an Anglo-Saxon and Latin invention; the Chinese never know boredom!

Indeed, apart from his pipe and his wife, does he not have the duties of his office to fulfil? Does he not have justice to administer? A simple justice (admittedly rather uncomplicated, it is true, a simple justice that begins with bamboo and ends with bamboo).

Anyone, says the code, who forgets the honour that must govern relations between men, shall be punished with forty strokes if the offence is minor, and eighty strokes if the offence is more serious.

Any woman who insults her husband shall receive one hundred lashes and may be repudiated.

Any child who insults their parents shall be fined two hundred and fifty uoupa, and, if they reoffend, shall be put to death.

A negligent astronomer shall pay for his negligence
Gougg.

Likewise, sixty blows to the small of the back, rap-
{1B118P0nl to young girls that they must never go to the foot of Buddhist altars, and two hundred oup•. on the lower back will convince shop boys that they must never sleep with their boss's wife. Twenty, forty, sixty, up to three hundred bamboo strokes on the calves will teach thieves respect for property.

Once the mandarin has dispensed justice, do not ask him for anything else. He will return home, resume his daily routine, or, though less commonly, go to the theatre, for in China, the theatre can still be considered a form of entertainment.

Performances usually take place in a large hall capable of holding around a thousand spectators from all walks of life, from the coolie to the millionaire merchant. Wooden benches serve as the stalls. On these benches, covered in straw, the audience sprawls. All that can be seen from the front is a line of feet pointing skywards, a forest of long-stemmed pipes belching smoke, a jumble of dangling tails. From there, odours rise, filling the nostrils—yellow, musty odours...

The music comes from right at the back, behind the actors. I can see gongs, cymbals, drums, tambourines, single-stringed violins and various odd-looking xylophones, which the performer strikes with all his might. It makes a terrifying, colossal noise, a howling cacophony that soars to the ceiling, descends, rises again, echoes through the corridors, and spills out into the street like an alarm cry, a desperate call from a fireman in distress, from a ship cast ashore. It sounded like dynamite blasts, or better still, iron balls falling from a height of fifty feet onto a sheet of metal. A few muffled thuds, then, louder, a barrage of *pan-pan-pau* launched like a catapult. Oh, what bliss, when sometimes, in this storm, a little note with a sharp, tangy sound can be heard. It means no more than the big bangs, but it's easier on the ear; it makes a few efforts to get closer to

Mr Auber. I'm moved to tears; I almost feel like applauding the shabby actor who plays him.

There are no sets in our Chinese theatres. It is understood that the stage will transform, one after another and without any tricks, into a forest, a palace, a theatre or a mountain; it is understood that, if the performance requires the appearance of a king, a simple chair covered in cloth will serve as his throne; it is understood that a vigorously agitated curtain will represent a spirited horse and a few drops of water, the sea

. Furthermore, by way of a prologue, the director will come himself to explain the subject of the play, almost always a drama drawn from history or legend: 'Ail/nnf mfrncufeus', 'The Port *of the Mandarin Tom How*', '*Li Sven's Triumph over the Usurper Zhao*'... And the performances lasted several days and several nights, like a serial in *the Pe(1) Zournal*, skilfully cut at the most moving moments, to make the audience want to return the following day.

Have pity on the poor actors! Have pity on the poor actors who, under this regime of hard labour, are wasting away and dying, victims of the demands of their art! Did you know that, more wretched than the troupes of Gringoire or Sigognac, they feed only on plain boiled rice and fish broth, that this nauseating ratatouille simmers on a stove in the sort of hovel that reeks of both of a workhouse and a home, that these poor wretches eat in two mouthfuls, sleep between two scenes—on half a bundle of straw and a single mat—so as to be ready more quickly to resume their

Their roles? Oh, nothing too complicated, nothing wrong with them, just a bit over the top. Basically, shouting at the top of their lungs to drown out the music, which is a constant barrage of brass fanfare. That said, if they want to stay true to tradition, they need to

:près the characters' personalities, to play the na-

. On the contrary, they must strive to be noble, to restore

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Moreover, to wear a resplendent costume, covered in gold, with gigantic arms, and a gigantic beard whose locks—black or white—flow down over a purple laticlave. And, thus attired, to avoid even more carefully any trivial movement: to walk with measured steps, to shake one's head imperiously, to stretch out one's arm in a gesture of apotheosis. At times, during the most intense moments, we shall see them fall upon the enemy, sword raised, and fight for a long while, amidst the furious clamour of cymbals and gongs... And when they have finished, we shall be left with encephalopathy or epilepsy, so to speak, for the cymbals and gongs will redouble their clamour, celebrating the victor's triumph.

But all that is classic theatre, it's tragedy, it's the Chinese Racine and Corneille. You have to listen to the popular repertoire, which is livelier and more natural. The subjects are always very simple: comedy or vaudeville performed in a thatched hut or on a junk by the riverbank.

Do you know *Tien Bus*? The story of a poor girl, very poor but honest, who, to feed her mother, buys a small boat and ferries passengers from one bank to the other. Along comes Lao Truon\$, a wealthy old man of eighty, in love with the young boatwoman.

1.xo Tnuo c. — Well, pretty child, what do you want as payment for your trouble? Tell me, I'll pay you. And, if by any chance you're not married, I

I would give you everything that you would like. Hò I

Tiso Bou. — I see that, despite your age, you love young girls. Don't you dare say that; if they find out, I'll be the laughing stock of everyone. You don't **have** a single tooth left, your beard is all white. So don't talk to me about marrying me!

Lx0 ÚRUONS. — I beg you, let us marry. You need not fear, at least, that I shall bite you. You shall see, I am not as old as I look. When we give ourselves over together to the sweet pleasure of love, you shall see whether I am strong or weak, you shall see.

'The Brief. — Yieillard, my body is like the fragrant pomme de canne that is placed on the altar between the two sacred cranes and beneath the great ceremonial parasol. I am as beautiful as a goddess. So do not speak to me so crudely again in future, and if you are in love, go home. Love is impossible between us. My body is as smooth as ivory, whilst yours is as wrinkled as a torn straw mat, abandoned by the roadside and on which children play.

Lxo TRuo«c. — You are wrong, my dear, to say that I am ugly. That is not kind. Nevertheless, I pray to heaven to send a great wind that may carry the torn mat away to the beautiful ivory body, where it will find happiness.

Tram Beu. — Your persistence touches me. But I

I want to know first if you're as strong as a thirty-year-old man.

You'll **have to** get into my boat on your own and row it away.

The good Lao Truong agreed and began to row **with** all his might. Meanwhile, little **Tien** Buu was swimming away. But the good Lao Truong caught up with her **and** insisted so much that little Tien Buu finally agreed to marry him, on one condition, however: that he would plunge into a cauldron full of boiling oil to emerge young and handsome.

Lao Truong hesitates. 'I'm far from being impressed by such talk,' he says. 'If you boil some oil and I have to plunge myself into it, I'm done for.'

RIEN Bec. — Come quickly! The oil is boiling; get into the cauldron.

Lao Truong. — Cruel, is that what you want? Look at me well, my love!

He lets out a deep sigh and dies. A few moments later, he comes back to life and realises, **to** his amazement, that he is now young **and**

And so, it is Tien Buu's turn to love him.

— Sir, she asks him, would you like to stay here and marry me?

Lao Truong has shaken off his old passion by shedding eighty **years** of skin. He bursts out laughing in the face of the boatwoman and leaves, doing a cartwheel,

And Tien Buu cries: 'Oh, you wicked man, **why**

abandon me? Despite my pleas, you have fled. Come now, we must resign ourselves; let us return to my father and run to meet the travellers, who must be on their way."

And Lao Truong starts laughing even harder: "Ha! Ha! Ha! I have taken my revenge on that young woman. In the past, she mocked me mercilessly; today, it is I who mock her, thanks to my genius. But my prank is over; I shall vanish and return to the heavenly realms. Ha! Ha! Ha!..."

He ascends to the heavenly realms, and the spectators return, each to their own home, to the small, solid house with windows lined with parchment. It is a procession of lanterns, in the middle of the street, still paved with unspeakable debris, entrails and manure. Women emerge, swaying, their forms indistinct, fringes of blue tunics, barely glimpsed... Fireflies glow, frogs croak, flies buzz, gongs resound muffled. The air is scorching. ... There is, in all these things, the sadness of things very old that seem to date from the earliest ages of the world, a whole series of impressions frozen in a very old mould that one dares not touch, for fear of breaking it. All this is inexpressible...

But soon the lights go out one by one, and eyes begin to close. A few isolated shops still wait for customers; owners and staff doze off in front of the doors. And

then, the shops too go dark. Then, there is nothing left alive but a crowd of drunks — all too lively, those lot! — sprawled across the pavement, drunk, bare-chested, swearing, spitting, ‘so be it...’

One of them shakes a telegraph post with all his might and, mistaking it for a bull, threatens to strangle it. Another tries to imitate an ox and succeeds all too well, for tremendous bellowing rises up, frightening and scandalising the rest of the gang, who, with a few hefty kicks in the backside, force the improvised quadruped back into a bipedal stance and drag him away by force.

They all head off towards the outskirts, their legs heavy with weariness. The man who was mimicking an ox a moment ago has swapped his bellowing for meaningful hiccups, and the man with the scar, weighed down by sad thoughts, wants to lie down on a pile of stones and sleep there under the stars, whilst a long discussion breaks out about him: ‘We mustn’t leave him!’ says one; ‘We must leave him!’ says the other. Just then, the police arrive, talking of throwing the whole lot in the slammer. This threat makes the little man’s legs go weak. Crossing ditches and ditches, over the bare ground of the suburbs, he arrives, followed by his comrades, in front of a terraced house, inhabited by Japanese women who are very worldly and very hospitable, since they seek to bring together in their living rooms the two classes of our great family...

Silent: the marines and the navy itself. An unfortunate, ill-advised display of eclecticism, at which everyone is rightly offended. Immediately, the thorny question of precedence arises: which will prevail, the army or the navy?

And you can well imagine that the quarrel can only end in a fistfight. A generous round of blows brings all the combatants out onto the street: broken noses, black eyes, kicks from sailors, punches from deckhands and n., d... D...

From their balcony, Tohio's little dolls gaze down at the chaos and weep. And the police, for the sixth time, arrive, restore a semblance of calm, and then disappear, only to reappear again, for the tenth and twelfth times...

XXIX

Tianjin, 3 June.

Let us continue to peel the mandarin.

What he accuses us of most is being uncouth and clumsy, of having 'no form of politeness, save that of doffing one's hat', no morals, no philosophy. He cruelly calls us barbarians. When he comes to see us, he would exclaim once again, as in the days of Lonte-Corvino: 'Let us go to the camp of the Barhares, to the uncultivated regions inhabited by the Barbarians.' He takes pity on us; he cannot stop shrugging his shoulders.

'Your social fabric really impresses me,' said a young graduate, back from Europe. 'Your multi-storey houses where people who don't know one another have to live under the same roof, your carriages where people pile in one after another, this jostling of all these people, without the slightest attention paid to the elderly, all this reminds me

and it tires me. Yes, I have my doubts: you lack individual initiative; you simply look too far ahead. You do not have enough respect for what deserves to be respected. Your governments are good—I want to believe that; yet, if they suited you as well as ours suits us, you would not change them.”

And that is quite fair.

You see their reasoning, always the same... They possess wisdom, whilst we are mere fools... They are happy and we never will be, for we move about too much... The books of Confucius and Lao Tzu are filled with maxims preaching
 general paralysis, the supreme state
 of the crocodile opening its jaws to the sun.

Reading these little snippets of nonsense, one's feet seem to stick to the ground. Literally, one isn't quite sure whether one is still a man, a crocodile or a tree. One wonders what would be best: to drift off to sleep, or to hang oneself, just to be done with an existence that is cloaked in such emptiness?

And yet, despite these repeated proofs of nothingness, I hesitated. After so much academic solemnity in which the Chinese citizen and family man had been extolled; after that Mr Hervey de Saint-Denis holding him up as an example to the whole university, and so many other enthusiastic graduates who gazed upon the Great Wall and marvelled to find so much behind it, I thought that he

It was rather foolish of me to dare to look at the Great Wall and find nothing there at all.

— 'Let's see,' I asked one day, 'Fer-gusson, the headmaster of the Imperial College in Kiang-flou province, the man who knows the

the Far East, since he has lived there for some fifteen years and speaks the language as fluently as Tchang' Tche Tong. Come now, I asked him. Will you tell me what lies behind the Great Wall? Above all, be very scientific in your judgements, for a monthly psycho-social journal has already criticised me for not being so, and I

would not, for all the world, wish to incur that reproach of frivolity a second time.

H. Fergusson thought for a few minutes. Impressed by my recommendations, he was searching for the right ethno-psychological phrase. After thinking it over for a while:

— 'China,' he replied, 'is a very serious joke.

— "Look at the wall, Mr Fergusson, that wall which hides it from us! There is something behind that wall

— There is nothing.

— Still nothing?...

— There is nothing.

— What else?... That gigantic, immeasurable pride which makes them—defeated, humiliated, the dregs of a people and the dregs of an empire—call us barbarians, fools and oafs? The

superiority of the Western races—do they not yet even touch upon it? And when they use the telegraph or the telephone, do they not do us the favour of acknowledging that these inventions possess some merit and that their inventors could hardly pass for barbarians? . . .

— Never would a Chinese person who recognised the telephone's rudeness be a Chinese person anymore. The telephone is a barbaric instrument, burdened with a ringtone that wakes you up at any time of the day or night, disregarding all the rules of politeness...

— I would go round ringing that bell, forcing him to understand...

Y. Fergusson fell silent. He watched the smoke from his cigar rise to the ceiling. Clearly, there was no reasoning with a Chinese man. There was no point in trying to make him understand. He either doesn't understand a thing or is turning a deaf ear. He repeats to you for the ten thousandth time that his civilisation is two or three thousand years older than yours, that he has the experience, that you do not, and that, consequently, in his eyes, he has nothing to teach you. If you boast of great discoveries, he boasts of even greater ones: the printing press, the cannon. Having lived long enough, he can see how all this is, on the whole, unnecessary and even harmful. He seeks nothing in life but immediate happiness, and he is certain to find that happiness as long as he obeys—

obedience to the laws of the ancestors. That is the essence and the purpose of his philosophy.

And no matter how hard you try to tell him that there are various ways to ensure happiness in this world; that it is not happiness to remain in ignorance, filth and misery, he will reply, with a shrug, that he is less ignorant than you, less filthy than you and less miserable than you. And if you persist in indoctrinating him, he will fold his hands over his cream-coloured satin robe and fall asleep right under your nose.

Let us leave this mandarin, this unyielding aristocracy, to sleep, and reconnect with his people, in one of the sampangs sailing up the Pet-Ho. I believe I have already told you about the sampang: a very long, very flat boat with thatched sails and a rattan roof resembling the shell of a turtle. Unfortunate shell, accursed shell, set so low *that* Tom Thumb would have been forced to bend his back. You can see from here the posture of a man over 80 centimetres tall—which is by no means an exaggeration. He can only stand crouched or lie stretched out on a mat. At the bow and stern, there is indeed a free space. But at the bow stands the sampan man, rowing, and at the stern, the sampan woman, his wife, rowing just as hard — and scattered about, between their legs, the children of the sampan man and woman.

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When you spend several days at sea in such conditions, the least you can expect to come away with is lumbago and fleas. Admittedly, this is down to a lack of habit, for the Chinese, after all, find their living quarters perfectly comfortable and wouldn't change a thing. Just as the sampan existed in the fifteenth century, during the reign of the illustrious Young Lo, so it still exists today, a family affair. One is born, lives and dies within it. The same mat sees the grandson drooling over his tongue and the grandfather spitting into his rice porridge. Here, moreover, is a fairly accurate inventory of the on-board furnishings: a clay stove, a cooking pot, earthenware cups stacked between two planks, a bamboo bundle containing, folded and rolled up, the spare clothes, and, at the back, the inevitable ancestral altar.

A cooking pot and a stove, food and drink – happiness is complete. This happiness is revealed to us through music. Happy people sing. The sampan boatmen are very happy, for they sing constantly a sort of trill with a sudden break in the flow of their voices. The woman begins, the man continues, and this goes on for hours, for days...

Now we go down the river, rocked gently, cutting through the green hair of the reeds. The oxen, carrying their herdsmen on their backs, and the egrets perched on the farthest reaches of the shore, white as foam, watch us pass... The arroyos fan out, their waters

into this vegetal flesh. Dark, slender fish follow the current.

Since yesterday, Mr and Mrs 'by San, our boatmen, have done nothing but sing and row. I imagine that these are no longer human beings before me, but machines with admirably well-oiled pivots. Their strokes are never stronger or weaker than one another, betraying neither fatigue nor impatience. Always the same slow movement, beating the waves at regular intervals. These malnourished wretches, whose fragile, bony frames are visible beneath their blue tunics, these wretches are made of iron, capable of killing twenty-eight six-foot-tall Turks. I saw them outpace a trotting horse, setting off at four in the morning to arrive at eleven at night, having covered 80 kilometres. I saw them, the day after that formidable march, as sprightly as if they'd taken nothing more than a short stroll the day before to aid digestion! I saw them, in blast-furnace heat, marching at their usual brisk pace, their frail, gaunt frames straining, sweating in thick drops that fell in sheets at their feet!...

And whilst the poor coolies were dabbing their foreheads, the mandarin woke up feeling refreshed.

Let's continue peeling the mandarin.

One of his main occupations is to steal from his government. The mandarin is a bribe-taker and a singer-songwriter by nature and by

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dignity. Taxes never reach the public coffers intact, because he always knows how to skim them off along the way. China is the land of freedom, says II. Hervey de Saint-Denis. Yes, for those who are penniless; but for the rest, if they wish to avoid the beggar's bowl of Belisarius towards the end of their days, they must live apart from the mandarin, taking care not to draw his attention to a fortune imprudently displayed.

The mandarin, moreover, has so many other ways of making money that one should not feel too sorry for him if his taxpayers sometimes balk at being fleeced by him. A Tao-tai of one of the major open ports of the South, receives 9,500 taels from the Court and his income amounts to 150,000 taels. It is certainly not by reading Confucius, in the chapter on the duties of a man of the state, that these 40,000 taels—9,500

40,500 taels—come his way. He speculates in opium and rice. He buys 12 or 15,000 kilos of rice at 3 dollars a quintal and resells it for 10 dollars in a province where people are starving. He issues transit permits, he fabricates false declarations; he allows himself to be showered with bribes by the transport companies, and quite naturally accepts banknotes from them, which he discounts for three or four months...

And how many other ways are there to make money, for our dear little sorupilcux! He builds a road and, on either side of it, he expropriates a number of farmers against

a paltry sum. Then all that remains is for him to issue a proclamation explaining that, for philanthropic reasons, he does not wish a single landowner to be dispossessed. For 1,000 taels, he will leave them the land. If the first buyer does not pay the 1,000 taels, he draws up new title deeds and sells them to new buyers at the same price. Nothing could be simpler.

Another way of making money: the Taotaï receives several million taels monthly from the customs service. As he is only required to hand this sum over to the treasury every six months, he has it at his disposal and lends it out at high interest.

So much for the civil mandarin. But it would be an insult to the military mandarin to suggest that he is not equally resourceful in the exercise of his duties as a tax collector. The Emperor pays the wages and upkeep of 10,000 soldiers. Immediately, the officers, from the general down to the second lieutenant, begin to dip into the imperial funds, so much so that the strength of the force is reduced from 10,000 to **150** soldiers. That is not all: these same officers, finding their earnings insufficient in lean years, run small businesses. I have cited the example of that frigate captain who sold slices of bacon on the deck of his cruiser. To this I add the Black Flag colonel who ran one of those establishments, now run by the Cellier family, and that commander of the

A shop that sells ladies' shoes... Ah! China really is a strange country! ... If, however, a barbarian of my sort can be permitted to make such an observation about his

Ta-Kou, 3 juin.

Let us be lenient with the mandarin. Bribery is almost necessary for him to live honourably.

The Court never concerns itself with what the taxable limit of its subjects might be. It needs 5,000 taels in a month; it demands them from the provincial prefect.

— ‘The people have already paid their taxes,’ replies the prefect timidly. ‘How do you expect me to collect taxes all over again?’

— ‘I don’t care,’ replies the Court. ‘If I don’t have my 15,000 tadls within a month, I’ll have you dismissed.’

So the prefect, who has no desire to be dismissed, puts pressure on his people. Seated in the ke-fang or reception hall, he receives a visit from his tax collectors, tasked with informing him of the financial circumstances of the leading residents. He listens to the litanies of the

Chinese politeness unfold for a quarter of an hour before the real subject of the conversation is reached:

— ‘Please rest, venerable old brother,’ insists the prefect.
‘Do rest, I urge you from the depths of my friendship.’

— Oh! I dare not, I dare not!

— I beg you, rest in my humble abode.

— He dares not let me rest; I would never dare to rest in your noble home!

— How many precious sons do you have?

— Oh! Only three stupid little pigs.

— He invited you to drink tea and smoke tobacco.

— Oh! I dare not, I dare not!...

— He also invites you to fan us with your fan.

— Oh! No, that’s too much, I dare not, I dare not!

— Rest on the south side; it is the most honourable spot, my dear old brother.

— I dare not, I dare not!

— Rest...

— Come now, I take pride in obeying you on this occasion. And he finally sat down.

— ‘You wished to speak to me, my incomparable elder brother?’ the prefect continued.

— I did, great man, I wished to speak to you about the noble Wang family, who are in litigation with the noble

Tsen family. I believe that, if your high court were to uphold their case, they would be grateful enough to send 2,010 taels.

— I have thought of that, venerable old brother, I have thought of that. And is Tang not rich, too?

— Tang would be most honoured, great man, to place a portion of his wealth in your illustrious hands.

— Enough, concludes the great man.

A month later, the Court receives its 15,000 taels, and the great man loses nothing, for he had been prudent enough to ask for 1,000 more, as compensation for his troubles.

However, it sometimes happens that CM. Wang, Tsen and Tang grow weary of serving as cash cows for their great men. That gelatinous mass that is the Chinese people protests and revolts, but without upheaval, peacefully. They place the prefect in a very comfortable palanquin and respectfully carry him far from his province. And the court always blames the gentleman who has been expelled.

One of the last emperors of the Ling dynasty, to whom complaints had been addressed regarding the abuse of power by judges and Taoists, responded with this typical proclamation:

‘It is right that my subjects should live in fear of the mandarins and their courts, and should have recourse to them as rarely as possible. I intend that those who do have recourse to them should be treated without

mercy, so that everyone may be put off by lawsuits and tremble at the thought of appearing before the magistrates. In this way, evil will be nipped in the bud; good citizens who have difficulties between them will settle matters amicably by submitting to the arbitration of the elders and the mayor of the commune. As for those who are quarrelsome, stubborn, and incorrigible, let them be crushed, let them be stripped of their possessions by their masters—this is the only justice they deserve!

And now, if we were to try to summarise China's social history, we would find in it what I described to you the other day as the defining characteristic of this insular people: the contrast, the bizarre juxtaposition of the very best and the very worst.

China has sought to base its entire existence on philosophical principles. This philosophy is childish, characterised by a naïve selfishness; it is not even a philosophy, but a moral code, a mere handbook of practical morality, written by a schoolmaster named Confucius. Beyond this Confucius and his moral code, China has seen nothing. It has never been willing to accept scientific experience as a criterion of superiority. Its own reasoning was sufficient. Living alone, isolated, or surrounded only by small tributary states, it soon came to regard itself as the centre, 'the pillar, the navel of the world'. Its emperor, the Son of Heaven, reigned over all kings. And an immense pride, alongside which

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compared to which Nebuchadnezzar's would have been modesty, has, for millennia, frozen it in its idolatrous stance.

China is poorly governed. A diffuse and chaotic government, rife with hypocrisy and lies; a hybrid and complex government, ambiguous, equivocal and ill-defined – and yet, sufficiently defined, since everything fits within its framework, never blurring the lines between the executive, the legislative and the administrative branches.

And everything holds together because the people are very docile and indifferent to public affairs, the smooth running of which is ensured only by a few mandarins. 'The misfortune—or the happiness—of the yellow race,' said Father Hue, 'stems from the fact that it takes no interest whatsoever in its own affairs. The Chinese are too preoccupied with the problems of their daily lives to think about political matters.' Their main concern is to eat first and then to save the day's bread, because if they do not have enough for the day after tomorrow, they will not be able to eat again.

A merchant from Shanghai, Mr Bard, told us that he had seen, in Tien-Tsin, workers striking with hammers at a group of shipowners, guilty of having agreed to work on a building site for ten cash less than the normal wage.

In 4887, II. Bard continues, a battle broke out between the 'débardelir' of Han-Keou and the 'eeus' of Han-Yitng; the ' were 'preioiet8' and ' ', accusing ' ' the

seconds from ôtra who had come to offer their services on a stretch of the shore that the people of Han-lteou would consider their stronghold. Around a hundred people were killed. •

It is scarcely anything but these matters of immediate gain that can rouse them from their indifference. They detach themselves easily from all the rest. Well or ill governed? That is the mandarins' concern.

A. To each his own. China has endured for centuries in this way; it will endure for centuries and centuries to come... And if things were to turn out differently, if the empire were, one day soon, to be conquered by the Barbarians, what difference would it make? The Yellow Men would simply withdraw further, changing nothing of their ancestral ways. Our entire civilisation would come crashing down against half a billion fanatics.

Yet we are told that among them there are men who are beginning to suffer from this degradation. The Emperor himself, and a few viceroys, are said to be bringing about serious changes. Steamships, railways, agricultural machinery—we are told that the first effect of the introduction of the European method in Guinea will be an enormous increase in the natives' capacity for initiative. Once we have filled the country with machinery, the Great Sleeping Beauty will finally awaken.

She'll wake up , , just too soon, sighs
 àl. d'Estournelles de Gonstant. When we have taught her how to use our tools

And if we were to produce on our own, what terrible competition would we not be exposed to? Chinese workers pay themselves six sous a day, whereas ours... And that is true. However, what the MP for Sarthe fails to mention is that these workers do not, by any means, perform the work of their European counterparts. It has been calculated that a workshop of 1,200 men could not produce more work than a workshop of 800 men, in France or in England.

Add to the deplorable qualities of the Chinese worker the deplorable qualities of the Chinese employer, who lacks capital or, if he possesses capital, it goes to waste very quickly, because it lacks order, administrative foresight and discipline — and because its employees, from the director right down to the lowest clerk, are all out to line their own pockets.

Another thing. If, despite these enc

On the brink of bankruptcy, he still wants to manufacture, to produce for export; his raw materials soon become more expensive, 'since at present these materials are used in Guinea and are only exported to the extent that the exporter pays a higher price than the local consumer.' Thus, inferior labour, insufficient capital, deplorable administrative methods, raw materials rising in value... 31. d'Estourneles de Constant can rest assured: the 'yellow peril'

is not imminent.

Will it be the military yellow peril? Well, you know only too well what a pitiful soldier the Chinese is.

EN CHINE, 1900-1901

Perhaps we shall see a few more tremors in the Pelchc-Li? An army of a few thousand men will always be able to restore calm... 11, d'Estournelles de Constant can rest assured: the military threat from the Yellow Peril is not imminent.

The only danger to be feared will never come from the old land of Han; it will come from London or Berlin. The Cliine is currently the prey of Europe. Germans and Englishmen—they are all we see, they are all we see! Sellers of all manner of clocks, ethylene and umbrellas, Maxim machine guns and Krupp cannons! Big industry seeks to extend its tentacles even into the most remote provinces, bordering on Tibet, and already overproduction—that disease from which we shall all perish if we do not take care—is lying in wait. In less than five years, two industrial suburbs have sprung up in Shanghai, occupied by I know not how many silk mills; many are no longer in operation. And Mr Georges Pila, our great manufacturer from the Rhône, explained this failure to me as being due to the spirit of speculation and gambling that had prevailed in their establishment. ‘The Shanghai merchants, intoxicated by the success—albeit relative—of the first factories set up, have opened many more, each containing several hundred basins. To supply them, they are now forced, at harvest time, to go on a veritable hunt for cocoons in the interior, which they pay dearly for— ly very dearly—’

counting on the rise to sell their products.”

And after silk, here come the mines, the smelters, the assembly plants. The German company has just secured its first concession, and financiers who have nothing to lose are hoping that others will follow. They are speculating on an open China. Everyone is speculating on an open China. This crumbling empire is beginning to be shaken, from its foundations to its summit, by the most formidable unleashing of appetites. While the Russians remain in Manchuria, the Japanese want to go to Fo-Kien, the British and Germans to the Yangtze, and the French to Sichuan and Yunnan. Syndicates are forming which buy land, build houses, and stockpile goods. Is there a rumour of iron somewhere in this or that province? Quick, quick, a new research syndicate is being formed! And tomorrow it will be copper, the day after cobalt, and the following week, zinc, antimony, tin, silver. The gluttony keeps growing, the mouths are opening wide. The study syndicates form and turn round and rush out a deluge of reports and projects. Already, we can foresee the moment when our specialised schools will be unable to supply them with enough engineers. That is where we stand.

So much effort, hard work and capital set in motion— — all hidden behind a gigantic

question mark? Will China open up* or will it not? Will the Chinese adopt our methods or will they retain those of the thinker Li-Sseh who, in the year 250 BC, advised farmers to ‘have the plough drawn by the poor men of the commune instead of by oxen’?

I, for my part, would suggest forming a new study group to find out.

Only yesterday, at 11 S. . ., there were a dozen of us guests, enough to fill a corner of the ark. A little of all of Europe in miniature: Englishmen, Germans, Russians, Frenchmen... A little of every profession: consuls, officers, merchants... There were little pools of Chartreuse and champagne on the tablecloth, a jumble of saucers and glasses. And yet, I assure you that, with a few English exceptions, we were completely sober. One of the guests summed it up thus:

“I wonder what is driving Europe? Trusts, triumphs or bankruptcies? In the past, one could certainly make a fortune in China. There were only a few of us, and buying and selling remained straightforward. Tomorrow, with this thirst for quick profits that is strangling us, China will in turn be overrun by big capitalists, then by small capitalists, and finally by the proletariat. Competition will be fierce — not Chinese competition, mind you, but the

‘If that happens, with European competition — we’ll all be holed up behind a counter watching the customers; we’ll be shooting ourselves in the foot and we’ll gain nothing from it.’

Some are already beginning to realise this. The most enthusiastic, Germany, is mourning its lost illusions. Som Chan-Toung, which it had envisaged as a treasure trove of the finest metals, is a poor country, with far more chestnuts than gold. The indemnity that William II will receive from Kuang Su will barely cover the costs of the war. His Far Eastern naval division and his security garrisons between Tien-Tsin and Peking will cost him 10 million. Yet his import figures amount to only 43 million. That is no fortune. Ah, if only China would open up! If its eighteen provinces were to consume Kitzingen beer and Stralsund sugar! But we are far from that. Field Marshal von Waldersee may well congratulate himself on the ‘moral and material results of the campaign’, but he has never been able to convince anyone but himself. And even then, is he really convinced of it?

His expedition satisfied no one, neither the humanitarianists who lament the ravages of the sword, nor the swordsmen who lament their own uselessness, for after the sieges of Tien-Tsin and Peking, they had no further use for their swords...

XXXI

Toh-Fou, 8 June.

And now, having been defeated, humiliated, reduced to shameful impotence, old China finds itself, once again, standing tall. Barely a few ruins to add to its ruins... And time will pass over them, spread its blanket of centuries, and China will find itself standing tall once more.

And it was just as I was about to leave her, just as I was about to set sail for Japan, that I longed to see her again, that I longed to wander once more through the deserted streets of her imperial city, the walled precincts of her thousands of temples. A monk was officiating in one of these temples. He was old, bent, and spat out his teeth along with his prayers. He was old, and yet he still went on...

And so this monk came to symbolise the whole of China for me.

I.:i Old China, the China that is the ancestor of the world, the China that knew everything and no longer wanted anything

to learn,)that China which could do anything and no longer wanted its power, that China which lay down in the tomb of its walls, that ancient China, as old as India, older than Egypt, yet preserved by death like a ghost...

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