

China's Secret Societies.

The Chinese Empire furnishes an excellent illustration of Herbert Spencer's dictum that an autocratic government fosters secret societies. In a popular government where the national policy is shaped by public opinion, freedom of speech deprives the secret society of its very reason for being and where citizens of a republic form a secret association it must be from the pure love of secrecy. But in a government where the power of life and death and the pursuit of happiness is in the hands of one, and where opposition or even remonstrance is deemed treason, those who desire to effect reform or achieve revenge must resort to secrecy until the strength of numbers gives some assurance of safety and success.

The government of China is paternal, but not of necessity despotic, the theory being that it is the pleasure of the Emperor to take care of his people as a father for his children, and that he will give patient heed to all complaints from his subjects, which according to the Emperor Wouti of the Han dynasty, is one of the most valuable sources of a sovereign's information. But Chinese theory and practice are widely separated. The officers with whom the people really come in contact have generally, in spite of the civil service examinations, bought their way to place like the Roman pro-consul, and, like Caesar, have three fortunes to make before they return from their government; and as their tenure of power is extremely insecure these farmers of the public revenue make all the hay they can while the sun continues to shine. The imperial government is paternal, but the rule of the mandarins is rather that of a stepfather. And so from the earliest times China has been, as it is now, honeycombed by secret societies. Indeed, popular plottings in secret serve the same purpose in China as does the ballot box in our own country; they answer

the people's will in framing the national policy and changing the national head. Not that such societies are always revolutionarily or even political, for they are often social or religious; and yet, like the society for Gazing on the moon, than which nothing could appear more innocuous, organizations originally social are sometimes used to accomplish the most momentous political revolutions.

The first of these associations of which we have record is the 'Crimson Eyebrows.' Immediately before the beginning of the christian era the great Han dynasty which had ruled China for 200 years, and was to rule for 200 more, was temporarily under a cloud, formed by a too powerful minister named Wang Mang, who made and deposed emperors at his will and permitted each monarch to retain the crown only so long as it served the ambition of the minister; until having by long practice become proficient in the art of creating Sons of Heaven, he brought forth his masterpiece, A. D. 6, by himself assuming the purple, or more accurately the yellow. In no country has loyalty to a fallen house been shown more devotedly than in China in the many dynastic changes which have occurred during her history of 5,000 years.

The new Emperor had to meet rebellion on all sides, but was able to do so successfully, and executions followed his victorious arms until it seemed that to oppose the usurper was to court death. Here was a legitimate opportunity for the Chinaman's genius for conspiracy. Fan Chong, an adherent of the Hans, organized a band in the Province of Shantung which quickly grew into an army, said to number 200,000 men. Each member of the band had his eyebrows painted crimson to signify that he dedicated the last drop of his blood to the cause; and it was, without doubt, this symbolism, so effective upon the childish

mind of half civilized man, which determined the issue of the conquest. The 400,000 fiery eyes struck terror into the soldiers of Wang Mang and brought inspiration to the forces of Han, and the usurper was defeated and slain.

The curse of China has been the indolence of its Emperors, who have too often resigned all power into the hands of ministers or the Empress. Lingti (A. D. 168-190) of the Hans left the country to the misgovernment of eunuchs of the palace. Then was formed the association of the "Yellow Bonnets," who incited a revolt; but the head dress of imperial yellow did not command the success which attended the Dragon's Crimson Eye, and after a few initial victories the Yellow Bonnets met defeat and extinction at the hands of Lingti's generals.

In 1279, after a desperate struggle of nearly half a century, China passed under the rule of the Mongols, and Kublai Kahn, the successor of the great Genghis, founded the Yuen dynasty. The Chinese were most unwilling subjects, and after a rule of ninety years the foreigners were driven back across the northern border whence they had come. Strange to say, the leader of the patriots was a Buddhist monk, and one most powerful factor in accomplishing the happy result was the Society for Gazing on the Moon. The ostensible purpose of this association was to promote the worship of the Queen of Heaven, and whether anything more inimical to the reigning house than this most innocent diversion was intended by the founders of the society is not known. The Chinese dignity the most trivial affairs of life with sentiments borrowed from the ancients, and cover the most dangerous conspiracies with the moral precepts of Confucius. Whatever its original purpose, the society became a potent ally to the political plotters who were striving to restore a native rule to the Empire. The annual festival for the worship of the moon became a gathering of conspirators, and the cakes which it was the custom to eat in honor of the lunar goddess were made to do duty as envoys most extraordinary. A summons to rise against the Mongols on a set day was inclosed in the cakes, which were sent from place to place throughout the Empire.

We hear nothing of such societies dur-

ing the succeeding Ming dynasty, but with the Manchu conquest in 1644 the secret conclave was revived with increased vigor. The Manchus and Chinese have never amalgamated, and have hardly mingled; the conquered still regard the conquerors as an inferior race of barbarians. Every large town has its Manchu city and its Chinese city, and in every town there is a Manchu garrison. The native brotherhood which has, under various names, religiously set itself to the task of ousting the Manchu or Ts'ing dynasty was attended in its origin by a miracle. The Emperor Yung Ching (1722-1735) directed or allowed severe persecution against both Christianity and Buddhism, and in one of the religious outbreaks the Shaolin Buddhist monastery was sacked and burned, and many of the monks were killed. A few escaped, breathing vengeance against the house of Ts'ing, and in their flight came to a stream where they stopped to quench their thirst. Having cooled their throats, but not, it would seem, their imaginations, they saw floating on the water a china censer, which being recovered was found to bear this legend: "Overthrow the Ts'ing and restore the Ming!" They straightway determined to obey the command thus miraculously conveyed, and mixing their blood with wine they drank to the destruction of the Manchus. Thus was formed the Water Lily Sect, which has been the mother of all the secret societies, except that of the Boxers, which have threatened the rule of the Manchus and endangered the very existence of the Empire during the present century.

The long reign of Kien Lung, the wisest of the Manchu rulers, gave little cause and no opportunity for aggressive action on the part of the new brotherhood, but in the reign of his successor, Kia King, outbreaks occurred in Shantung province under the direction of the White Water Lilies, and in 1808 the assassination of the Emperor was openly attempted in the streets of Peking. The outrage was rightly or wrongly charged to the White Water Lilies, and an edict was published making death the penalty for membership. This penalty was to some extent avoided by changing the name of the association as often as the necessity arose. It was called the Theen te hwuy, 'The Celesto-Ter-

restrial Society, or the Society That Unites Heaven and Earth,' and later the San ho hwui, 'The Society of the Three United,' from which comes from the name 'Triads,' by which the society has been most commonly known. The 'three united' are heaven, earth and man. Another name was Hung Kia, or 'Flood Family,' signifying that its membership should overflow the land. A new society also arose in the reign of Kia King known as the Green Water Lilies.

Under various names and sometimes under none the operations of the society were carried on with remarkable vigor and daring. Insurrections continued during the reign of Kia King and in 1813 another unsuccessful attempt was made upon the life of the Emperor. There was little open activity during the next reign, that of Taikwang (1820-50), but the Triads were quietly fomenting the great Taiping Rebellion, which in 1850 plunged China into a civil war lasting fifteen years, which was finally quelled with the help of Gen. 'Chinese' Gordon. The Triads have since been dormant, if not dead; yet their spirit was reincarnated for a time in the Kolao Hwui, a society formed of veterans of the imperial troops who had been engaged against the Taipings. Unlike their predecessors, however, they attacked not the Manchus, but the white foreigners and occasioned the rising against the whites in 1889.

The avowed purpose of the Triads was the dethronement of the Ts'ings, but the membership was drawn mainly from the dregs of society and their practical activity lay largely along the line of burglary robbery and murder, and in all the vicissitudes of their dangerous calling they were faithful to each other and to their oath. Their motto was:

The blessing reciprocally share,
The woe reciprocally bear.

The impressive ceremonies attending their initiation were conducive to fidelity. In the dead of night the novice was brought before the assembly, often gathered in the depths of a forest, and as a preliminary ceremony was obliged to prick his finger with a silver needle, allowing the blood to drip into a bowl of wine, which he then drank. The written oath, consisting of

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A PARISIAN FLOWER GIRL.