

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

PEKING UNDER THE DRAGON FLAG AGAIN

(July 10, 1917)

ON June 6-7 of last year, the night after Yuan Shih Kai's death, I made a rash attempt to give a short summary of the events which led to the fall and the final disappearance of this man, surely the strongest among the Chinese of the present time. As I now glance over what I then wrote, I discover that some of the closing words, "the morrow will be given over to the quarrels of petty kings", became true for the unhappy country in a peculiarly calamitous way.

The death of Yuan was felt all over China as a release from the intolerable position to which the monarchical movement had brought the country. The new president, Li Yuan Hung, is an unpretentious man, respected by all parties for his unquestioned honesty, but beyond that hardly equipped with any great measure of statesmanship. He came into the foreground during the Revolution of 1911-1912 almost by accident.

On his accession to the presidency he was hailed with the most friendly expectations, but he soon divined that fate had set him a task that was beyond his resources of initiative and foresight.

Premier Tuan Chi Jui was one of Yuan's most trusted followers and after his death the undisputed head of the North China military party. He is reputed to be a courageous, independent and intelli-

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gent leader, who, now that Yuan is gone, should be the best man at the country's disposal, even if his administrative ability is chiefly confined to preserving peace and order by military means.

After some introductory differences of opinion between the political parties, there was a restoration of the parliament which had before been so drastically dismissed by Yuan Shih Kai. The parliament's activity soon turned into the continuation of a struggle for power between the military party under Premier General Tuan on one side, and on the other the parliamentary majority under Kou Ming Tang, which was usually supported by the president. This struggle grew constantly more bitter.

The first disastrous encounter took place on the question of whether China should enter the World War as the enemy of Germany. When the United States broke off diplomatic relations with Germany, China followed with a similar declaration, whereupon the question arose: "Shall we go on and establish a formal state of war?"

To a European audience it may seem comparatively unimportant to speak of China's participation as a belligerent power, since it is clear that the Chinese could not in any military way be effective in Europe. A more careful study of east-Asiatic conditions will, however, show that China's entrance into the war does not lack its interest for the Allies, and that on the other hand this hazardous act, if it is well performed, may be a profitable matter for China.

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For the Allied Powers, especially England, China's entry as a belligerent against Germany would contribute two valuable advantages: first, the free use of China's cheap and, in Europe, badly needed labor; secondly, the possibility of completely uprooting the German business ventures in the Far East.

For China on the other hand there would be an opportunity, in conjunction with her entrance into the war, to devise with the Allied Powers certain regulations vital to the land's economy in regard to the revenues and the indemnities for the Boxer uprising.

The development of these questions presents one of those labyrinthine mazes in which Chinese politics so lamentably abounds.

On one side the inclination to proceed to a declaration of war against Germany was quite general in political circles throughout the land; on the other the parliamentary majority seems to have feared to give the premier and the military clique behind him the economic advantage which might be reaped by an agreement with the Allied Powers.

In order to bring pressure upon the refractory parliament, Tuan undertook in April to hold a conference of the provincial military governors, who appeared either personally or through representatives and certified their agreement with Tuan's war policy.

When this military conference failed to persuade the opposing parliament, an almost riotous demonstration was made before the parliament building.

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The participants, who carried flags with grandiose inscriptions, such as "Representatives of the Five Chinese Nations", etc., consisted chiefly of hired coolies and soldiers in citizen dress. They threatened to blockade the parliament till it should decide to declare war on Germany. The police stood about passively all day, but in the afternoon when the premier succeeded in getting into parliament and was seized as a sort of hostage, the parliament square was cleared in very peremptory fashion.

This affair was the signal to a more acute conflict. During the days immediately following, most of the ministers were dismissed as a protest against the premier, who was held to be in sympathy with the demonstration before the parliament house. When the premier showed no disposition to resign of his own accord, he was dismissed by the president.

General Tuan now went to Tientsin and the remaining military governors betook themselves to their respective homes.

For several days it looked as if President Li had come out victorious. But then came the news that Governor Ni of Anhui had declared his independence, and, soon after, one declaration of independence followed another, while a provisional government was established simultaneously at Tientsin and a punitive military expedition sent against Peking, viz., against the president and parliament.

At this stage General Chang Hsun stepped into the foreground. He was inspector general for the Yangtze provinces and holder of other high offices,

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an exceedingly picturesque figure, a relic of the Middle Ages in a comparatively modern community.

Without any of the book learning so highly prized in China, even — according to some accounts — illiterate, Chang Hsun had by his military prowess and old-time loyalty to superiors won one of the highest positions in the army, which he then strengthened in a very arbitrary fashion so that he made it a state within the State. He was supported by his soldiers, dreaded after their plundering of Nanking in September, 1913, for whose pay he not only made sharp demands on the central government but took possession of levies originally made for quite other purposes in the regions where he encamped.

Chang Hsun offered himself as mediator between the government at Peking and the provisional government at Tientsin, that is between the president and parliament on one side and the rebellious military governors with General Tuan behind them on the other.

In a mandate which highly praised Chang Hsun's deserts the president invited him to come to Peking, and after several days' conference with the authorities at Tientsin he arrived with six thousand of the soldiers so abhorred and dreaded by the populace, half-wild warriors, fantastically uniformed and wearing pigtails. The police were ordered to treat these "pigtail men" with the greatest consideration, and the theaters and other amusement places had instructions not to ask them for entrance money if it was not offered voluntarily. Chang Hsun conducted

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himself from the start with the air of a master, but it must be granted on the other hand that he had thus far maintained discipline among his troops.

At the beginning he seemed also to be in earnest about his position as mediator. The president was first obliged to disband parliament, a concession that accorded ill with his promise earlier in the quarrel to die for the principles of the constitution. Thereupon the revolting military governors were induced to recall their proclamations of independence and withdraw the troops sent on "punitive expeditions" against Peking. In the last days of June it looked as though a peaceful solution of the dissension was in sight.

But with that, on the night of July 1 came Chang's thunderbolt, a *coup* utterly unexpected by all outsiders and carried out in masterful style.

For many years Chang Hsun had been known to sympathize with the restoration of the Manchu empire, but he had given solemn assurance that, because of the anti-monarchial tendencies then prevailing, he had given up any such design.

Nevertheless on the night of Sunday, July 1, the Forbidden City was occupied by Chang's soldiers. A vain attempt was first made to induce President Li to resign in favor of an empire. This opposition, however, hindered little. Despite the representations and lamentings of the highest Manchu dignitaries, the reascension of the boy emperor to the dragon throne was celebrated in the early dawn, and soon afterward the dragon flag was waving every-

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where above the government buildings, while an imperial edict announced the restoration and Chang Hsun's appointment as premier, vice regent of Chihli and high commissioner over Northern China. A striking detail in this truly impressive edict (probably composed by Chang's associate, K'ang Yu Wei, a man more experienced than he in literary art) was the provision that the emperor's subjects might, according as they pleased, wear pigtails or go with close-cropped hair.

All Peking was in consternation over this *fait accompli*, all strategic points were occupied by pigtail soldiers, and Chang Hsun was for the moment undeniably master of the situation.

President Li had, however, succeeded in getting quietly out of the palace and finding refuge in the Japanese legation, where he took occasion to send two telegrams: one to Vice President Feng Kuo Chang at Nanking, requesting him to act as president; the other to General Tuan, reinstating him in the office of premier.

Even before President Li had in this moment of desperation sought an alliance with his antagonist, General Tuan, the latter had begun to rally all the forces at his disposal for an armed opposition to Chang Hsun.

The main body of Chang Hsun's troops was still in his old headquarters at Hsuehchow in the northern part of the province of Kiangsu, and the first thing to do was to hinder the transportation of these men, who were already on their way to Peking. By swift

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and resolute action General Tuan first succeeded in getting the governor of Shantung to turn against the troops at Hsuchow, whereupon the governor of Chihli, who had already declared himself for the empire, turned his troops against Peking.

There was in these days a great migration of well-to-do Chinese from the capital. Every train to Tientsin was packed with fugitives, and those who could not leave Peking sought refuge in the Legation Quarter or with their foreign friends. Ever since the severe reprisal after the Boxer rising, the Chinese retained the impression that the houses of foreigners would shelter them against impending disturbances. To show the practical consequences of this state of mind let me cite some of my personal experiences:

The General Director of Mining has rented his house to me, only that I may raise the Swedish flag there. I have from five to eight Chinese constantly living in my own house, and my nearest neighbor, General T'ang, who has soldiers to guard his house, notwithstanding sends his twenty-year-old sister every evening to sleep under my more secure protection. Chang Hsun's private residence lies only a few hundred meters from my house. He has now fitted it up as a fortified camp, with soldiers' tents, cannon, machine guns, automobiles and baggage wagons, the whole protected at the outer gates by sandbag barricades and earthen ramparts.

On a couple of mornings recently we had the pleasure of seeing a flying machine circle over the Forbidden City. It dropped several bombs, which

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caused more alarm than direct damage. Malice reports that at the explosion the boy emperor slid off the throne, the courtiers rushed from the palace in their automobiles, and the dowager empresses did not dare to take food for the next twenty-four hours.

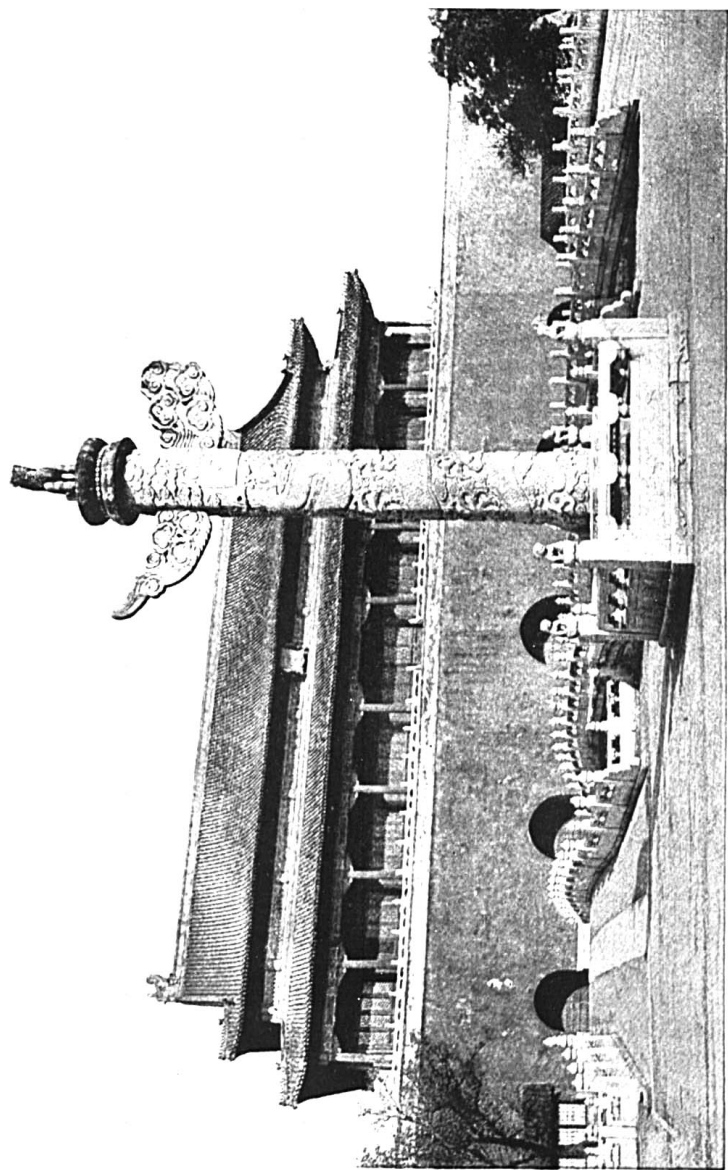
Chang Hsun's cause is certainly lost by this time. The troops he has sent out of the city have been beaten in a couple of minor engagements, the city gates are in the hands of the republican troops, and a couple of times the sound of a rifle has reached my abode of peace.

The dragon flags have again disappeared from the city, though they still wave over Chang Hsun's camps. A number of his soldiers have cut off their switches of hair, since General Tuan has proclaimed that all "pigtailed" met with in the struggle are to be slain without mercy. A price of one hundred thousand dollars (Chinese) is offered for the capture of Chang Hsun dead or alive, but there are still negotiations with him.

Is there a peaceful solution near or will there be street fighting with fire and pillage? These are questions that will be decided in the next few days.

Evening of July 12. The epilogue of Chang Hsun's adventure in restoration was played to-day.

At half-past three in the morning the first cannon shots sounded and machine guns began to rattle in various quarters. Chang Hsun's main force, which lay within the extensive wall enclosing the Altar of Heaven, became isolated at once and in the course of the day was disarmed.



T'IENT'AN M'EN, THE CHIEF OUTER GATE OF THE FORBIDDEN CITY

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Detachments of republican troops penetrated into Peking through many of the city gates and made a concentric march toward Chang's house. Around Tung An Men, which was the nearest entrance to the headquarters of the emperor-maker, there was quite a sharp fight, which led to the capture of this important gate by the republicans.

Small groups of the attacking soldiers climbed up combinations of ladders to the summit of the "red wall" directly facing Chang's house and from there opened fire, presumably with little effect. But meanwhile the wall had been broken in several places, and when about two o'clock cannon were put into these openings, Chang's house was soon set on fire. During this procedure, however, he had escaped in a foreign automobile to the legation quarter, where he was received into the Dutch legation. By five o'clock his house was a smoking ruin.

Stray shots from the republican artillery have done a good deal of harm in Chinese houses both north and south of my home, and my men have collected a handful of shell fragments and rifle bullets in our courtyard. But the police have been at their posts in the streets during the whole fight, and as far as I can tell there has been hardly any plundering.