

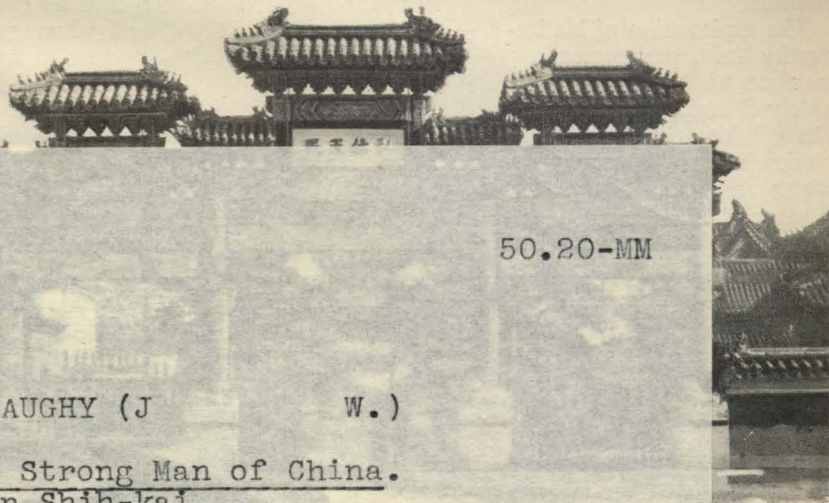


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THE STRONG MAN OF CHINA



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McNAUGHY (J W.)

The Strong Man of China.
Yuan Shih-kai...

New York, Munsey's Magazine,
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Yuan Shih-kai,
to whom His Country's
Millions Look
at the Present Crisis

by
J. W. McConaughy

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WHEN the Japanese drove the last remnant of Chinese authority out of Seoul, and set the tide for the final swallowing of Korea, the man to

leave the capital of the Hermit Kingdom was a bull-necked young politician who was known in several chancelleries as Yuan Shih-kai, the Chinese director-general of trade and international relations in Korea.

That was his official title. Unofficially, he was known as a bold intrigant, a daring schemer, of unusual coolness, judgment, and audacity. He had checked the emissaries of Tokyo at every turn until, beaten in trickery, Japan drew the sword and cut her way through the feeble resistance of the great Chinese jellyfish to a position of commanding importance in Korea and throughout the Far East.

When the guns began to shoot there was

nothing for Yuan Shih-kai to do but to get out of Seoul—a feat which he accomplished under the guard of British sailors.

That was only half of the difficulty, however. In other countries a diplomat whose mission is unsuccessfully terminated by war or other causes returns to his own capital in a state of honor in direct proportion to his share in the failure of the mission; but the Manchu rulers of China ordered these things otherwise. They had a genial habit of cutting off the heads of dignitaries who chanced to fail in a duel of diplomacy merely because the scene of combat had shifted to the battle-field, where gallant armies and navies did their best without equipment—the military funds having been spent in additional decorations for the imperial palaces.

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In spite of this tradition, and although

Yuan Shih-kai, who had witnessed the downfall of his country's influence in a rich empire, was not a Manchu, he returned unmolested to Peking, where he was made much of at the court of the dowager empress.

The explanation of his immunity from punishment may be given in two widely different ways. The "historical" version is that the young man had displayed such marked ability as a diplomat, administrator, organizer, and soldier that his failure at Seoul was not held against him. The great Li Hung Chang thought well of him, and was influential enough to protect him.

The other is one of those "behind the scenes" stories that level-headed, earnest Anglo-Saxons bring back after a score of years in the ancient empire. It is a rather complicated but very interesting tale, especially as the chief figure has lately accepted the reversion of the imperial crown of the Manchus.

According to this romantic story—which was given with much detail to the writer by a man who has been for many years a close student of Chinese affairs—the rise of Yuan Shih-kai dates back to the fact that the late dowager empress was rather a disgraceful old lady. Graft, intrigue, and even worse things were rampant at her court. It is said, for instance, that one of the

principal reasons for the complete defeat of the Chinese navy at the hands of the Japanese was the diverting of the navy funds by the chief of her household to the rebuilding of the Summer Palace. Men who had no official standing, and whom you would not care to invite to dinner,

were the real rulers of China by virtue of the old dowager's favor. First among these was one

Jung Lu, a Manchu, who had been her lover before she married the Emperor Hsien-feng. Jung Lu had also gone through the ceremony of becoming a blood-brother to Yuan Shih-kai, the resourceful and enterprising young Chinese from Honan.

This is quite a ceremony in China, and is binding above all

other ties. Just why Jung Lu should have picked out Yuan as a blood-brother is not clear. Yuan is of the full-blooded Chinese, a people for whom the ruling Manchus professed no small contempt. He was the son of a district governor in the province of Honan, born in 1859. From his early youth he had had his eye of ambition on the official service of the empire; but for a time it seemed as if the doors were shut against him. In the first place, he was not a Manchu; and again, his education was deficient.

The age-old system of civil service examination in China is a peculiar one. What a man knows about bud-



YUAN SHIH-KAI, THE STRONG MAN OF CHINA,
WHO HAS RISEN FROM OBSCURITY TO
THE THRONE OF A GREAT EMPIRE

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THE FAMOUS PEACOCK THRONE IN THE GRAND THRONE-ROOM OF THE IMPERIAL PALACE IN THE FORBIDDEN CITY, PEKING—HERE FOR CENTURIES THE MANCHU EMPERORS OF CHINA WERE CROWNED

From a copyrighted photograph by Underwood & Underwood, New York

get work, municipal administration, cost system and purchasing, estimate and apportionment, does not much matter. What he knows about the ancient classics of Chinese literature matters materially. Herein Yuan fell down in his examinations.

And here it was that Yuan Shih-kai's blood-brother began to figure large in his destinies. Among the slant-eyed but punctilious gentlemen of China blood-brotherhood appears to have a significance all but incomprehensible to the western mind,

which holds its obligations rather more lightly. Indeed, the Chinese do not measure up to many of our standards. In their tongue there is no equivalent for a "scrap of paper," as applied to a written obligation. What a certain generation of Americans was taught to consider as "business acumen" the Chinese merchant regards as plain dishonesty. There are other matters in which we might study their ethics with some spiritual profit.

And a blood-brother is a blood-brother.

There is more or less actual transfusion of blood in the ceremony, and it is a binding tie, so much so that, according to this version of history, the tale of Yuan's life hangs thereby.

China. As a result of the operations of the Celestial armies, the Hermit Kingdom was brought under the political domination of China.

Yuan played an important, albeit not



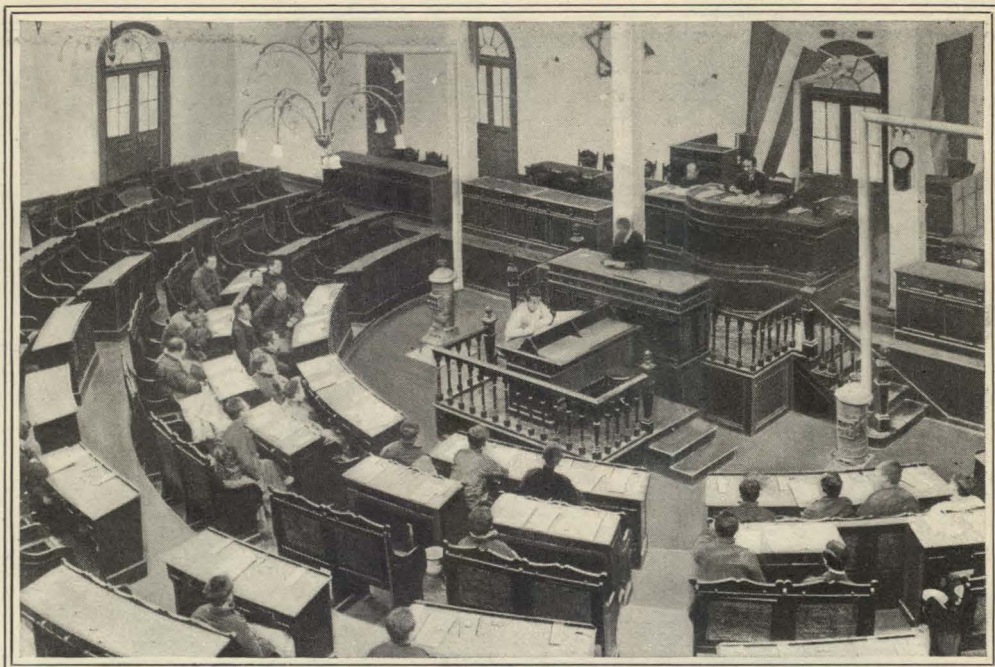
LITTLE P'U YI, THE LAST OF THE MANCHU EMPERORS OF CHINA, WHO WAS DEPOSED FROM THE THRONE OF HIS ANCESTORS ON FEBRUARY 12, 1912, TO MAKE WAY FOR THE CHINESE REPUBLIC

Failing to enter the public service by the classical examination route, Yuan presently bobbed up in Korea as a military secretary attached to the Chinese army. This Korean campaign stands out all by itself in rather pathetic loneliness as the one successful military adventure of modern

conspicuous, part in these affairs. He displayed remarkable ability as a military organizer and as a tactful diplomat. According to one story, his achievements attracted the attention of Li Hung Chang, and it was by his procurement that Yuan was made political resident at Seoul.



TSI-AN, THE FAMOUS DOWAGER EMPRESS OF CHINA, WIFE OF THE EMPEROR HSIEN-FENG—FOR YEARS TSI-AN WAS THE POWER BEHIND THE THRONE AT A COURT WHICH OUTSHONE ALL OTHERS IN INTRIGUE, GRAFT, AND DEBAUCHERY



THE FIRST—AND LAST—CHINESE HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT IN SESSION—THIS BODY GREW OUT OF DR. SUN YAT SEN'S REVOLUTION, AND WAS ABOLISHED BY YUAN SHIH-KAI AS SOON AS HE WAS FIRMLY SEATED IN THE PRESIDENCY

This was in 1883, when Yuan was twenty-four years old. It is clear that no matter what secret or open influences may have been at work for him, he was undoubtedly a young man of astonishing talents. He was entrusted with the supreme command of the Chinese troops in Korea, and with the more important and delicate game of diplomatic intrigue.

It was his job to maintain the authority and prestige of China in the Hermit Kingdom, and it was a considerable assignment. Handling merely the natives should have been fairly simple, but Korea was even then plainly coming in between the upper and the nether millstones. From opposite directions the Japanese avalanche and the Slav glacier were closing in, and the only question was which would arrive first.

At one time it looked as if the Japanese had checkmated Yuan and won the puppet King of Korea away. In the latter feat they had undoubtedly succeeded, but in regard to the former they had reckoned without Yuan. With startling suddenness and simplicity he conducted what was known as the Palace Revolution of 1884. The Japanese legation was burned, and the Korean monarch was brought back to his "allegiance."

In the light of subsequent history, it is probable that the war between Japan and China, which broke out ten years later, was inevitable from that day; but the fact was not yet apparent. Yuan continued to hold forth at Seoul, and to meet and beat all comers in the game of lies, trickery, hoodwinking, and sculduggery which is known as international diplomacy.

But in 1894 all of his fine-spun combinations were ripped up with the sword. Japan and China went to war, and Yuan had to flee from Seoul, where the Japanese were filled with a strong, not to say feverish, desire to lay hands on him. The ubiquitous British bluejackets were on hand, as usual, and they saved Yuan and got him safely home.

As you know, China did not fare particularly well in the struggle that ensued. It was a war of the Japanese nation against the Manchus of Peking, and a large part of the Celestial Empire utterly declined to take it seriously.

Like most countries that have any great meridian length, China is sharply divided into a north and a south. It is well to understand that fact, which has a vital bearing on Chinese politics and Chinese history. The south is not much interested in the

affairs of the north, and the northern Chinese look down on the southern.

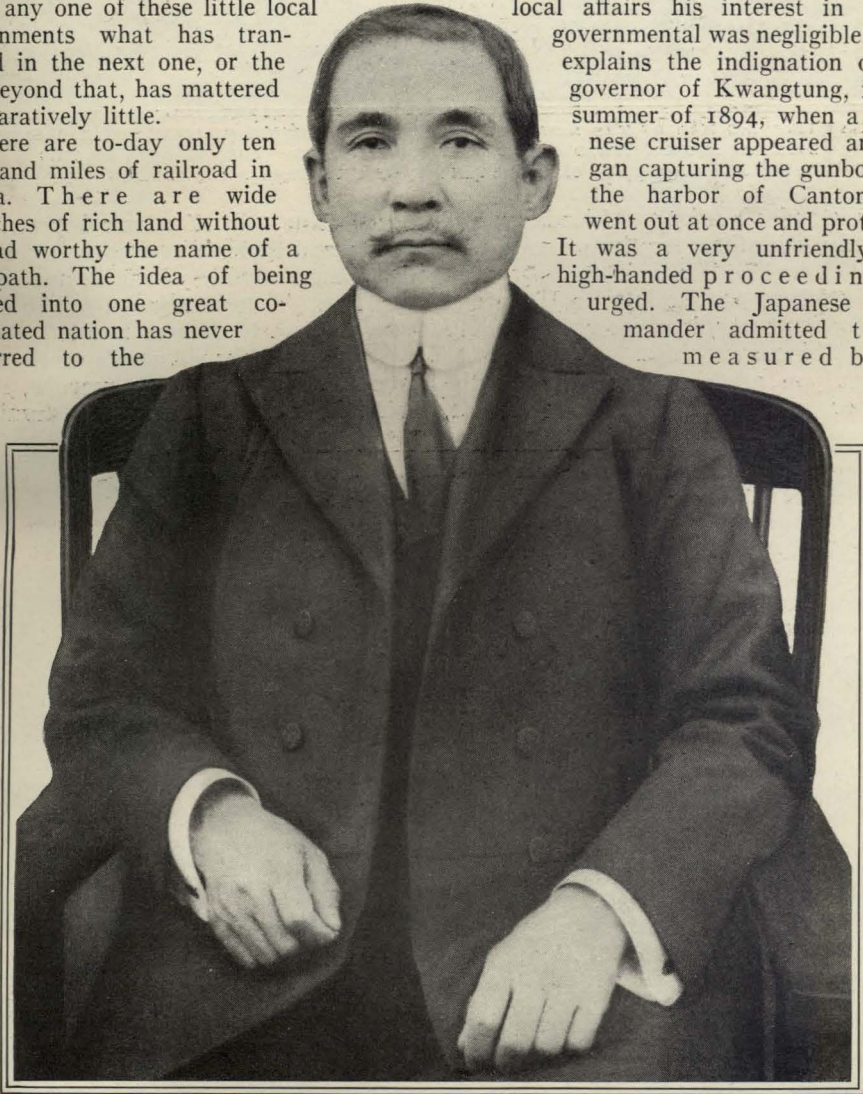
The Chinese are not a homogeneous people, and have never had a strong central government. They are proud of their immemorial civilization; but, in terms of modern international cant, they have never possessed a national will. This is probably due to the fact that in their attitude toward the world they have never felt the need of a national will.

China is a huge aggregation of comparatively small democratic communities, each sufficient unto itself in all essential matters. With any one of these little local governments what has transpired in the next one, or the one beyond that, has mattered comparatively little.

There are to-day only ten thousand miles of railroad in China. There are wide stretches of rich land without a road worthy the name of a cow-path. The idea of being welded into one great coordinated nation has never occurred to the

typical Chinese. If he understood the outlines of the German theory of national efficiency promoted by a ubiquitous official paternalism—which he does not—it would be his pet abomination.

This in a large measure explains the Chinese tolerance of the Manchu conquerors. They—the Manchus—were remote. To the average Chinese, Peking was a far-distant place, which he never expected or desired to visit. Occasionally he came into contact, more or less indirectly, with Manchu graft, but there was little interference with his local affairs; and beyond his local affairs his interest in things governmental was negligible. This explains the indignation of the governor of Kwangtung, in the summer of 1894, when a Japanese cruiser appeared and began capturing the gunboats in the harbor of Canton. He went out at once and protested. It was a very unfriendly and high-handed proceeding, he urged. The Japanese commander admitted that, measured by the



DR. SUN YAT SEN — THIS BRAVE AND HIGH-MINDED RADICAL PLANNED AND LED THE ASTONISHING REVOLUTION WHICH RESULTED IN THE DOWNFALL OF THE MANCHU EMPERORS, BUT HE LACKED THE ADMINISTRATIVE GENIUS FOR BUILDING A SOLID STATE ON DEMOCRATIC LINES



CHINA'S FIGHTING MEN OF THE NEW TYPE, PART OF THE CHINESE MILITARY FORCE ORGANIZED, DRILLED, AND OFFICERED ON STRICTLY MODERN LINES—THE CREATION OF THIS ARMY HAS BEEN ONE OF YUAN'S MOST IMPORTANT ACHIEVEMENTS

higher standards of true friendship and brotherly love, the operation seemed open to criticism; but he took the somewhat logical position that so long as Japan and China were at war, it was clearly his duty to grab Chinese war-ships.

"But you are entirely mistaken," the governor explained. "We have, indeed,

heard some talk of a war between your people and those fellows up north; but we don't know anything about it, and we care still less. That is why we feel so keenly your attempt to drag us into it."

The writer does not vouch for the stenographic accuracy of these remarks, but in spirit the incident was much as described.



REPUBLICAN CHINA ON THE FIRING-LINE, DURING THE REVOLUTION OF 1911-1912—A THREE-INCH FIELD-PIECE OF THE REBEL ARMY IN POSITION BEFORE THE BATTLE OF HANKOW, IN WHICH THE IMPERIAL FORCES WERE DECISIVELY BEATEN

Aside from the lack of transportation, without which there can be no coordinated nation, there is between different sections of the country even the barrier of alien speech. A few years ago, during the Hudson-Fulton celebration, I made friends with a veteran gunner on a Chinese cruiser. He could talk enough English to let me know that he had fought the Japs at the battle of the Yalu, and I was eager to get his version of that first fleet engagement between modern steel-clad ships. He said something in his own tongue, and I asked an educated Chinese who was with me to interpret.

My companion laughed.

"Why, my dear chap," he said, "you have a much better chance to understand him than I have. Perhaps you can make something out of his pidgin-English. I couldn't make anything out of his Chinese!"

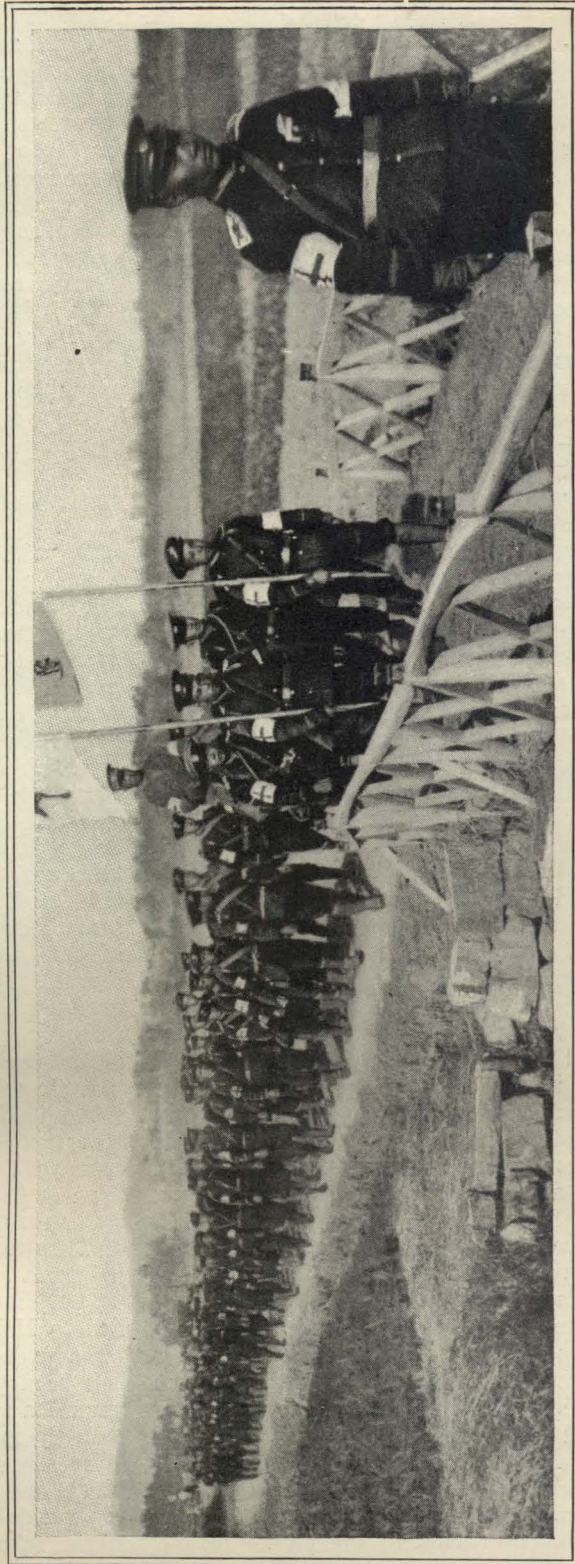
And when Li Hung Chang pleaded for peace with the Japanese delegation, he summed up the whole situation in one pathetic protest.

"I can't fight you all by myself," he said, when he was demanding reasonable terms.

But to get to Yuan Shih-kai. When the war was over he was still in high favor at Peking—which meant that he was in high favor with the dowager empress. So far as can be judged from the annals of that period, he was the one man in China who really understood the principles of organizing and leading a modern military force.

That was among his first achievements. He organized an army corps which was an army corps in every sense of the word. It could be depended on to follow its officers and to fight with judgment and discipline.

In this wise Yuan rose from one honor to another. He



A RED CROSS DETACHMENT OF THE CHINESE ARMY ON THE MARCH—CHINA'S MODERN MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT IS AS YET SMALL, BUT IT IS COMPLETE IN EVERY PARTICULAR

was at first judicial commissioner of Pechili. In 1897 he commanded the army aforementioned, and then he was made governor of Shantung.

It was while he held this office that the Boxer uprising swept through northern China. Yuan Shih-kai instantly and vigorously opposed it, and it was undoubtedly due to his influence that the ferment did not flow over into the southern and south-western provinces. Much influence was brought to bear on him to join the movement against all "foreign devils." The leaders of the outbreak declaimed against the foreigners and all their machinations, and promised Yuan immunity from everything—including bullets—if he would join.

There is a story that he took them up on the matter of bullets. He informed them that he had had some experience with the leaden missiles of the "foreign-devil" variety, and he gravely doubted the immunity of the Boxer commanders. If he were convinced of this fact, he said, he would seriously consider joining them.

Whereupon one of the more zealous of the fanatics offered his own body for the test. He invited Yuan to take one of the rifles of the foreign brand and shoot at him. Yuan accepted the offer, and bound himself to abide by the result. He took a modern high-power rifle and shot that Boxer chief full of holes. Being fair-minded men, the other leaders thereupon recognized Yuan's right to remain aloof.

Still Jung Lu, his blood-brother, remained high in favor with the dowager empress, and still Yuan went up the scale, aided by his own ability and by the kindly regard of the awful old lady who ruled China "from behind the curtain." But the emperor, Kwang Hsu, one day conceived the notion that he would be monarch in fact as well as in name. He summoned Yuan and ordered him first to seize Jung Lu and have him decapitated forthwith, and then gently to confine the dowager in such a manner that she would trouble no one thereafter.

Yuan, so the story goes, departed quietly on a special train for Tientsin, where Jung Lu, now viceroy of the important province of Chihli, had his official residence, and informed his blood-brother that the Son of Heaven had ordered him to cut off his, Jung Lu's, head. The friends held a hasty but serious confab, with the result that Yuan hurried back to the palace of the

dowager, where he told his story and claimed sanctuary. After that Kwang Hsu had, if possible, less authority than before.

Debauched weakling though he seems to have been, Kwang Hsu had a memory that held good for several years. The dowager seemingly understood this fact, for she designated P'u Yi, the infant son of Prince Chun, as the heir to the throne. This little boy was also the son of Jung Lu's daughter, the old empress having arranged the marriage of his parents. This was a bit of motherly foresight on the part of the dowager, who readily perceived that there would be short shrift for Jung Lu and Yuan and her other friends if the titular emperor got a free hand with them.

To make assurance sure beyond peradventure, she also arranged for Kwang Hsu's death to take place as nearly simultaneously with her own as possible. At least, that is one more crime that is charged to her account. It may have been merely a coincidence, but it is a fact that the dowager and the emperor died within a few hours of each other.

But Kwang Hsu lived long enough to pen, in the quavering chirography of a man sick unto death, a message to Prince Chun, the regent. Written in the imperial vermilion ink, this brief document ordered the prince to "behead the traitor, Yuan Shih-kai."

Now, Prince Chun was not a blood-brother to Yuan. He was merely the husband of the daughter of Yuan's blood-brother. It is probable that he would have executed the order if Yuan had not mysteriously received the tip that he had better vanish. He vanished. It appears that Sir John Jordan, the British minister, got him safe conduct from Shanghai to his own province of Honan, and when he next came publicly to light he was in his home town of Changtefuh.

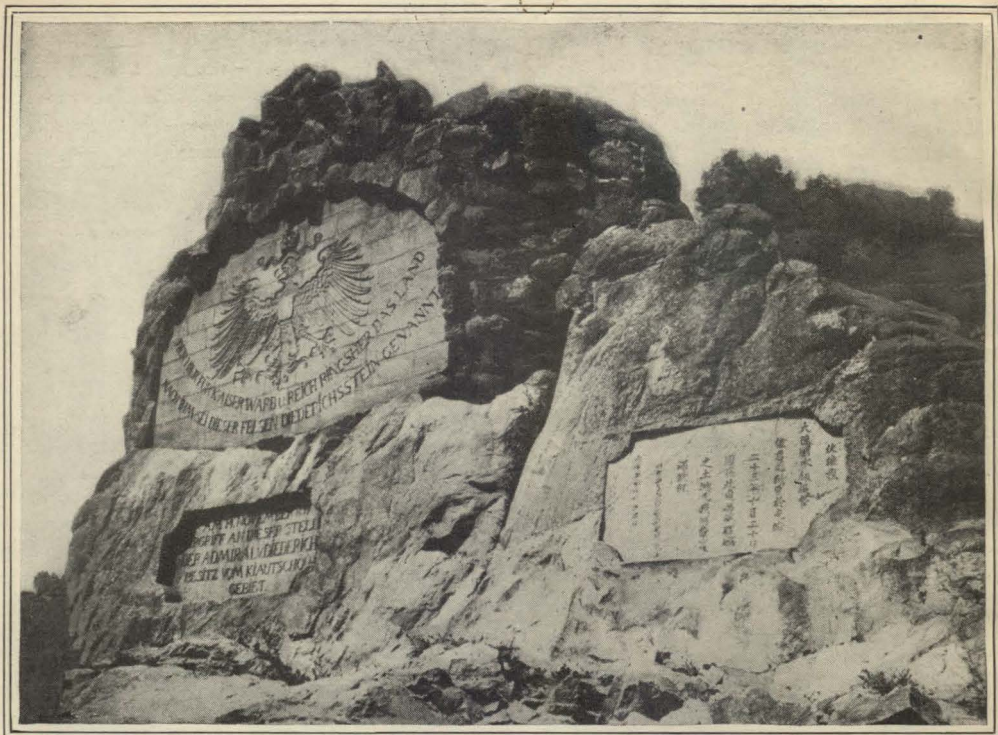
Such is the story of the first rise and fall of Yuan Shih-kai. You can use your own judgment about accepting its details as accurate. It is a fact, however, that Yuan fled to Honan. It was given out by the regency that "by imperial clemency" he had been permitted to retire in order to "nurse a sore leg."

In the mean time American colleges and other schools had been busily at work in China, and a new generation of enlightened young men had come forward. There were several reform movements, and finally there



ENTRANCE OF THE PALACE OF THE DOWAGER EMPRESS TSI-AN, IN THE FORBIDDEN CITY, PEKING

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A MONUMENT TO GERMANY'S VANISHED DREAM OF EMPIRE IN CHINA—THE INSCRIPTION ON ONE OF THE HILLS OF KIAU-CHAU, NAMING IT DIEDERICHSSTEIN, OR DIEDERICHS ROCK

appeared that singular and astonishing figure, Dr. Sun Yat Sen, the father of the Chinese Republic.

It is a pity that it is not possible, within the limits of the present article, to go into the character and career of this remarkable young man. In a land wedded to the traditions, not of centuries, but of thousands of years, Dr. Sun suddenly emerged as an extreme radical—a socialist of the militant school, burning with high courage and full of glorious ideals of a free China.

He raised the flag of rebellion in the southern provinces, and millions of his countrymen rallied behind him. It was a remarkable movement, and the world looked on in amazement.

The revolution was almost an instantaneous success in the south. Nothing could stand before Sun Yat Sen and his followers, and no one seemed inclined to try. Prince Chun and the Manchus went from nervousness to panic, and begged Yuan to come back and save them. He replied that his "sore leg" had not yet healed.

The revolution spread, and the appeals to Yuan became more insistent. Finally, when it was agreed that he should return

to Peking practically as dictator, he returned; but it soon became clear that the day of the Manchu was over.

Dr. Sun was elected provisional president of what might be called the Chinese Southern Confederacy; and for a time it looked like a divided China, with a republic in the south and a limited monarchy in the north. But the pressure from the south grew stronger and stronger. There were conferences between Yuan and the republican chiefs; and finally, on February 12, 1912—the birthday of Abraham Lincoln—the ancient empire came to an end, the dynasty of the Son of Heaven was finished. Prince Chun, with his family and followers, withdrew, and Yuan was empowered to organize the Republic of China. Dr. Sun resigned from the provisional presidency to give him a free hand. A constitution was drawn up and elections were held.

But Sun could not "stay put" very long. He did not like the way things were going. Again he broke out in the south with ideas too radical for a full-grown republic, let alone one newly born. The influential men of his party refused to follow him further, and he left China.