

A RETROSPECT
OF
POLITICAL AND COMMERCIAL AFFAIRS
IN
CHINA
DURING THE FIVE YEARS 1873 TO 1877.

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PREFACE.

FIVE years ago, a small volume was published containing a reprint from the "North-China Herald" of the Retrospects of political and commercial events which are written every year in that paper, for the five years from 1868 to 1872.

The project had been entertained of carrying back the work in another volume to 1863, in order to provide a fairly complete, even if very brief, sketch of events since the close of the last war. Partly from lack of encouragement, however, partly from other causes, this idea was not carried out; but it was resolved to carry forward the design and to publish a fresh volume at the expiry of another five years—at the close of 1877.

That period has arrived; and a second volume, covering the period from 1873 to 1877, is now published, with the conviction that it will be found a useful book of reference pending the appearance of a more pretentious history of our intercourse with China.

The Political articles are, as in the former volume, solely from the pen of the Editor, who is conscious that many defects can be charged against them. The excuse is that they do not pretend to be standard history, thoughtfully elaborated in the calm of a study, but simply retrospective sketches of each year's events, written originally for publication in a newspaper.

The Commercial reviews, on the contrary, proceed from many different authors ; but in each case from experts in the subject treated of. The scope of these articles has continued to expand yearly since they were first undertaken, as their value has been recognised ; and they form, it is believed, a careful and complete review of the course of the four chief staples of the China trade during the period treated of.

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RETROSPECT

OF POLITICAL EVENTS IN

CHINA AND JAPAN

DURING FIVE YEARS (1873 TO 1877.)

1873.

Political. THE leading incident which we had to chronicle last year, was the marriage of the Emperor—not, as we pointed out at the time, the mere fact that His Majesty had taken to himself a consort, but the acceptance of personal responsibility and power implied in the proceeding. And his formal assumption of power, after a short interval from the marriage, is the first incident that claims notice in our review of 1873. His Majesty formally accepted the responsibility of government on the 23rd of February; and the Foreign Ministers at once wrote to the Tsungli-yamen, intimating their wish to congratulate him personally on the event. Much haggling about form and ceremony; much endeavour on the part of the Chinese to deprive the concession of its value, and some effort on the part of the Ministers to assert the position of the countries they represented—ensued. His Excellency Soyeshima, Foreign Secretary to the Japanese Government, arrived in the meantime, as Ambassador from the Mikado, and at once claimed admission to the Presence on the same footing as his colleagues. Rumour said at the time, that his firm attitude contributed to the eventual solution of the problem; we must await the publication of official papers before judging accurately the value of the report.

However this may be, the Audience was eventually had on the 29th, in the building where Envoys of Tributary States are habitually received, but with the essential difference that, in this case, the form of salutation was foreign. The details of the ceremony appear to have been unobjectionable. The misfortune is that proper measures were not taken to give publicity to the circumstances, and to establish clearly in the eyes of

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the Chinese the true position and power of Foreigners. So far from this being done, the only notice taken of the ceremony in the Peking Gazette was a statement that, as foreign envoys (designated by the same term as the annual emissaries from Liuchiu and Corea) had supplicated (the same term used by Chinese to supplicate a mandarin) permission to present letters from their respective Governments, they might be allowed to do so—and a routine announcement that the Emperor would go on a stated day to the Temple in question, for the purpose of granting audiences. The Mandarins who were present at the audience know of course that the barbarians were too ill-bred and too unruly to *kotow*, and that the Son of Heaven mercifully condoned their ignorance; but what can the great mass of Chinese infer from the Gazette utterances, but that the foreign envoys had been granted permission to humble themselves before the Solitary Man, in the same manner and place as other envoys had humbled themselves in all ages?

Greater in real, though less perhaps in nominal, importance than the events just sketched, have been the successes of Imperial arms in Yunnan and Kansuh. After years of independence under a Sultan of their own election, the Mahomedans of Yunnan were finally crushed by the capture of Talifoo, about the time of the Emperor's accession. Of course the city was taken by treachery; even in Europe a proverb exists that all is fair in love or war, and the Chinese push the axiom to an extreme. They much prefer diplomacy to fighting, and are adepts in the art of corruption. What is unfortunate is that some grains of humanity are not also latent their character. The accounts received in Burmah, of the capture and sack of Talifoo, describe a scene of massacre and pillage scarcely equalled by the deeds of the Jews upon the Amalekites.

And now, from the North-west, we have an account of the capture by Tso Tsungtang of the city of Suh-chow, which was the chief stronghold of the Mahomedans in the further half of Kansuh. Suh-chow is situated on the Tola river, just beyond the neck of land where Kansuh is nearly divided by the converging provinces of Mongolia and Kokonor. The account in the Peking Gazette speaks of hard fighting; and we accept the statement for what it may be worth. It also gives a description of butchery rivalling the achievements at Tali. "The troops," to quote from the Imperial decree, "massacred the Mussulman inhabitants down to the last man. Thus truly are Heaven's vengeance accomplished, and the feelings of humankind assuaged." It is strange how all people, of all religions, in all times, have been prone to claim the sympathy of Heaven in the slaughter of its creatures! The success is evidently thought much of at Peking, from the honours that have been showered on the successful general and his subordinates. It seems to show that the Mahomedan insurrection has been thoroughly quenched within the boundaries of China proper; and when we remember that, a few years ago, not only was Yunnan a Mussulman State, but Kansuh, Shensi and Shanse had been over-run by the Mahomedans in the Northwest, we may