

parties were unequal. They regarded the Chinese Government of that day as being inferior to their own in its jurisprudence and administration and we have never heard it argued that they were not justified in this assumption. Acting on these assumed premises they inserted certain stipulations, confessedly of a temporary nature, in the treaties they were negotiating and their successors are doing exactly the same thing now while professing to annul the action that was taken then.

The Chinese say that the former treaties were imposed on them by force and that they were compelled to submit to the unreasonable demands of the foreign diplomats. But the things the Chinese object to now are not the things that were objected to then. The earlier treaties compelled China to open her ports to foreign trade. To the patriotic Chinese of those days this was an unparalleled humiliation. They regarded it as being the first step taken towards the ruin of their country. To the fixed tariff which was the corollary of the opening of the ports they objected not at all. Neither the Chinese nor foreign plenipotentiaries attached much importance to the amount of the tax to be levied on the trade; it was the admission that other countries had a right to trade with China at all that was the bitter pill for the Manchu Government to swallow. It had consistently acted on the theory that China was the middle kingdom, the centre of the earth, and that merchants from overseas were tribute bearers, graciously permitted by a benevolent Emperor to bring the trumpery products of their barbarous lands to the Celestial Empire and receive in return the necessaries of life for their starved people. The present Government of China does not object to the trade but only to the restriction on the tax to be levied thereon. It needs more money and, as the provinces are already bled white to support the bloated armies they are compelled to tolerate, an increased income can only come from a tax on overseas trade.

The Conference delegates apparently take the view that as the tax must be paid by the consumer, that is, the Chinese people who purchase the goods, it is not worth while haggling over the amount to be levied. Moreover, they realize that China needs a strong central government and no bankrupt government can be strong, therefore, an increase of revenue is necessary to stabilize the existing administration.

This reasoning is correct, but it presupposes that the administration is worthy of support. We do not mean that the Conference delegates have the right, any more than they have the inclination, to take upon themselves to decide whether the present Government deserves support or not. This is the recognized Government of China and foreigners must accord it the respect due to it. But millenniums ago the Chinese sages laid down the rule that a Government's only right to exist was that it possessed the confidence of the people. The Book of Odes says: "Before the Yin dynasty (B. C. 1122) lost the confidence of the people it might stand before God." Now, half of China is in arms denouncing the present Government and the leaders of the opposing force declare they will not be bound by any action the Tariff Conference may take. Indeed, the Conference itself is the immediate cause of the present war in which a greater number of men face each other in arms than at any period of China's history. The Government living from hand to mouth

is a government that may be obeyed or defied as occasion suggests. But a Government with a largely increased revenue is not only in a position to be coveted, but is also to be dreaded, as it will be able to maintain an army and enforce its decrees. Therefore Sun Chuan-fang and his allies have struck before the increased revenue which the tariff Conference is to create has strengthened their enemies. The Conference is placed in an anomalous position, but it must finish its labours. For, whether the next government—should there be a next one immediately—will endorse its findings or not, is not its concern, but that government's concern.

## CONFERENCE BASED ON SHAMS

Nov. 9.

We should be glad to share the optimism of the American delegate to the Tariff Revision Conference now sitting in Peking. The task set before the Conference was the abolition of the unequal treaties which have become a source of irritation to the Chinese people and the restoration of atmosphere of harmony and mutual trust. The whole world is suffering now, as it has often suffered in the past, from the suspicion with which different nationalities regard each other. It would be worth paying a big price to get rid of misunderstanding and put in its place a feeling of reciprocal confidence and respect. How does the Conference propose to get rid of the oppressive unequal treaties? It proposes to accomplish this feat by negotiating another unequal treaty. It says to the Chinese Government: "If you will abolish likin, we will cancel the treaties to which you object and concede your request for absolute tariff autonomy." But this also is unequal because if China is to be treated as a sovereign State, on a basis of complete equality with the Powers represented at the Conference, she has an indefeasible right to tariff autonomy without consulting anybody or making any promises of any kind. In the very act of abolishing the unequal treaties the delegates to the Conference justify the statesmen who negotiated those treaties, some 70 or more years ago, to which objection is now taken. Those men assumed that the contracting