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A Chinese Warlord

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A FIRST meeting with the "Mukden Warlord" Chang Tso-lin is always a shock. Surrounded by all the ornate atrocities of a Chinese ceremonial room, one awaits the arrival of the *ta jen*, or great man, with growing nervousness and a conviction that this famed ex-bandit will prove a physical prodigy.

When, in place of the robust, saber-clattering, uniformed giant imagination had pictured a meek and smiling little man in Chinese robes steals into the room, it requires a moment to adjust one's mental sights to the new objective. And from that time on the visitor must go through a series of readjustments of various kinds.

Marshal Chang, drawn to Peking from his native Mukden "to cooperate with the foreign ministers in saving China from Bolshevism," talks in terms of nations but continues to think in terms of provinces. Anyone who has spent half an hour with him knows this. The Strong Man of Mukden has improved his propaganda vocabulary but he is using the same old brain—shrewd, keen, but sharply limited.

In a crowd of a dozen foreign correspondents, all but one of whom were English or American, it took the Marshal twenty minutes to decide what language the Continental European spoke when he asked questions through his own private interpreter. Finally, in the midst of a question, the Marshal laid down his cigarette-holder and bent forward with the look of a pleased and precocious child. "Ah—*Fu Gwa jen!*" ("Ah—you're a Frenchman") said he, and settled back content. The episode was significant, not of the Marshal's lack of intelligence, but of his lack of experience in dealing with foreigners. He is a clever man. In the aggregate he has met many foreigners. But during the greater part of his long life he has lived simply, surrounded in his native Manchuria by his own people and his own problems. He has not traveled abroad, he speaks no language other than his own—and but a simple dialect of that—and now, in the declining years of his life, he is trying to grapple with great international problems which he views with an amused tolerance and with no conception of their magnitude. His mind is still adroit in dealing with matters in old fields, but it is no longer flexible enough to wrap itself around new problems propounded by the foreigner.

Certainly Marshal Chang—or those near him—knows the things which will sound impressive when cabled abroad. The interpreter confers with him for a moment, then proclaims with unction:

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The Marshal says that he will protect the lives and property of all foreigners. He holds himself personally responsible. No foreign troops are necessary for defense of foreigners in North China.

It is the wavering attitude of the Powers which has helped the South. The Powers have not heeded the Marshal's advice, they have negotiated with the Cantonese, they have yielded step by step.

Bolshevism is the great menace in China. The Chinese people do not hate the foreigner. But Soviet Russia desires to destroy the foreign trade and the very existence of the British and Americans in China.

During all this the Marshal has seemed quiescent, almost indifferent; he glances about from time to time through half-shut eyes, but beyond an occasional show of earnestness he plays the traditional inscrutable Oriental to the life. Direct questions he evades. In precisely what co-operative act can the Powers join, since their troops are not wanted in North China? Ah, that is something which is not quite settled as yet. Something may be said about that later.

But let mention be made of some specific military move—a recent victory or even a recent defeat. Immediately the Marshal is all attention. Gesticulating and interrupting the interpreter, he goes through the entire story. His hearer must understand exactly where each body of troops was located, and how the unexplained defection of General So-and-So, coupled with the regrettable absence of General This-and-That at the crucial moment, resulted in a collapse which will speedily be repaired and the enemy driven back with heavy losses. This is the sort of thing which interests the Marshal.

To question Marshal Chang on international events is to waste one's breath. He knows nothing of the outside world. He knows nothing of the art of government, and says as much frankly. Politicians he despises as meddling time-wasters of no value to practical men. Action, military action, that is what the Marshal understands, and as he talks one forgets his frail figure and the softness of his handclasp and begins inevitably to think—hackneyed though the figure be—of a keen and sagacious old fox bearing toothmarks of many a fight.

And, watching this fox, one thinks in turn of the directing figures of the Cantonese. One thinks of Eugene Chen, whose carefully chosen phrases in the most perfect English bite like a blade; one thinks of the Russian High Adviser Borodin, massive, a scholar, an engineer, builder of nations. In the feudal North of China there is animal intelligence, but in the South there is the brain of modern man. Here, perhaps, is an answer to the Chinese puzzle.