

»Don't worry. The government has the means to enforce its will.»

We also paid a visit to MONLIN CHIANG, the Minister of Education, and he, too, promised to do all in his power to further our plans.

THREAT OF A NEW CIVIL WAR

Just at this time storm-clouds began to loom again in Central China, and the civil war threatened to grow to even bigger proportions than before. The protagonists in the decisive struggle that might at any moment break out were CHIANG KAI-SHEK and Nanking on the one side and on the other the Governor-General of Hunan and Hupei, LI TSUNG-JEN, who in conjunction with Wuchang and Hankow were called the Kuangsi-Group. General LI was quartered in Shanghai, and was said to dispose over 360,000 men in different parts of his sphere of interest. General CHIANG KAI-SHEK was believed to possess 200,000 men under his colours. Rumour had it that armed clashes had already taken place, and tension was terrific. The conflagration that threatened might blaze up at any moment. The great question-mark was, as so many times before, FENG YÜ-HSIANG. On which side would he throw his 250,000 men if it came to open war?

The internal political situation was a matter of the greatest importance to us, for if the power of the government was weakened the Governor-General of Sinkiang would take no more notice of its orders, and treat us just as he chose.

VISIT TO CHIANG KAI-SHEK

On March 8th we were received by General CHIANG KAI-SHEK. To tell the truth, we were astonished that the most powerful man in the Nanking Government could find time to receive us and listen to matters that were so remote from the impending war. Political tension was at its height and an important meeting with the ministers was about to take place. It was thus not to be wondered at that CHIANG KAI-SHEK looked serious when he entered the room. He was wearing a simple uniform of European cut. His manner was polite and reserved, and he had no time for ceremonious bows or old-fashioned phrases. With SUN FO, the Minister for Railways, as interpreter he addressed himself direct to me and put some questions concerning the expedition, its field of work and plans. He enquired as to our wishes and said he would give his orders in accordance with them. He then spoke for a while with Professor SIU, and finally regretted that he had so little time. We rose and took our leave and the ministerial conference could begin.

Although it was as yet only the 9th of March it was already summer in Nanking, and balmy breezes blew over the wide-spread city. The climate here was much softer and milder than in Peking.