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■ SIGNS OF THE TIMES ■

CHINA'S RULER AND CHRISTIANITY

THE death of President Yuan Shih Kai, with rumors of poison, suicide and nervous breakdown, has no doubt removed one of the strong men of China, but has also taken a cause of discord out of Chinese politics.

The late President, Yuan Shih Kai, was a man with energy, ability, strength of character and personal ambition. He came to the presidency at a critical moment, when a strong hand was needed to bring together two opposing factors—the Manchus and the Republicans—and to establish peace. He was, no doubt, a patriot, but with strong personal ambitions. He re-established Confucianism as the state religion and caused himself to be proclaimed Emperor. This latter step brought about a series of revolutions in various provinces and threatened the disruption of China.

Yuan's sudden death on June 6th, and the succession to the presidency of the well-known and respected republican leader, Li Yuan Hung, has caused the provinces of Szechuan, Hunan, Che-Kiang and Shensi to rescind their declarations of independence (caused by their distrust of Yuan Shih Kai) and to reassert their loyalty to the Peking government. This is a decided gain for peace and unity in China.

President Li Yuan Hung is fifty-two years of age, having been born in the province of Hupeh in 1864. He studied at Peiyang Naval College and served on a cruiser during the Chino-Japanese war. Later, he assisted in modernizing the Chinese army. At the outbreak of the revolution at Wuchang he was forced to take the command of the revolutionary forces and was instrumental in arranging the Shanghai Peace Conference. After the abdication of the Manchus he was elected

Japan's Leadership in Asia

BY ROBERT E. SPEER, NEW YORK

Author of "Missions and Modern History," etc.



THE net judgment with which we returned to America, after three visits during seven months, is a judgment of increased respect for Japan and for what she has achieved and a deepened confidence in the worthy and better elements of Japanese life and character. There are circles both in the East and in the West in which it is almost as much as a man's life is worth to express such a judgment as this, so deep is the feeling of racial distrust of the Japanese and of suspicion of their political and commercial ambitions. Many times we have been frightened at the intensity of this feeling as we have encountered it at different points in the East.

No one can complain of fair and discriminating judgments, but what frightens one in much of the prejudice against the Japanese is its unfairness and its lack of discrimination. Courses of action pursued by America or Great Britain or Germany are viewed and judged in an entirely different light from similar courses of action pursued by Japan. Japan's conduct is often considered a matter of mere political expediency or a cover of sinister purposes, while wrong done by Western nations is too often condoned or lamented with soft judgments. Wrong and right are not affected by degrees of longitude. Evil or unworthy actions on the part of the Japanese ought to be judged on precisely the same basis as that on

which a Western race or nation would be judged, unless the latter be held to a stricter accountability because of their fuller light.

Whoever seeks to view the Far East with an impartial mind to-day will be impressed anew with the significance of the history which Japan has made. Of the Asiatic nations she alone has thus far shown herself capable of actually mastering and absorbing the principles of efficiency which lie behind modern progress. The new civilization in Japan is not merely imitative, but has been intelligently absorbed as no other Asiatic nation has yet absorbed it.

The New in the Old

After what one has seen of the struggle for civilization in other Asiatic lands and of the danger of attempting to make transitions by breaches and over chasms, one appreciates Japan's success in having moved from the old to the new with so little rupture and without the loss of her own racial traditions and integrity. The new has been grafted on to the old not without blunders and some misshapen consequences, but in the main with wonderful skill and success.

Japan has done better than any of the other Asiatic nations in preserving good manners through such a transition. It is pitiful in some of the Eastern lands to see how fully the old etiquette and courtesy have passed away without the acquisition of such good manners as there may

still be left in the West. Japan is holding still to some of her old traditions which she must transcend, but she ought to be judged charitably if she holds to them a little too long. What can a nation build on except its past? The present history of Siam shows how difficult it is to build up a sense of national personality without a living history.

By grafting the new civilization on her own racial life Japan has rendered a great service to the whole of Asia. It is true that the process has not been a perfect one. Every living experience of this kind is sure to be mixed with crudities both of spirit and of form. Who should realize this better than Americans? But just as America set an example of inspiration and of hope to the peoples of the West, so Japan has done to the peoples of the East. They were in danger of slowly sinking into a sense of racial incapacity, surrendering the hope that they could ever take a full place amid the serving, working, forward-moving nations. Such a despair as this was itself sure to create its own justification. And the strong nations have not been free from the error of schooling the backward nations into the idea of their own incapacity, nor has the missionary enterprise escaped from this reproach. But to treat either men or nations as incapable of the highest is to disqualify them for the highest. The great need of the Asiatic peoples today is that they should be steadily heartened to believe that God has as honorable and worthy work for them to do as for any others. Japan's example has given such a heartening as this to all the Asiatic peoples.

If to the hope and inspiration of

her example Japan could add influences which would win the love and confidence and good will of the Asiatic peoples, the service which she might render to Asia and to the world would be unlimited. But as one travels about through Asia he finds that while Japan is admired, she is also feared. The other Asiatic peoples complain that the Japanese are proud and overbearing, that they are seeking not to befriend and to guide but to overpower and dominate, to secure and monopolize the markets, to promote the interests of Japan alone and not to guard Asia for the people of Asia or to seek the nobler end of fostering the brotherhood and unity of all mankind.

If Japan could break down these suspicions and free herself from all the influences which justify them and give her leadership unselfishly to the Asiatic peoples it would be the beginning of a new day.

The Inspiration of Religion

Only religion will be able to inspire ambitions like these in the heart of a nation and the old religions of Japan can neither give men such inspiration nor even produce these conceptions in their minds.

Shinto is in the narrowest sense nationalistic and for purposes of nationalism even is now only a shadowy and receding force. Its ritual has filled a large place in the coronation ceremonies, but it is a mere shell for departing ideas not unwisely preserved, perhaps, until new and living ideas have more adequately taken the place of the old. The Shinto shrines are kept in good repair and to many of them in the holy places the people still throng,

but it is often with simply a holiday purpose or as a rite of patriotism or with a religious longing which would turn as readily to an image of Buddha or to some symbol of animism.

Buddhism, broken into scores of sects, active in its propaganda, has its huge temples and its millions of adherents, but it has been badly damaged by notorious financial dishonesty in its chief shrine, it can not without logical contradiction fit itself to the needs of a modern society, and in its effort to do so is appropriating more and more of Christian truth. One is impressed inevitably by the splendor of the temples and the multitudes of people thronging about them, but two things need to be kept in mind when we are told of the activity and popularity of Japanese Buddhism. One is that the cleanness and good repair of the temples in Japan as compared with the squalor and neglect of the temples in so many other parts of Asia may be due, not to any special strength of Buddhism, but merely to the fact that everything is kept up better in Japan than in other Asiatic countries. The second is that the idea of amusement and recreation is more and more drawing crowds to the vicinity of the temples but is also weakening and too often degrading the old religious sensibilities. The best known of the Tokio temples is tenfold more now than twenty years ago, the center of the amusement and immorality of the city.

A Nation of Readers

The processes of national education to which Japan whole-heartedly committed herself a generation and more ago have wrought upon the

nation with penetrating and far-extended influence. They have made a nation of readers. At the ricksha stands the coolies read together while they wait. Messenger boys have their books in their pockets to read as they push their carts along the roads. It is claimed that more books are published and sold in Japan now each year than in Germany. For half a mile in one street in Tokio book-stalls, with new and second-hand books, line the street on either side. The yellow press, exceeding in irresponsibility, in lack of historical perspective, in sobriety, in any consciousness of the perils of its power, even our yellow press in America, finds in all this mass of common men who are now able to read a field where fire can run as over a prairie. In the schools all classes meet together and in the democracy of their fellowship and of the truth which they are taught forces are at work which must slowly develop a new Japan and which will need the wisest guidance, if wise guides can be found to succeed the few survivors of the old men who have led Japan so successfully along her amazing way.

One of the things which impresses one deeply as he comes to Japan from the Philippine Islands or China is the tightness, the constriction, the close knit organization of life in Japan. In spite of the license of the press there is still a check upon free expression. Japanese will often lower their voices as they refer to some political or religious subject. Economically and socially also Japan seems to be completely set together, the paths to employment are clearly defined, the whole organization seems to be more nearly finished, with less

room for free play, for initiative, for innovation.

The Japanese are beginning to feel this and are attributing some of it to the rigidity of their educational mechanism. The great body of alumni of the different private universities resent the privileges of the Imperial University caste and now that the head of one of these universities is Prime Minister and its Dean, Minister of Education, what might be called educational liberalism is raising its hand against the routinism of the educational absolutists who have controlled the whole school system of the nation. Many are arguing that the traditional system has simply bred specialized men, that the nation needs a great body of men more freely educated and breathing an ampler air, that there should be more flexibility of mind and life, a release from the over-precision and bureaucracy of the past.

The Japanese are instinctively an orderly, rule-obeying people and their effort at transition from a social mind in which they have been clamped together objectively, so to speak, by the bonds of a highly organized order, to a new social crystallization of self-directed, freely choosing individuals, is one of the most interesting situations in racial psychology that can be conceived.

Attitude Toward Christianity

Everywhere through Japanese life great changes are taking place. Among these we rejoice most in the evidence of the steady gain of Christianity and the altered attitude of the nation toward it. Everybody notes the ease with which Christianity can secure a hearing anywhere, in churches or

schools or public halls or even in Buddhist monasteries. The secular newspapers are reporting now not only religious meetings where the discussions have had a semi-political cast but purely evangelistic services as well. An English paper in Tokio printed the account of the Emperor's birthday with a small caption and immediately under it, with bolder capitals and in longer space, an account of the death of Dr. David Thompson, one of the older missionaries. A few years ago it would not have been thought appropriate to overshadow with any other news a reference to the Emperor's birthday ceremonies, least of all with an account concerning a missionary.

Never were Japanese Christians bolder in telling their nation what it needs and where what it needs can be met. Dr. Uzawa, an elder in the Church of Christ in Japan, and a leading lawyer of Tokio and a member of Parliament, stated in a published article, "Does Japan need Christianity?"

"The main reason why Japan needs Christianity is to cast out her devils. There are some among us who fancy they have no devils to be exorcised of but they are much mistaken. Even those who pretend to be sinless and pure are none too good for Christianity. Buddhism has taught us that when we think devils enter through our thoughts; when we read, they enter through our mouth; when we pray, they enter through the crown of the head; and thus evil spirits take advantage of everything we do, to get into us somehow; so that all our deeds are more or less influenced by evil. But through Christianity come in the spirits of good to defend the ego and prevent its defeat.

"Christianity is the white corpuscle to

protect the soul's blood, and consequently the whole man, from evil spiritual influences. It supplies the phagocytes before which malign spirits flee. Without a religion of the right kind man is exposed and hopelessly at odds with his environment. Will those among us, who fancy they can do without religion, affirm that we Japanese are as kind as we ought to be, or that we are as thoughtful and serious as becomes a people with a great destiny? The Buddhists of the Zen text invite us to go to the central temple and learn to return to our true selves; but the true self in most of us is so marred and maimed that it is hardly worth returning to. For most people the true self is completely gone—and only Christ can restore it whole.

"Some will say that I talk like a pleader, and that I so speak because I am a Christian. Well, I can hardly do otherwise. I have been a Christian for twenty years, admittedly a very imperfect one; but I owe so much to Christianity that I can hardly be expected to do otherwise than plead for it. When I say what this religion can do for a man, I speak out of the seriousness and fulness of my own experience.

"The Japan of to-day is absorbed by abounding ambition; she is no longer content to remain an island empire; her career is to be continental and her future world-wide. No such ambition can ever be realized without the wise guidance and firm faith which Christianity gives. No nation can make a universal appeal without the inspiration of a universal religion. Those among us who imagine, as is often asserted, that modern science has eaten into the vitals of Christianity like a canker, are greatly mistaken. Science has never undertaken to prove, nor can it prove, that Christ can not save. That man can not attain unto his best without religion is the teaching of all religions as well as of Christianity; but the latter is the one power that has enabled men to come unto their best. It

is the only force capable of assisting us to overcome the counteracting gravitation of evil. Before its light and power the darkness and doubt of insistent pessimism disappear.

"If the world is to-day less pessimistic than it was, the improvement is largely due to Christ. Two or three hundred years ago pessimism hung like a pall over the human spirit. The Buddhism of the Kamakura period taught that this was the worst of all possible worlds, a place of torment and affliction, a veritable hell, and that the only hope of happiness lay beyond; the aim of life was to attain Buddhahood and reach Nirvana. The spirit seems to have been world-wide, for Christianity, too, had to pass through the same stage. Paradise was either in the distant past or in the unseen future. But under the influence of Christianity the human mind has so far developed and brightened that men now look for paradise on this earth, where nature is being fast conquered and made to yield all the delights that man can enjoy. It is only the irreligious that to-day have fear. They doubt whether nature is yet conquered.

"In Tokio the newspapers that tell fortunes sell best. Multitudes are still away back in the age when nature was man's master, and the earth a fearful place to dwell in. But the spiritually enlightened know better. Christianity has taught them that heaven is where Christ is, and He is everywhere that man will receive Him. I am convinced, therefore, that no nation can successfully enter in world-wide hopes and ambitions without the help of the Christian religion. This conviction has grown upon me more and more during the last twenty years, and I am extremely solicitous that my countrymen should make no mistake about it; for no mistake could be more fatal either to the individual or to the nation. Both in my experience as a lawyer and as a member of the Imperial Diet, I have been confirmed in my conviction ever more

and more. If I have been able to do more for myself and my country than the young men who went to school with me and had the same chances in life, it has been due to the help that Christianity has given me. This religion has given me a spiritual courage that has carried me triumphantly through many an adversity.

"Our country is very successful at producing criminals and incorrigible youth. Why not now welcome an influence that will make men? When I consider all that my country has yet to do before coming to her own, I tremble to think of her undertaking it with her own strength. The defects of our education and our social life are patent to all. We have to spend the greater part of our early life obtaining an education, and then shortly after its completion we retire from life's activity. Our system seems to be intended for those who expect to live to the age of about 125 years and is therefore unsuitable to us, with the possible exception of Count Okuma. Jesus Christ, in his short life of thirty-three years, and with no university education, did more for mankind than a whole nation can do. Why? Simply because His was the unconquerable spirit of the Divine, a spirit that every man and every nation may have, if there be the will.

"Nearly everything that is international and humane in modern life originated with Christianity. Our hospitals, our Red Cross societies, our international jurisprudence, our rescue work among the poor and unfortunate, our education, and the general enlightenment of the world, all is but a combined reflection of the life of Jesus Christ. Through Him alone have we any hope of creating a paradise on earth, and making ourselves a people of permanence and great national destiny."

This is the same lawyer who re-

cently, arguing in behalf of a man who had committed murder and who, as the jailors recognized, had been touched and changed by the influence of the Gospel of Christ, boldly appealed for the life of his client on the ground that a new principle had come into his life, that he was no longer the old man who had committed the crime but had now been made a new man, and he openly in court explained to the judge the fundamental principle of Christianity and that process of redemption by which Jesus Christ, entering a man's life, transforms his character and gives him a power of victory over sin that enables him to live by the strength of God a new and pure life.

Thousands of men in Japanese society who are not prepared themselves to test the Christian faith by personal surrender and make their own lives the gateway for the entrance of its power upon the life of Japan are nevertheless quite candid in their declaration that it is this power which Japan needs in the strange days which have come upon her, wherein the old paths have faded away and the old lights flickered out, and when the nation must find the highway of truth on which the Light of the World is shining. Heavy is the responsibility which those men assume, whether in Japan or in America, who talk of war or the possibility of war in an hour like this when the whole mind and heart of the nation need to be fixt upon the deep, spiritual problems of her own life and her great duty as the friend and helper of her neighboring peoples.