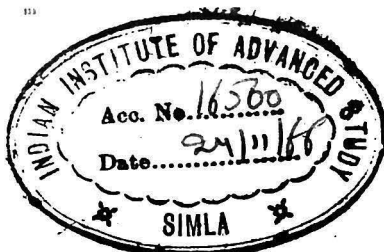


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WHERE NOW, CHINA?

By W. GORDON HARMON, O.B.E.

Notes from a lecture delivered to the Royal Central Asian Society on November 15, 1950, E. J. Nathan, Esq., O.B.E., in the Chair.

THE CHAIRMAN: China is very much front-page news today. It has not always been so. Sometimes it has been neglected, when those of us who lived in China felt that country deserved front-page news, because it is only by a continuous study of what has happened in China over the last quarter of a century that one really can appreciate something of the Chinese problem. In order to do that it is necessary to know a good deal about the Chinese people, and we are fortunate in having with us today one who knows the Chinese well, as Mr. Harmon does. He has lived for thirty years in China, and has been in the service of both the Chinese and the British Governments in that country. He has been in close touch with the rulers of China under the Nationalist régime—that is to say, the leading figures who were in Chungking at the beginning and end of the war; and he has also been in most intimate touch with the present rulers of China, who like to call themselves the Central People's Government. It is of those interesting people that Mr. Harmon is going to speak to us.

I AM aware that what I am about to say will not satisfy your needs, but I shall do my best to give you a brief description of some of the characters I met in China in both camps, the Nationalist and the Communist, and not endeavour to answer my own question, "Where now, China?" because I do not know where China is going.

Many of those present, I see, are old China hands, and it is a tremendous honour to speak to those who are such celebrities in their own right in China. Many of them will remember the old type of Chinese military sect who governed the country shortly after the Revolution, when we had such warlords as Chang Hsueh-liang and Feng Yu-hsiang attacking one another; each sometimes trying to persuade the other to attack his next best friend, and later signing up with his erstwhile enemy to attack a former friend again. Backwards and forwards these battles used to swing, and we all became rather expert at speculating what was going to happen. Until recently, most of us who had lived in China for any time at all could make a fair guess as to what life was likely to be. Now there is a very different set of rulers in the country and none of us has the courage to hazard a guess. One can only hope that certain things will happen, based on one's knowledge of the characters now leading the Chinese Government.

I got to know Chou En-lai, the present Premier, during the war; strangely enough, through one of his worst enemies, Chang Po-lin, founder and president of Nankai University. I got to know Mao Tse tung, through whom I met certain others, including the present leader of the Youth Movement, Chao Hu chang, who I see is going to the United Nations at Washington; also I got to know Tung Pi-wu, the Vice-President, and Lin Pu-han, one of the elder statesmen of the Communist Party. I mention these names because they are those of some of the present leaders of China, and I became fairly familiar with all of them

in varying degrees. Chou En-lai is a very close friend of mine, and he had a tremendous effect on China's policy in regard to the world in general.

Chou En-lai always told me, and I believed him, that he had a very friendly feeling towards the British. During the *Amethyst* incident he gave proof of that feeling: some may feel that the exhibition of Chou En-lai's friendly feeling was not very marked, but it was there. We have friends in the Communist Party, and there is something we can do for them. We have Yeh Chien-ying down in Canton, an extremely pro-British official appointed, I believe, for that specific reason. He was so friendly disposed towards the British that he was sent down to Canton to be in close proximity to Hongkong officials, and those who have come from Hongkong will tell you that the behaviour of the Chinese Communists has been very correct. They have never said or done anything provocative, and even when a British soldier got rather "fed-up" with his commanding officer and decided to take a jeep and motor all the way to England, the Communists took him in hand and were very kind to him; they arrested him, fed and clothed him, gave him cigarettes and pocket money, and eventually returned him with his jeep and all his equipment to the British authorities, very much to the surprise of the G.O.C., who did not expect to see the man back again alive, though he thought he might expect to see the jeep. The Communists have been very proper and correct in their behaviour. Mr. Trevor, the director of the Kowloon-Canton Railway, has been very successful in negotiations with the Communists when he has gone up to Canton. Perhaps one may say that is natural, since it is to the advantage of the Chinese Communists in Canton to have that railway open and running properly. Nevertheless, it is to the advantage of the Chinese to have all sorts of things done which have not been done, but we must give Mr. Trevor credit for having negotiated successfully with the Chinese. I think we can anticipate even closer relations with the Chinese Communists, provided we get our people in there who are prepared to negotiate with them. You may say: That's all very well; we recognized the Government in Peking on January 6, 1950, and the Chinese have refused to accept that recognition; it is all very well for you to say we can go and negotiate; how are we going to do that when a British Ambassador cannot get in and they are not prepared to accept him even if he could? It does seem as if the Chinese are behaving peculiarly and that I am talking peculiarly to say we can establish some relationship, when we cannot get our ambassador into the country. I think the solution to it is that we cannot send an ordinary ambassador with all the history behind him. For instance, the Chinese Government in Peking regards consuls in quite the wrong way; they regard a consul as an emblem of foreign imperialism. When you explain that you have consuls as trade agents who look after the general interests of the British out there, they are not satisfied; they say there is no need for consuls; they are really thinking of the old bad days of imperialism in China, when consuls ordered the gunboats to open fire on the Chinese. An ambassador is, I think, disliked in name by the Chinese. We want to send someone who does not go out as an ordinary ambassador at all, who will make a preliminary approach to Chou En-lai or, preferably, to Mao Tse-tung, who

I think is really approachable. Those who know him find him so. I met him first when he was rather a sick man. He had an ulcerated stomach when he came to Chungking in October, 1945, and my friend General Carton de Wiart, in his *Happy Odyssey*, having met Mao Tse-tung and having had dinner with him, does not speak very highly of him as a result of that meeting. I agree that he gave very little cause for anyone to speak highly of him; he refused to respond to anything; one only got a wintry and watery smile out of him. But when I saw him again later he was quite a different kind of man. The two Russian doctors, who are presumed to do nothing but treat him medically, seem to have cleared up that digestive trouble. I saw him in December, 1946, when I stayed down in Yenan for ten days, and found him an amusing, entertaining and kindly companion. He does not believe in the old diplomacy. You have to state your claims bluntly. He told me he thought I was a fool and I reciprocated the compliment, and then we got on very well indeed. We were very frank with one another; he told me what a wicked Government we had; that he could not "understand how the British ever suffered themselves to be led down the path by them. No respectable Government in China would have anything to do with such rogues and rascals." I told him I was not Labour, but that I could not understand why he called Attlee and Bevin rogues and blackguards, and so on. He said that of course they were, because they had not the courage of their convictions; "they do not like us, but they dare not come out and meet us; at present we are not in the hands of the Russian Communists, and we have no desire to be governed from Russia. The man we like is Churchill. He hates us and he says so. When the Russians joined the war he said to them: 'We will fight with you, though we do not approve of anything you stand for.' That was the right way to talk." Curiously enough, Mao Tse-tung has a great admiration for another Englishman. When he had been rather kind to me I asked what could I give him as a mark of my friendship and appreciation, and he asked, did I want to spend much money? I said I did not wish to spend much; just the equivalent of about £10. And he said he would like all the books I could send him relating to the life of Oliver Cromwell. I said I would get hold of Carlyle's *Life and Letters* and do all I could to collect any others. I did that. When I asked Mao Tse-tung why he liked Oliver Cromwell of all men, he reminded me that Cromwell was a Puritan. I told Mao that he was an agnostic himself or even an atheist, and that Cromwell would have been very happy to dispose of him. He maintained that Cromwell was "one of the greatest men England, if not the world, has ever produced." I was astonished to find how much Mao Tse-tung knew about Oliver Cromwell; he had evidently read a great deal. He said: "Do you see this mark on my chin? That is a very ugly wart; and do you know that Oliver Cromwell had one too, but in a more prominent position. Oliver Cromwell always insisted when he had his portrait painted that his wart should not be removed. I insist when anyone takes my photograph that the wart shall be there." It is strange that Mao-Tse-tung should feel so great an admiration for Oliver Cromwell; he enlarged on Cromwell's abstinence, the way he lived with his army, and the discipline he imposed on the men. These were the

things which caused Mao Tse-tung to admire him, and he said that he hoped to run his own army on the same lines.

The man who runs the army is General Chu Teh, a most charming man. At one time he may have been quite well built, but age has bowed him and he looks older than the seventy-five years to which he admits. He is a man with an exceptionally clear mind. I was telling him of my relationship with his military representative in Chungking, Lieut.-General Wang Yu-no. I was engaged on liaison work with these people, and I used to endeavour to secure information relating to the Japanese army. I told General Chu Teh how difficult it was to obtain that information from the Nationalists and how satisfied I had been with the information I had from the Communist side. He replied: "Of course, we knew everything; the Nationalists did not know anything; mention any division you like of the Japanese army and I will give you details of it." I mentioned the 52nd Division, and Chu Teh rolled out a complete history of the division from the date of its landing in China until its surrender; he knew the names of the commanding officers, the code letters of the division, and every other particular I could ask for. What he said was accurate, as I proved when I returned to Peking and examined the papers there.

Chu Teh told me he could answer any questions about enemy formations. I said I had just come down from Peking and that we were puzzled about the troops coming and going; nobody knew whether they were properly equipped or under whose command they were, and so on; what could he tell me about the troops around Peking? He said General Li Tsung-jen had troops round Peking; he gave me exact details of every formation there, without reference to any notes, but merely from recollection. He was never in the least troubled to answer any such questions. One liked him very much; he was most charming.

There was one man who did not join in; he sat in the background and it was hard to get a glimpse of him, but I got a photograph one day. Incidentally, I got photographs of most of these men and they very kindly signed them. This particular man signed in pencil and I had it written over in ink by a Chinese friend because the pencil was gradually fading out. The man was Liu Shao-ch'i, the big question mark in the Chinese Government at the moment. He is the ideological expert of the Chinese Communist Party, and he does not come to the fore more than he can help; never until he is brought forward. The Chinese, who ought to know, tell me he is the link between Li Li-san and Mao Tse-tung, Li Li-san being the power behind the Labour Unions.

Mao Tse-tung is surrounded by men who are no longer young. Tung Pi-wu is getting quite old and others also are getting on in years. Lin Piao-cheng is perhaps the youngest. I am not sure of his age, but he is a fine strapping man. Lin Piao has been building himself up in his march from Mukden to Canton; he brought those men through different climates; they passed through different territories, living on different food; they passed through the villages of the garlic-eating Manchu peasants and made their way down into the rice lands of the south. The water in the various villages through which they passed was practically undrinkable—in one village it killed them off; yet these troops marched on to their

objective, because they were well-disciplined men fortified by a burning enthusiasm. Those in China at the time of this march—I was not there then—will bear me out when I say that they were extremely well behaved and triumphant on all occasions. The Nationalists could not put up any effective resistance at any time.

What is Lin Piao doing? Is he up in Manchuria waiting to step over the border into Korea? Or is he, indeed, in Korea itself? I dreaded the United Nations forces reaching the 38th parallel, sitting down there and doing nothing more. They must cross it, but I prayed that they would not go up to the Manchurian border; that would be inviting trouble, knowing that the Chinese depend on very extensive power plants along the Yalu river to supply Manchurian industries, and they would certainly fear our designs on those plants. If we headed in that direction and got too close the Chinese would step in at once. Such seems to have been the case. We went up to the Manchurian border and the Chinese stepped in, not without previous warning.

I do not think that Mao Tse-tung or any of the present leaders (except Li Li-san), who have roots in China, would take orders from Russia. Li Li-san has a Russian wife, but no relatives of Chinese origin, except third cousins fifty times removed. He will always, I presume, accept the dictates of Moscow, but I do not think that Lin Piao, Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh, and the other generals in the Chinese army would accept a *dictat*; they might accept Russian advice and they might accept British advice. Mao Tse-tung asked me to persuade British advisers to go out to China; they want there doctors, engineers and every type of scientist to teach their people. He said he did not want them to come out "to order us about; we want them to teach our people; we do not intend that they should live out here as princes in the university; they will live in humble circumstances with ourselves; they will have no better house than I have; two rooms per man. If he has a wife, four rooms; if a child, six rooms; and so on; we will provide all their food, clothes, accommodation and pocket-money, and they will require nothing else." I reminded him that British and any other scientists would want to be paid for their services, and he replied: "Then I don't want them; I want people out here, not for my benefit, but for the benefit of the Chinese people; we do not want missionaries to teach us religion or hygiene; we want those who can teach us how to build roads and conserve water. You send out as many as you like able to do that and I will look after them. If it is a matter of an odd penny or two, I will always be prepared to dip into my own pocket and give them pocket-money."

I think it would have been a very wise and useful step if the British Government had sent out thirty or forty men for a period of five years each and paid them in England. Those men would have been on the front doorstep of the Chinese Government when the Communists entered Peking; they would have been established there to advise, and in the meantime they would have secured the friendship of these leaders of the Chinese Government. Unfortunately, no advisers went out apart from a few individuals who drifted out to China on their own and are still out there now. But Mao Tse-tung was willing and anxious to welcome the

British to China, and again he asked me to pass a message to the British Parliamentary Mission, which was out there at the time, to come and visit him. He asked them to go down to Yen-an and he would look after them and entertain them, take them around and give them all the facilities they required to see what they wished to see.

Yen-an has been described on many occasions, but it flabbergasted me. I saw no policemen there; they were not required, for there was no disorder of any sort. There was no traffic problem. There was no prostitution; no women were reduced to such a state. All were looked after. There was no starvation; nobody ill-clothed; everybody was well clothed, though there was no silk worn; all were in cotton. The children had chubby faces and were very happy and full of fun; the women were healthy and strong; the men of good, sound physique; all had free medical attention when required—almost as good as our National Health Service in England. But all that did not knock me over completely until I saw the dear old crones, the old peasant women of the north with their tiny little bound feet which they had not unbound for years, playing football! That was unbelievable. Nevertheless, I have photographs of them running round kicking a football with the sides of their feet. Mao Tse-tung was with me when we saw this, and when I commented on it he did not seem to think it strange. He strolled through the streets of Yen-an just like an ordinary peasant; no one followed him or took any notice. In Peking it was otherwise.

When I returned from Yen-an to Peking I hurried to see my friend Cheng K'ai-ming, who was the successor to Gestapo chief Tai Li, who died in April, 1946, in an aeroplane accident. I told this Chinese Nationalist what a remarkable place Yen-an was and how impressed I had been by it. He said: "That's a show window for you foreigners; it has all been dressed up. You did not get any further than Yen-an." I said I did not, although I could have done so but for lack of time. I had been told that I could go anywhere I wished, escorted or unescorted. I asked him, "Have you a show window?" and he had the impudence to reply that Tientsin, Shanghai and Peking were the Nationalist show windows. Whatever we say for or against the Nationalists, they have never produced a village, town or city which could equal Yen-an for law, order, good health, happiness and everything that speaks of a really comfortable and contented community. That stood very much to the credit of the Chinese Communist Party. Granted Yen-an was a show window, granted that all foreigners who went into Communist territory were taken there; still it was there; also a quaint university dug out of the cliff-side. We staggered up steps and saw students sitting out on little stools when it was so cold that I was breathing heavily into my gloves. There were students, boys and girls, sitting on their stools out in the open, drawing and taking notes of lectures; in the bitter cold, all dressed in the most horrible uniform. The hair of the girls was cut in an ugly style; the Communists have done nothing to beautify the women; their "beauty" was not a beauty which impressed one in any way.

I would not have dared to come here and talk to you if it were not that I feel that there is a chance of friendship between the Chinese Government

in Peking and the British Government. I feel we should do something as soon as possible to secure closer friendly co-operation between the two countries. Of course, nothing can be done until we get an ambassador in China and they will send an ambassador to England. I believe an unofficial approach can, nevertheless, be made to the Chinese Government which would result in the eventual appointment of an ambassador. When that day comes, if we appoint the right man—and we have got the men—we shall be able to woo the Chinese away from the Russians, towards whom they are drifting so rapidly now, and might eventually drift so that we cannot win them back. If we act soon enough we can win the Chinese over to our side and not be so terrified of having a great war out in the East.

SIR GILES SQUIRE: Could the lecturer tell us to what extent the Communists owe their easy victory over the Nationalists to Russian facilities, either in the way of military supplies or advisers?

THE LECTURER: I have been out of China for two years, and I told my father (who had been there for forty-five years) when he had been in England for six months that he knew nothing about China, having been out of it for those six months! From those with whom I discussed the Chinese Communist campaign I understood there were no advisers with the troops who marched from Mukden to Canton. Certainly the equipment supplied by the Russians never was more than revolvers captured from the Germans on the Western Front during the last war. The arms and equipment which went to the Communists in the final campaign were taken from the supplies provided by the Americans to the Nationalist forces.

THE CHAIRMAN: The lecturer has produced some thoughts as to an approach that we should make to China; in fact, we do require an entirely new approach to China and the problem of the Chinese People's Government. It is that Government that is now firmly established in China, and it seems to me that the sooner that Government is recognized by all the great nations, and that when we talk of the Big Five we can in fact talk of China as being included in the Big Five, the sooner we shall be a step nearer to the peace which we are all so anxious to achieve. I feel that our lecturer has helped us considerably in this problem and that to him we owe a very hearty vote of thanks, which I now ask you to accord to him in the usual manner.

