

SHANGHAI—JAPAN'S JUSTIFICATION

BY A BRITISH RESIDENT

IT is March, and an uneasy armistice rules in Shanghai. Now that the dust and heat of the conflict have subsided, passions and prejudices run a little less high, and the demands of the actual moment are less insistent and exclusive, there is time to look back on the events of the past five weeks; to attempt to arrive at a considered judgment on the rights and wrongs of the situation; to ask whether the chorus of condemnation with which Japan's actions have been greeted in certain quarters is justified, if the disapproval, tacit or otherwise, which the West seems to have chosen to exhibit, is fair.

The first thing to be remembered is that the provocation suffered by Japan was considerable, far greater in fact than appears to be realised except by those who were witnesses of it. Not only was there the boycott with all its attendant illegalities of confiscation and intimidation, there was also the constant outpouring of a rancorous anti-Japanese propaganda of the most hostile and insulting character, which was condoned, if it was not actually inspired, by the Government; and there were the constant outrages and indignities suffered by Japanese residents. To secure redress by the ordinary methods of diplomatic intercourse was impossible. Protests were unavailing, for the Government, even if willing to control its subjects, was unable to do so. Moreover, with the overthrow of Chiang Kai Shek's administration there was only a very shadowy government to protest to and negotiate with. Nor was China's past record such as to inspire trust. The history of Hankow and Nanking, the murder of missionary after missionary, the case of

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John Thorburn, the growing insecurity of life and property in the immediate vicinity of Shanghai, culminating in the death at the hands of Chinese soldiery of Dr. Porges, all went to prove that if Japan's nationals were to be assured in future of the peaceful and undisturbed exercise of their legitimate rights, sterner measures than diplomatic notes were necessary. It was time to show that in the case of Japan at least, there was an iron hand beneath the velvet glove.

A wanton attack on a procession of Japanese Buddhist priests, resulting in the death of three of them, coupled with insulting references to the Emperor in the local vernacular press, brought matters to a head. The patience and the wonderful dignity and restraint with which the Japanese had hitherto borne themselves gave out. A few of the less responsible attempted reprisals, for which they were at once arrested by the Japanese consular authorities and deported to Japan to be punished. A mass meeting of Japanese residents passed four resolutions demanding immediate action to put a stop to the boycott and the other illegalities under which they were suffering. These were made the basis of an ultimatum from Admiral Shirozawa, commanding the Japanese forces in Shanghai, to the Mayor of the Chinese Municipality, and the morning of the 28th of January arrived with these unaccepted, and the time limit due to expire that evening.

In the afternoon the Mayor announced an unconditional acceptance of the Japanese demands, though with what possibility of enforcing them on the general Chinese public is a question of which the answer will never now be known. But in the meanwhile there had been other developments. The 19th Route Army had been brought to Shanghai, and was stationed in or near Chapei, an area in which resided several thousand Japanese nationals, constituting a distinct menace not

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only to these latter, but to the settlement as well. It had a none too savoury reputation, being composed of the most hard-bitten and 'reddest' troops in the regular Chinese forces. Its personnel was mainly Cantonese, and it took its orders from the leftist group of politicians, including Wang Chi Wei and Eugene Chen, who had just forced Chiang Kai Shek and the more moderate elements into retirement, very largely by exploiting the anti-Japanese movement and the demand for more vigorous action. It is worth while to ask why it was thought necessary to bring these troops to Shanghai. Remembering the record of their political sponsors, especially that of Eugene Chen, the widely held belief in Shanghai that they were to be used to rush the foreign concessions, as was done at Hankow and Nanking, and so, by presenting the powers with a *fait accompli*, implement China's unilateral abrogation of existing treaties, does not seem altogether without grounds. Be that as it may, the tension on January 28th had become so great that the Municipal Councils of the Settlement and the French Concession proclaimed a State of Emergency to exist, the necessary consequence of which was the taking up by the defence forces of the positions assigned to them in the defence scheme. It was in moving to their allotted position along the Shanghai Woosung Railway line that the Japanese marines were bombed and fired at.

Once this had happened, and it became clear that it was no isolated incident but part of an organized scheme of obstruction, the Japanese commander had to make a quick decision. He could either retire and, getting into communication with the other military commanders and the settlement authorities, await developments, or make a further attempt to reach his objective, using the best military means at his disposal. He chose the latter, and ordered out his aero-

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planes, hoping to bomb the opposing forces out. With the thousand odd troops at his disposal it would have been absurd to attempt house-to-house fighting in a district of tortuous streets and narrow alley-ways, infested with plain-clothes snipers and machine-gun and trench-mortar posts.

At one time the almost universal opinion was that in taking this decision he was wrong. But before concurring in this view it would be as well to ask what would have happened if he had gone back. His action would undoubtedly have been attributed by the Chinese to fear and the operation hailed as a Chinese victory. The arrogant and impossibilist attitude of China to the foreign powers would have been intensified, and the position of individual foreigners made worse. Moreover, the threat of the 19th Route Army to the settlement and the likelihood of an attempt on their part to rush it would have become much greater. A very serious situation would have been created. Japan's prestige would not have allowed her to accept the rebuff, and the other foreign powers would almost have been bound to join with her at least in a demand for the withdrawal of the offending Chinese soldiery. In the mood it was in, flushed with an imagined victory, it is hardly likely that the 19th Route Army would have complied. In the last resort, as in the first, it would have had to be driven out by bombing and shelling. Indeed, one can argue very seriously that the Japanese commander, by assuming the offensive at the start and maintaining it, not only did the best thing from his own military point of view, but also the best thing for the interests of the settlement. By taking the whole burden on Japan's shoulders he kept the settlement free of hostilities, and prevented the development within it to any dangerous extent of anti-foreignism. Once he had taken his decision it had to be carried through to its logical conclusion of suc-

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cess. The action once started could not be broken off on any other terms than a Japanese victory. While with any other people it might have been possible to negotiate a settlement on terms of mutual concessions; this is a process impossible in the case of the Chinese. 'It is a regrettable fact,' says *The Shanghai Times*, 'that China has yet to show that she can be trusted not to construe sympathy and forbearance as being the outcome of fear and to presume thereon. If on this occasion she is left with the belief that she has gained a victory, one is greatly afraid that she will take it as an encouragement to pursue the same tactics and the same diplomatic technique as have been responsible for the present crisis.'

A great deal of criticism of Japan is based on the belief that she had no need even to threaten military measures—that she could have obtained full satisfaction by customary diplomatic processes. That belief ignores altogether local conditions and the character of the Chinese authorities. With the 19th Route Army at the gates of the settlement, Japanese nationals in imminent danger, and no sign of any real intention on the part of the Chinese to come to and keep a satisfactory agreement, immediate action was imperative. No one with an eye to realities can contend that the ultimatum was uncalled for, came too soon, or was too strongly worded. However, it may be urged that to take action on the night of the 28th of January, without waiting to see if the Mayor's acceptance of the terms of the ultimatum was sincere or not, was precipitate. Such a contention not only disregards the actual position at the time, but is based on a misconception. The fact that during the afternoon of that day all the police in Chapei abandoned the district, leaving the inhabitants entirely at the mercy of the plain-clothes gunmen, who were pouring in from the ranks of the semi-bandit soldiery of the

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19th Route Army, would alone have provided ample justification for sending in troops for the protection of the Japanese there. But apart from this altogether the attempted advance to the line of the railway was in no sense the aggressive expedition which it was represented to have been. It was the logical outcome of the proclamation of the state of emergency, exactly similar to the advance out of the settlement in the west of the British troops to their defence line in Chinese territory there, save in the one particular that the British were not fired on. It is pertinent to ask what would have happened if the conditions had been reversed. Nor would any commander begin an offensive against several thousand troops with a mere handful of men. It is this conception of the Japanese action which has misled a section into finding fault with Admiral Shiroshawa on the grounds of foolhardiness, quite forgetting that they, like everyone else, would before the event have scoffed at the idea of the Chinese putting up any resistance at all.

Criticism of Japan is to a very large extent the outcome of hysteria, a sentimental reaction to the misfortunes of the Chinese civilian population. No one can but feel the deepest sympathy with these unfortunates, rendered homeless and destitute through the destruction of Chapei. No one can view with satisfaction the holocaust of that district, insanitary and criminal infested rabbit warren though in great part it was, but that is no reason why the reasoning faculties should cease to function. That military exigencies demanded the bombing of Chapei cannot be blamed on to the Japanese. It was not they, but the 19th Route Army which chose to make it a battleground, seeking no doubt to shield itself behind the wretched inhabitants. Once the first bomb fell its leaders must have been fully aware of the risks to which they were exposing

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those latter, and that their ruse was doomed to failure. They could have saved Chapei by retiring—at that time little save the North Railway station and the Commercial Press had suffered serious damage—instead they preferred to sacrifice it and their fellow countrymen to a useless stubbornness. To represent the Japanese as committing a wanton and unprovoked attack on a defenceless population is a complete travesty of facts.

For the belief so sedulously fostered in certain quarters that the Japanese have contravened the canons of civilized warfare there are absolutely no grounds. Much has been made of the ruthlessness with which the sniping evil was dealt with in the Hongkew district in the first few days, but ruthless methods were the only ones possible against assassins in plain clothes sheltering behind the civilian population. As one looks back on that episode it is not the ruthlessness that sticks in one's mind, but the speed and efficiency with which the evil was stamped out. With kid-glove methods it might very well have lasted much longer, and, when one remembers that on the night of Sunday, January 31st, it was actually inadvisable to walk along the Bund in the settlement's very heart, one can only feel thankful that they were not adopted. The only real criticism that can be made is of the behaviour of the Japanese civilians, a certain element among whom undoubtedly disgraced themselves and their country, but in extenuation there must be pleaded the provocation they had themselves endured in the preceding months. There is too a hooligan element in any large body of people, and before Britains or Americans cast stones, they should bear in mind the behaviour, with far less provocation, of the London East End mobs on the outbreak of war in August, 1914, or the treatment of negroes in the southern states. The Japanese authorities took

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prompt action to suppress these undesirables, and many were arrested and deported to Nagasaki for punishment. To elevate this into a serious charge is to display a lack of a sense of proportion.

If it were not that they have apparently been repeated in responsible English and American publications, the atrocity stories, with which Shanghai has been unedified, could be treated with the neglect they deserve. One would have thought that their experience during the Great War would have taught people to distrust all such tales. In the present instance they are the outcome of a somewhat unoriginal Chinese invention. All the old favourites have been trotted out—loot, rape, torture, the killing of prisoners, even the use of dum-dum bullets. A fully authenticated case has yet, however, to be produced. One realises, of course, that 'atrocities' are always news, but that presumably responsible neutral observers should have been found willing, either through bias or journalistic zeal, to give currency to such reports has been not the least disagreeable feature of the situation. Two examples must suffice to show the type of story and their groundlessness. The attendants of a large Chinese military hospital have been displaying photos of what they allege are dum-dum bullet wounds and of dum-dum bullets. By any persons with experience the bullets are easily recognised as pieces of shrapnel, and the wounds as caused by them. Incidentally the foreign doctors, who have been in attendance at this and other hospitals, have definitely stated that they have not come across one instance of dum-dum bullet wounds, and they would obviously have been the first to be shown any. The second story would be laughable in its patent absurdity, if it were not for its vileness, and the fact that people can be found to credit it. On a visit to the North Railway station, the writer had pointed out to him by a non-commissioned officer of the

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31st American Infantry a house, in which, according to him, the Japanese marines had assembled a number of Chinese girls, whom for days they violated at will, and finally butchered. The house in question, as the writer knew from previous visits to the sector, had been during the whole period of hostilities well in front of the Japanese line, in the direct line of fire from a Chinese machine gun post not twenty yards distant from it, and was only one house removed from the blockhouse which there forms the chief defence of the settlement. Yet the narrator seemed to believe what he was saying, will no doubt relate it to others with no means of testing its truth, perhaps write it home. Thus are atrocity stories put into circulation.

For the charges that Japan has endangered the settlement, disregarded its neutral status, and usurped the authority of the settlement officers there may be some justification, but the average Shanghai resident does not take them very seriously. As far as the first is concerned, it appears to him that once the 19th Route Army had decided to make Chapei the scene of an armed conflict Japan could not help herself, and he knows that she has taken the greatest possible care to avoid creating any damage in the settlement. With regard to infringements of the settlement's neutrality, it does not seem possible to sustain any serious charge in view of the fact that no formal state of war existed so that previous precedents did not apply. Japan throughout claimed to be acting solely in defence of her nationals. To land forces for that purpose is a right which the powers have always exercised. There is no difference in kind, though there may be in degree, between the landing of the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders or the 31st American Infantry and the Japanese divisions. Actual military operations were conducted from the Hongkew Park district, which is not part of the settlement proper. In that district and

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the parts of the settlement immediately adjoining the Japanese military did, it is true, assume full control, overriding to some extent the normal authority of municipal police, but military necessity can very fairly be pleaded in excuse. It was in this area that the great majority of the snipers had been located in the first few days, and, with the Chinese forces in close proximity and a hostile native population to contend with, it was only common sense that while acting as far as possible in collaboration with the police the Japanese should insist on their own arrangements being carried out.

China and her friends, playing as usual on the idealism with which a post-war world has been trying to blind itself to hard facts, seek to brand Japan's actions as a sheer appeal to brute force, which, if it triumphs, will prove a death blow to the League of Nations. Certainly the intervention of the League of Nations in the Sino-Japanese dispute has been unfortunate. It has only encouraged China to hope for a third party intervention, to adopt an impossibilist attitude, and to refuse to enter into the direct negotiations with Japan by which the whole trouble would probably long ago have been settled. There has always been the danger of the League being used not so much in defence of the weak against oppression as by the inefficient malefactor as a means of avoiding, or at least postponing, just retribution for his wrong-doing. This is exactly the use to which China is putting it. Very few of the statesmen who periodically meet together at Geneva have real first hand knowledge of Chinese conditions. They live, as far as China is concerned, in a land of make-believe, for China has succeeded in imposing on the world an idea of herself as a united nation with an organized modern administration completely at variance with all the facts. To treat China as a sovereign state with a

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responsible government is to connive at a most harmful diplomatic fiction. In refusing to subscribe to the pretence any longer and having recourse to arms, Japan took the only practical means of securing a satisfactory solution. To have waited for the League to provide one would have meant a long delay, during which she would still have been without relief from China's injurious actions. Moreover there was absolutely no guarantee that any decision the League might come to would be applied, that China would abide by it without being compelled to. Japan could not afford to wait, with every prospect that she would in the end have to use force, when, as in the case of Shanghai, it might be too late.

If China were the responsible, trustworthy power she claims to be, there might be some grounds for regarding Japan's use of her superior strength as an attempt by the strong to browbeat the weak, for interpreting a Japanese success as establishing the axiom that might is right, or at least that the world is content to let it be so. But though might may not necessarily be right it does sometimes happen to be, while China has repeatedly shown herself both unreliable and irresponsible. In dealing with a spoilt child the rod is often the only means of bringing it to its senses, and the person who uses it is not usually regarded as a bully but as a benefactor to the rest of the community. A victory for Japan will not be the triumph of armed force, as much as a triumph for common sense.

As the days go by and recent events fall into proper perspective, Japan's policy will be found more and more to have ample vindication. Certainly this is the view of the average man on the spot. He has witnessed the constant procession of refugees into the settlement, bearing with them the few sorry possessions which are all that most have been able to salvage; he knows what will be their wretched plight. He has seen

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the bombs falling, listened to the shelling and rattle of machine guns, nightly watched the red glow over burning Chapei. He himself has been in danger, even if, as it has turned out, it was not very great danger. He has experienced constant anxiety for the safety of the settlement, his home, and his possessions. He has been put to great inconvenience; trade and business have been practically suspended; he has suffered in many cases considerable pecuniary loss. Yet despite all this he is far from anti-Japanese. The *Shanghai Times* probably summed up his point of view very well when proclaiming that fundamentally the origin of the trouble lay in China's own actions. 'It was,' that paper says, 'her notorious disregard for treaties, the inability to secure any undertaking from her which could, with any degree of hope, be regarded as permanent, the constant succession of indignities suffered by Japanese along with other foreigners and the impossibility of securing redress or any trustworthy assurance that they would not occur again, which were primarily responsible for the ruins of Chapei.'

E. H. ANSTICE.