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CHINA:

BEING

'THE TIMES' SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE FROM CHINA  
IN THE YEARS 1857-58.

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WITH CORRECTIONS AND ADDITIONS BY THE AUTHOR,

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## PREFACE.

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THE letters collected in this volume have been received with so much favour by the general public that I am desirous they should live a little longer in the world's notice. Whether they have any value in a literary point of view I am not careful to inquire : I shall value them only by the effect they may have upon the minds of my countrymen ; and their success towards this object must be entirely due to that great organ of public opinion which created them, and gave them currency. It is, to my thinking, no small privilege to have been allowed to take a rather prominent part in the most noteworthy enterprise of our age. If the treaty which has just been concluded open the interior of China to Western commerce, it will open it also to Christianity. How long it may be before these two elements of civilization leaven the whole lump, we must not rashly reckon ; but it is impossible that our merchants and our missionaries can course up and down the inland waters of this great region, and traffic in their cities and preach in their villages, without wearing at the crust of a Chinaman's stoical and sceptical conceit. The whole present system in China is a hollow thing, with a hard, brittle surface : we try in vain to scratch it ; but some day a happy blow will shiver it. It will all go together. A Chinaman has no idea of surrendering a part to save the rest. The only question with him is, how long can it be resisted ? how can it be evaded ? The shrewdest among the

Chinese feel that everything depends upon a steady and unyielding resistance to change. The king of Cochin, whose work I shall cite hereafter, is in accord with all the governing classes of China in believing that concession is always fatal. They who have intercourse with the mercantile and emigrating classes among the Chinese may think they see progress at work ; but the brokers who deal with British merchants, and the emigrants who come back from Australia or California, have no influence upon the government of China. Yeh, and men like Yeh, are the only exponents of imperial policy.

It was this knowledge which induced me to sacrifice so much in order to be able to study the character of one great Chinese statesman. They who read the anecdotes I collected during my voyage in company with this important, but not agreeable personage, may see why it is the Chinese go on using bows and arrows, and exploding rusty matchlocks. It is plain that Yeh is the Eldon of China—Eldon intensified, and omnipresent and omnipotent in Chinese official life. It is “bows and arrows, and the wisdom of our ancestors”—“no barbarians, and the Chinese constitution.” It is plain that young China, from Singapore or California, and even middle-aged China, in the person of the Howquas and Minquas, can do nought against this obese old China.

Lord Elgin was well rid of Yeh. He must be the despair of all diplomacy. He is one of those things to which nature has given great inert force, and no other power. He is like a landslip or a fallen avalanche, blocking up a pass. You must tunnel through it, or you must wait till it melts away ; push it from your path you cannot. It is his duty and his destiny to lie there, and there he will lie. That “Taoli,” of which we read so much, is, among its many