

BRITAIN MUST KEEP HONGKONG

WHEN the Chinese ceded Hongkong to the British after the Opium War nearly a century ago, it was only a desolate barren island, inhabited by a handful of fishermen and pirates. But its site was exceptionally favorable for the maintenance of a permanent battalion of troops to protect British interests in the Far East, and it was strategically situated at the estuary of the Canton river, one mile from the mainland and some 90 miles from Canton itself. Overlooking and commanding the valley of the Si-Kiang, and equidistant from Indo-China and the Philippines, Hongkong became an almost obligatory port-of-call for all boats plying the China Sea.

In one hundred years the population of Hongkong has grown from nothing to more than a million; from a simple naval base it has become one of the most prosperous shipping centres in the British Empire. All the industries, docks, warehouses, banking and insurance firms on its 390 square miles are connected with shipping. It is the only large oceanic port

between Shanghai and Singapore and as such the crossroads of the international shipping lines. In addition, this island off the south-east coast of China is the junction of the British, American and Chinese air services.

Such a development could not have been realized without strong military protection—and, indeed, Hongkong is frequently referred to as the “Gibraltar of the East.” She boasts a summit crammed with casements, perforated with loopholes through which peep the muzzles of mighty cannons. Powerful, mysterious batteries lie in wait behind every hill along the coast, torpedo tubes under every rock. The innocent traveller who makes a tour of the island is confronted with prohibitions at every step, particularly if he happens to be carrying a camera.

No one ever forgets the day he first disembarked at Hongkong. From afar he sees a great peak towering in the mists, rising sheer from the yellow waters of the bay. Approaching closer, he observes that the mountain is entirely cov-

ered by a terraced city with houses rising in tiers above each other. And then suddenly he is surrounded by the seething turmoil of a Chinese port. The harbor is crowded with all kinds of crafts—liners, tramps, ferries, the grey dispatch boats of the British navy, junks and sampans. The sampan seems like the incarnation of the winged dragon with its red sails extended in the wind, skilfully manoeuvred by a Chinese woman carrying a baby on her back. And the ancient wooden junks are alive with men, women and children, as well as with squealing pigs and cackling geese. The air resounds with the weird cacophony of sirens, bells, whistles and a thousand and one sounds of indeterminable origin.

On the quays all China leaps forth to greet the eyes, ears and nostrils of the visitor. The streets are filled with cooks stewing their savory ragouts in the open air; street-merchants cry their wares, rickshaws carve a passage for themselves through the dense throng of humanity. But this panorama lasts for only a short distance and one realizes that Hongkong is British to the core. That is evident in the wonderful sleek black roads, the flowered boule-

wards, the lavish hotels, the buildings, the banks, the factories.

This, then, is Hongkong, fortified bastion of the Empire, guarding her far-flung interests in the Far East. And behind her is China, insatiable China, home of four hundred million customers, all of whom must be fed and clothed . . . With whose food? *Whose* clothes?

Recent Japanese activities in the South China Sea, and her invasion of South China, of Canton itself, threaten to isolate Hongkong. That would mean the loss of Britain's most lucrative market. For Japan declares openly her intention of stopping or controlling all traffic via Hongkong with the Chinese world. And Britain's behavior in the last critical months has done nothing to instil any fear of opposition in the minds of the Japanese war-lords.

The loss of Hongkong would be a major set-back for the British Empire—economically, diplomatically, militarily. But it is unthinkable that Britain will abandon Hongkong to whatever ignominious fate Japan may have in store for her. For in abandoning Hongkong, Great Britain will lose her supremacy in the East.—*Max Cousin, condensed from Parade.*