

made by the war with Japan, the outside world seems to have been quite unaware of the utter rottenness of the Empire as a political institution. At the touch of the iron hand of the foreigner the walls of China, seemingly as stable as they were exclusive, crumbled into dust. Yet so slight was the strain put upon them from within that the Empire seems to have maintained itself up to the present in full integrity. Even yet, if left to itself, there seems to be no reason why it should not continue for ages in the same unbroken unity. Like so many other features of Asiatic social life, the structure of Chinese society is a standing contradiction to many of the supposed universal principles of accepted political philosophy. The fact is that the Chinese Empire holds together, not in virtue of its central organization or national spirit, but in virtue of the local customs and habits of its people. The general inertia with reference to imperial matters permits even a worn-out political faction to stand for a central unity. The central power being a mere political simulacrum, it is helpless in the face of determined foreign encroachment. All the great powers have already staked out frontage claims along the coast, with indefinite possibilities of extension into the interior. And now Italy, Japan and Belgium are boldly presenting claims for concessions without any show of compensation, and they seem likely to be granted. It will then be in order for Spain and Turkey to claim their shares in the spoil with the lofty air of superiority which so well becomes those ancient and respectable powers. If states could be judged by the standards of morality, the parallel to the Chinese situation would be the case of an old lady of ancient family becoming bedridden and deserted, whereupon the neighbours flock in and pillage the house of everything worth carrying off, each one excusing himself on the ground that if *he* did not take what he could get it would not preserve the old lady's property, as it would simply fall into less worthy hands.

On China's part there promises to be little obstacle offered to the partition of the Empire. But in the very helplessness of the Chinese Court lurks the germ of retribution for the spoilers. Concessions granted by the Chinese Court are rapidly losing all value or importance, since they simply represent degrees of pressure, and a conflict of pressures promises a very dangerous situation. The integrity of the Turkish empire has been maintained for so long a time simply because of the dreaded consequences of any attempt to distribute it. China, on the other hand, seems to have surprised the European powers by the ease with which it goes to pieces under pressure. They wish only to extort certain limited concessions at present, leaving the rest to be gained by gradual expansion as circumstances and safety warrant. But the concessions come with fatal facility as far