SHALL CHINA ENTER THE WAR? ¹

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A MEMORANDUM PRESENTED TO THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT IN FEBRUARY

To this question which I place at the head of this discussion I reply with full force of conviction, after over thirty years of hard work in China's behalf: "A thousand times No."

China has in the past escaped many threatening dangers, sometimes within, sometimes from without. The escape has generally come through a few Chinese in high places of authority remaining cool and level-headed. Where dangers have not been averted, as in the Boxer year, it has been because the number of such men has been insufficient; the few sensible and patriotic ones have often offered up their lives as martyrs.

The present danger, the new form of temptation, is so different from anything known in the past, that it will be easy for the Chinese who are now in high places of authority to be beguiled, or, to use an Americanism, to be "gulled."

There is nothing new in the mere attempt to persuade China to join the Entente Allies against the two Central Powers represented diplomatically in Peking. It has been conjectured that the proposals were also aimed against Japan. Both President Yuan and President Li in these previous attempts had enough sense to reject the proposals and enough patriotism and unselfishness to spurn the enticements accompanying the proposals.

The attempt today, with the same object in view, comes to us in another form, with a far more innocent air, and

¹ This article was written before the United States declared war against Germany.—Editors.
with Germany, it is quite certain that she will not hesitate to follow wherever America may lead; and that the United States will be involved in open warfare almost immediately is certain.

This settles the matter so far as China and the United States are concerned, if Putnam Weale, a Britisher, has any chance of settling the matter. China's action of protesting is taken to be the same as the United States' action of severing diplomatic relations; and the American action is taken to be the same as entering upon open warfare. If all advice to China is thus muddled, China will find it hard to walk in the straight and narrow way of neutrality, justice and good-will.

Personally, as one concentrating attention on China's interests alone, I give no support to either of the three proposals, as bearing on China's international obligations.

The first proposal, that made by the United States government to China, that she, too, sever diplomatic relations with Germany, ought to be rejected.

I am looking at the effects on China, while President Wilson was thinking only of American interests. Whether he was right, fair and prudent in the position taken, I do not here discuss; a few weeks will show whether all Americans agree with President Wilson. Already we learn that ex-Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, does not agree with the President, though both are of the Democratic party.

Even supposing that President Wilson's move is wiser than what Solomon ever made or longed for, the inference does not follow that the Chinese republic, away out here on the Asiatic continent, would be equally wise in rushing into making the same move. Let Americans all by themselves derive all the blessings that are possible from this great transaction, but let China strive for no prize till duty alone calls her to it.

China can well wait till all the neutral governments in Europe, and then all in Central and South America, imitate the United States in breaking off diplomatic relations with Germany, before she makes the same big jump. Thus far the neutral nations showed themselves more ready to sup-
The American President declared the cessation of friendly relations with Germany, not after any American interests or rights had been injured, but only on the receipt of a warning from Germany. China's interests and rights are not being injured by German blockade of Britain, France and Italy, not injured as through the high-handedness of certain other countries—why, then, should she break off diplomatic relations with Germany and possibly with Austria-Hungary?

This break with Germany on the part of the United States can by an effort rest on usages established by international law, but China in making the same kind of a break could find a precedent nowhere in the treatises on international law, not even those which have been put forth by American experts. A prodigy would be needed to concoct a reason from the new German blockade why the Chinese ministry of foreign affairs should hand passport to the German minister and request him to leave for his own or the nearest friendly country. What may prove reasonable for the United States would be senseless for China. What has she to do with German blockade or German submarine warfare?

Furthermore, though the blockade by England through use of mines was prior to the German declaration of blockade and was meant to be detrimental to all neutrals trying to reach Germany, and though the blockade was also a blockade of Denmark and Holland, the United States has made no protest or broken off relations with England. China would be fair and sensible if she paid no attention to either blockade and remained fair to all.

For China to break off relations with Germany would be an unfriendly act. It would also be an unfair act, unless she broke off relations with England also, who first declared a blockade to the total subversion of neutral rights.

If China were a strong nation, she need not worry about one less or one more national friend. Being weak, she should aim to keep the friendship of all, and not commit an hostile act, sure to be paid back by an irrevocable law at some future time.
Back of all this distracting discussion there lies in the Chinese mind something more serious, far-reaching and apparently more far-sighted than the simple matter of breaking off diplomatic relations with Germany. The idea is that China join the Entente, particularly England and France, with whom the United States is now supposed to be a new partner.

This is the third plan against which China ought to be solemnly and earnestly warned.

The hint is thrown out, as in former attempts, that China can thus offset and resist the encroachments of Japan. Here is a fascinating, advantageous, and hence sensible alliance for China to seize, ere the chance be let slip. An alliance of England, France and the United States has already been talked about as best guarantee of future peace. For China to be requested to join this group, how honoring, how promising, how complimentary!

Personally I do not believe that future peace can come through the rivalries of alliances. Even Mr. Asquith has expressed himself against this grouping of nations. Neither do I believe in "entangling alliances" for my own country, whatever may be advocated by President Wilson in contradistinction to the sage advice of President Washington. Beyond all this I do not believe in aid of this political scheming for China. I see no reason for abandoning the old theory of the "open door," even should any number of foreign powers plan its overthrow, as has been tried before. To eject all Germans and Austrians from China, from this time forth forever more, may be desirable for British and French and pro-Ally Americans, but its consummation will mean that China, too, under foreign tutelage is taught to break treaties, while the whole lot of them will go back on every high principle and holy aim they have ever professed. I am ashamed that any of my countrymen have done even a little to lead China away from the straight path of righteousness and fair-dealing. Let China be not deceived. She will reap no harvest of national security, if she takes from another and plants in the good old soil the seed of injustice.
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My own advice, then, is that China reject all three proposals for getting entangled; that she maintain her neutral spirit—far more neutral than most Americans have been; and that she treat all nations with the same spirit of fairness, cultivating cordial relations with all, and presenting to all the same opportunities for trade, enlightenment, and respectful diplomatic relationship. This advice of mine may be rejected, as other advice I was wont to give in days of Manchu rule, but in giving it, I do it in all sincerity, looking solely for China's good.