

CHINA: TWO POINTS OF VIEW.—I

By G. W. KEETON, in *The Fortnightly*, January, 1945

Professor Keeton was formerly Reader in Law and Politics at Hong Kong University, and his books include "The Development of Extra Territoriality in China" (1928) and "China, the Far East and the Future" (1942). The second article, by Jack Chen, will be published in our next issue.

THE TERMINATION of General Stilwell's command, and the ensuing statements in the United States and China, have emphasized that all is not well with Chinese Nationalism. After seven and a half years of war, fought under every imaginable difficulty, it would be miraculous if everything was going smoothly. The fact that China is still maintaining some kind of resistance to Japan is in itself, in the circumstances, a notable achievement, yet the recent difficulties have led to a disturbing crop of rumours that the Nationalists are finished, that no considerable effort is being made to resist the Japanese, and that Chinese Nationalism is really Fascism in disguise. Such wild exaggerations are essentially mischievous, and they are a poor tribute to the political sagacity of Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt, both of whom have persistently addressed General Chiang Kai-shek as the leader of a world Power.

For all that, it is clear that China is to-day facing a major crisis which requires prolonged study and bold treatment. For that reason, it is unfortunate that our news from Chungking is necessarily scanty and that it only filters to us through the medium of two censorships and in such a form that its significance is in danger of being lost in transit. In spite of these difficulties, however, it is essential to reach some conclusion upon such questions as: Is China a democracy? Is she a world Power? Is she really one State, or two States, or a collection of autonomous regions?—if for no other reason than that China's continued and increasingly effective collaboration in the Far Eastern war is a necessary condition of an allied victory within a reasonable space of time.

The end of one important era in Chinese history came with the outbreak of the Revolution in 1911, for it was at that date that the rule of the Manchus dissolved. Since then, China has been struggling to re-establish unity and stability. Judged by Chinese standards, thirty-three years is not a long time for such a struggle to continue. When dynasties have collapsed in the past, the ensuing disintegration has often continued for half a century, and sometimes for as long as nearly two. Yet always in the past, unity has been eventually regained. Failure to recover it would have involved not only China, but much of the Far East, in chaos, for until the nineteenth century China was the centre of an international system which lasted for many centuries, a system for which Japan is now crudely attempting to substitute her own "co-prosperity sphere," thus defying at once geography and history. One of the main sources of political instability in the Far East during the past century has been the steady decay of Chinese strength, thereby exposing wide contiguous areas to foreign domination. For that reason, the best hope of prolonged peace in the Far East after the defeat of Japan is to be found in a China which is once more prosperous and unified.

Unfortunately, it is now plain that China is going to need a good deal of foreign assistance before she can hope to be either. Have we, then, perhaps been a little premature in saluting Nationalist China as one of the "Big Four"? When asked the question some time ago, President Roosevelt replied that China was undoubtedly potentially a great Power, as well as being a major factor in any Far Eastern peace system, and this is the exact truth.