

THE STORY OF THE SIEGE IN PEKING

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The Story of the Siege in Peking by S. M. Russell

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OF
THE SIEGE IN PEKING

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PREFACE

DURING the two months we were shut up in Peking, hoping we might possibly be rescued, my wife kept a diary. The following pages are partly taken from that diary, and were principally written for the information of the friends who so long mourned for us as dead. It is at their request that this little book appears in print.

THE SIEGE OF PEKING

BEFORE relating a few incidents of an event unparalleled in the history of the world for atrocity and perfidy, it may not be uninteresting to consider some of the causes which produced the outbreak.

The first and principal cause, no doubt, was the encroachments of Western nations. Germany seized Chiao Chou in Shantung. She did it in a manner the most offensive and best calculated to hurt the susceptibilities of a proud nation like the Chinese. Russia, posing as the protector of China, took Port Arthur, and was gradually absorbing Manchuria. The British Government, on the pretence of preventing further Russian encroachments, but really to satisfy public opinion at home, took Wei-Hai-Wei.

Newspapers, British and Continental, openly discussed the partition of China. No wonder, then, that the Chinese became desperate, and madly resolved to drive the hated foreigner beyond the 'four seas' or perish in the attempt. Nor to the mind of the Chinese Government did the enterprise seem so desperate or impossible.

Doubtful friends of England had kept the Chinese well posted in the history of the South African War. If a small Republic, numbering not more than 40,000 men, could keep England at bay for so many months, what could not a nation like China, numbering 400,000,000 souls, accomplish, even if all Europe were arrayed against her?

Another cause was the ill-feeling that had gradually been growing up between the heathen and the Christian converts, Roman Catholic and Protestant. In this also may be included the inborn dislike the Chinaman bears to the 'foreign devil.' The Roman Catholic Church, and to some extent the Protestant Church, in China is an *imperium in imperio*. The convert looks not to his own official for protection and justice, but to his priest or pastor. In case of a lawsuit, he invokes the powerful aid of the foreigner, and may possibly win it, even though justice may have been on the side of his heathen opponent.* There is no doubt that the Boxer movement which began last year in Shantung, and which this year caused the massacre of so many missionaries and native converts, took its origin from the above causes. It had smouldered for years, until this year, fanned into life by the smile of Imperial favour, it broke out with irresistible fury.

* The Chinese official is often corrupt, which makes it difficult for the missionary not to interfere.

THE BOXERS GROW MIGHTY.

The Boxer movement began in Shantung in the autumn of last year. Converts were maltreated and their houses looted, but no lives were taken. Later, about Christmas, an English missionary, Mr. Brookes, was murdered. The Chinese paid a small indemnity, but no adequate punishment was demanded, although it was well known at the time that the then Governor of Shantung, Yu Hsien, was at least indirectly responsible for the murder.

Immediately afterwards Yu Hsien received high marks of Imperial favour, and was promoted to the Governorship of Shansi, where he lately distinguished himself by murdering over fifty missionaries, women and children, whom he had beguiled to the capital of the province under promise of protection. So far it had been quiet round Peking, so that we did not feel in the least alarmed. On May 17 we heard that the Boxers had burned a village about 100 miles distant, inhabited by Roman Catholics, and had killed all the inhabitants. From that date native refugees, Catholic and Protestant, began to crowd into Peking. The missionaries went to their different Legations, and vainly tried to induce their respective Ministers to take active means to stop the horrible atrocities that were taking place in the country around. The Ministers represented