

JANUARY 7, 1933

*East of Suez*

THE ORIENT THAT ANTEDATED FOREIGN ENTANGLEMENTS.

CHINA: THE PITY OF IT. By J. O. P. BLAND. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1932.

Reviewed by HENRY KITTREDGE NORTON

**W**HEN one sees the name of J. O. P. Bland gracing the cover of a new volume on China, one may be sure of several things. The author has something to say; it will be said skilfully and forcefully; and there will be no wishy-washy sentimentality about it. Mr. Bland has known his China for a third of a century and he is convinced that if that unhappy country has moved at all in the last three decades, it has moved backwards.

Without relieving the Chinese of their share of the responsibility in the premises, the half-baked liberalism of the West—by which is meant Great Britain and the United States for the most part—is found to be the chief cause of expanding disaster in China. What we should do is “to desist from experiments in political idealism and to apply measures of a practical humanitarianism, with a view to putting an end to the long-drawn sufferings of the “Chinese people.” If we would but display “more concern for their unhappy fate and less for the vain doctrines of racial equality and ineffective sovereignty,” there might be some hope of extricating China from the mire.

The Washington Conference was the fatal turning-point. The purport of the treaties signed there was to proclaim “America’s intention to establish a moral guardianship over China and, by virtue thereof, to challenge Japan’s position of ascendancy in Manchuria and Mongolia.” This policy, Mr. Bland holds, could only hope to succeed if the young Chinese could establish a responsible government along modern lines in their country.

There is no news in Mr. Bland’s conclusion that they have not done so. There is room for argument in his further conclusion that they never can. Yet he makes a strong case. He reemphasizes the fact that the dominant loyalty of a Chinese is to his family and that thus far few have

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been able to substitute a larger social unit. The country suffers therefore from the activities of its officials, and in this respect the author rates the politicians of the Nanking and Canton groups no higher than the members of the old mandarinat. Like their predecessors, they have always been ready to sell their country's interest to foster their own.

The author takes the missionaries and their efforts severely to task. They have been undermining the nation's reverence for those things which have given stability and harmony to her civilization. This they have done when they might have been giving steadying guidance through a difficult period.

Of even greater import in the disruption of China is what Mr. Bland sarcastically terms the "F. O. School of Thought." The Foreign Office, he finds, has been unduly swayed in the shaping of its policy by such incorrigible liberals as Mr. Lionel Curtis and the other "earnest busybodies" of the Royal Institute of International Affairs and the Institute of Pacific Relations. As contrasted with Mr. Curtis, it is hardly necessary to add that Mr. Bland is of those who are convinced of England's divine right to govern other peoples of the world. In his own words, "The British type of civilization will probably continue to be the best type evolved by the nations of the Western world." Doubtless it is this conviction which makes him hesitate as much as he does about commending Japan's activities in Manchuria. His argument on that score is not so much a plea for Japan as a plea for imperialism in general.

Mr. Bland's remedies for the distressing situation which exists proceed naturally from his premises. As to method he would return to the old reliable application of force. What China most needs, Mr. Bland is convinced, is ten years of uninterrupted peace and security. This, he is equally convinced, she cannot possibly achieve without assistance from outside. The powers therefore owe it to the oppressed Chinese people to abandon their formula of non-interference and to recognize that the doctrine of self-determination is inapplicable to a people which is manifestly incapable of self-government. He would have the powers formally notify the Nanking government and the provincial warlords that the railways of central China shall henceforth be neutral zones from which all military adventurers and other freebooters will be excluded. He opines that this would not take a large force and that the expenses of the operation could easily be met out of the profits of the railways under an honest foreign administration. In fact, these profits will be sufficiently large to pay not only the expenses of the actual operation, but the funds necessary to buy off the war lords and, in



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addition, to purchase the authorization of the central authority! Nay, there would still remain a surplus with which the foreign administrators would be able to purchase the "allegiance" of the so-called "Communists."

The pity of it is that practically everything that Mr. Bland says is true, yet these truths hurtle against one of the overwhelming imponderables of the present age. It may be, as he says, that "many of the Bible Belt's ideas on political economy still emanate from an undigested Pentateuch." Nevertheless, that spirit, manifesting itself in such "liberal" expressions as the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the Institute of Pacific Relations, and Mr. Lionel Curtis himself, is as ineradicable a fact in our time as the "immutability" of Mr. Bland's China. Even if China herself remained unchanging, China's relations with the outside world and the relations of the Powers with China cannot be the same in the twentieth century as they were in the nineteenth. Such continuity will only be possible when the civilization of the whole world has become as "static" as Mr. Bland conceives the civilization of China to be.

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