

OUR BOOK TABLE

The Break-Up of China. By Lord Charles Beresford, M. P. Harper & Brothers: New York.

At the instance of the president of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of Great Britain, Lord Charles Beresford undertook, in September, 1898, the task of investigating the present financial and commercial condition of the Chinese Empire. Ever since the war between China and Japan, which revealed in a manner almost startling the military weakness, political disorganization and imminent bankruptcy of China, apprehensions have been entertained of the dissolution in the comparatively near future of that vast and populous empire. These fears have naturally had considerable influence in determining the policy of the leading nations of Europe toward China and toward each other in view of their respective relations to that empire. "Wheresoever the carcasses lie, there will the eagles be gathered together." Russia, England, Germany, France, Japan and Italy all hope to profit by the complications and embarrassment of an ancient people whose military and naval systems, political organization, commercial, educational, social and religious institutions are at length discovered by themselves to be a group of startling anachronisms destined ultimately to break down under the pressure of present-day civilization. But not alone in courts and cabinets, legislative halls and diplomatic circles, has the moribund condition of China excited attention. Great commercial houses doing a large and lucrative business with the ports of the far East in this country and in Europe have watched with the keenest interest the progress of events there. At last, resolving to know the true inwardness of the whole commercial and financial situation, the author of this book was sent as an envoy of trade to visit the chief ports of China to collect information and report.

To the general reader the book Lord Beresford has written is not without interest, inasmuch as it furnishes glimpses of the political, commercial and social life of the Chinese not elsewhere obtainable; but it is professedly addressed to the great trading public and to that large and growing section of the people who are concerned with commerce as an important item of national well-being. The facts of chief importance developed by Beresford's investigations are: the inherent weakness of the Chinese government arising from the inadequacy of its police, military and fiscal systems; the consequent insecurity of commerce as carried on by foreigners in all the large and populous towns on the coast and in the Yangtse Valley; the determination of nations having trading relations with China to secure their commercial interests by claiming concessions from the government and establishing "spheres of influence," thus preparing the way for the ultimate dismemberment and disintegration of the empire; and, finally, the domination of Russia in Northern China where the Czar has acquired complete ascendancy by a policy of mingled cajolery and intimidation. Lord Beresford thinks that China can only be saved by the reorganization of her army under the command and control of European and American officers, and so openly and unreservedly did he urge this policy on the viceroys of the various provinces and on the great national council, the Tsung-Hi-Yamen of Peking, that there is

some prospect of its being adopted if the fate of the great Eastern nation is not already fixed beyond recall. The book is indispensable to those who would know the conditions which present the greatest problem of modern political history.