

## Chinese Characteristics.\*

THIS is an interesting and remarkable book. It is evidently the work of a man whose eyes are open, who to cleverness and practical intelligence adds the gift of insight and has abundant stores of first hand information. Though it has neither the personal element of a narrative of travel, nor the dramatic movement of such a book as Pierre Lotis' story of Japanese life, "Madame Chrysantheme," it carries the reader into the very heart of the social life of the Chinese people, a fascination which cannot be denied is exerted upon the Western mind by the spectacle of this strange Eastern civilization, and gradually the reader awakens to the fact that he is caught by the interest of a story. A whole people is the hero of the tale, and the interest of the plot lies in the curiosity awakened by a thousand perplexing paradoxes. As one reads about this extraordinary people, the mind seems to swing like a pendulum, now to one side, and now to the other. If a Western nation is conspicuous for a certain virtue, it seems safe to conclude that the opposite vice will be infrequent, and *vice versa*. This logic does not hold in the case of the Chinese. Alternately the mind rises to the zenith of wonderment and praise at the filial piety of the Chinese, only to fall to the nadir of scorn and blame at the unfilial spirit of the same people. At first, the problem suggested by these extraordinary contradictions seems insoluble. But presently the key is found in a leading trait, viz., devotion to ceremony. The Chinese beat the Pharisees hollow in the stress they lay upon "forms," together with a complete absence of "the spirit." Bad form is in China a sin, but sin is not bad form. A Chinese may lie and cheat and steal, and it doesn't matter if only he preserves his "face." This word is almost impossible to translate, yet in understanding it lies the key to many phases of Chinese life. In order to understand, however imperfectly, what is meant by "face," we must take account of the fact that as a race the Chinese have a strongly dramatic instinct. Upon very slight provocation, any Chinese regards himself in the light of an actor in a drama. If his troubles are adjusted, he speaks of having "got off the stage" with credit, and if they are not adjusted he finds no way to "retire from the stage." All this, be it clearly understood, has nothing to do with realities. The question is never of facts, but always of form. To deny a theft is to preserve one's "face," to be found out is to lose "face." If debtor and creditor meet and the one affirms his due with sufficient vehemence and the other strenuously denies his debt, both preserve their "face," though the creditor does not get his money. "To save one's face and lose one's life would not seem to us very attractive, but we have heard of a Chinese district magistrate who, as a special favour, was allowed to be beheaded in his robes of office in order to save his face!"

The Chinese people are economical, industrious, and, of course, polite. Chinese politeness is very largely the equivalent of etiquette, carried to a pitch of formalism, which is bewildering and almost maddening to a Westerner. The disregard of time, the disregard of accuracy, the talent for misunderstanding and the talent for indirection displayed by this people suggests China as a very desirable asylum for certain aggravating persons. When a foreigner knows enough of the language to converse, to his pained surprise he finds he is not understood. Driven to desperation, he turns fiercely on his adversary and inquires: "Do you understand what I am saying at this moment?" "No," he replies, "I do not understand you!" When driven to close quarters the most ignorant Chinese has one sure defence which never fails—he "did not know," he "did not understand"—twin propositions, which, like charity, cover a multitude of sins. "Flexible inflexibility" is another leading characteristic. Teach a Chinese your way, he smiles approval, give him a new and improved machine, he is enraptured, but to-morrow, his way, and the old machine are to the fore. "The Chinese is like the bamboo. It is graceful, it is everywhere useful, it is supple, it is hollow. When the east wind blows it bends to the west. When the west wind blows it bends to the east. When no wind blows it does not bend at all. The bamboo plant is a grass. It is easy to tie knots in grasses. It is difficult, despite its suppleness, to tie knots in the bamboo plant."

Intellectual turbidity, the absence of nerves, contempt for foreigners, the absence of public spirit, conservatism, indifference to comfort and convenience, chronic poverty, astonishing physical vitality, astounding patience and perseverance, cheerfulness and contentment, are all characteristics of this race. The absence of sympathy, mutual suspicion and lack of sincerity are stains upon their morality and blots upon their civilization. The rate of interest is from 30 to 35 per cent., and the reason of it is that the risk of lending is so great. We have said nothing of their system of government, or of their religion, but it is quite impossible to give, in a few words, any adequate idea of the interest and completeness of the work before us. The conclusion forced upon all readers is China's lack of righteousness. The absence of sincerity interferes with trade and commerce and keeps back her civilization. We can imagine a shrewd Yankee speculator returning from a business reconnaissance in China and giving ten thousand dollars to foreign missions, designated "for the civilization of China," in order that presently his children might go and trade there.

A grim humour is present in every page, but it has its origin in the moral and social state of a people who to our eyes appear grotesque. Defeat in the present war may be China's salvation. In that case the Chinese are certain to adopt the civilization which has done so much for their rival, Japan. The religion of the West will in time become the religion of the Empire and the Ethics of Confucius will fall before the Sermon on the Mount, and then who can say what tasks will prove too great for the really splendid virtues of this strange and wonderful people.

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Chancellor Pasquier.\*

WE hail with pleasure this further instalment of Pasquier's history. In some respects the present volume may not so specially interest English readers as the earlier ones, the great revolution, wondrous consulate and first empire having passed; nevertheless, the exact student of European history in its relation to English can ill afford to neglect this volume. We have in our former notices given our view of the Chancellors' character as manifested in these memoirs. We may so far repeat as to say that his judicial calmness and calm truthfulness are as conspicuous as ever in his bright flowing narrative. The present volume covers the period of Bourbon rule after the first abdication, Napoleon's return from Elba, and the eventful "hundred days" with its Waterloo, and the occupation of Paris by the Allies until the fall of the Talleyrand Ministry. Of that ministry, our author was a member. The Richelieu ministry found him simply one of the Chamber of Deputies. And there the present volume ends.

Though M. Pasquier is by no means to be considered an infallible guide, nevertheless his clearness of vision and coolness of judgement, forbids on our part any decidedly adverse criticism of his positions. We serve our readers purpose better by indicating a few of his interesting comments.

It is well known that Napoleon introduced the old barbaric custom of spoliation in war, and to enrich Paris he plundered the art galleries of cities he had conquered. The allied powers demanded the restitution of these works of art, and, when the French Government demurred, "the allies had no hesitation in adopting the brutal (?) course of doing what they styled justice to themselves"—they simply took back the things which belonged to them. "Great was the indignation in the capital, but, however widespread it might be, its helplessness to resist was no less evident." M. Pasquier was pre-eminently a Parisian, hence for France he could serve under either Bourbon or Emperor, and complacently see the museums of Paris enriched with spoils from other capitals, but rise in indignation at the quiet resumption by those cities of the things which had been stolen from them when the fortune of war turned in their favor.

The Chancellor was certainly not enraptured with M. de Talleyrand's diplomatic skill at the Vienna conferences. While giving him full credit for "extricating himself from the very humble position to which he seemed condemned from the very moment of his entering Vienna," he feels that the interests of France were sacrificed by the proposed western boundaries which left too many points of exposure with Prussia and the Netherlands.

\* "Chinese Characteristics," by A. H. Smith. New York, Chicago and Toronto: Fleming H. Revell & Company.

\* Memoirs of Chancellor Pasquier, Vol III, 1814-1815. New York, Charles Scribners' Sons; Toronto: Wm. Briggs. 8vo., pp. 461. \$2.50.