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for the payment of a weekly sum, and the husband will be anxious to avoid payment. In every case, to admit the existence of the separation order is to give one's character away. The indirect proof seems clear. The Act of 1895 has materially altered the proportion of men living singly to men living in families, and has transferred some tens of thousands of drunken and lazy men from the latter to the former class. It is only to be expected that there should be manifest signs in the Poor Law statistics.

If it is possible to accept this Act as an important factor in the increase in adult male pauperism, that conclusion is certainly reassuring. So far as it is a factor, the increase is seen to represent not a growth of poverty and degradation, but merely the transfer of the burden of existing "undesirables" from the shoulders of their wives and children to the broader back of the community. There is no reason why the community should submit to bear the burden in the precise way at present adopted. The cause of this class of pauperism is reasonably clear, and the type of pauper is more or less uniform. The problem of dealing with the "separated husband" class should, therefore, be comparatively simple, though the consideration of specific suggestions for dealing with it are beyond the scope of this article.

F. TILLYARD

THE COMPRADORE: HIS POSITION IN THE FOREIGN TRADE OF CHINA.

OF the many peculiar features connected with mercantile life in the open ports of China, one that perhaps deserves more than ordinary attention is the custom—one might almost say an invariable rule—of employing natives as compradores in almost all classes and grades of business enterprises, whether wholly or partly owned by the foreigner. In the words of a foreign newspaper editor in China, "the compradore may be regarded as not only the axle on which the whole wheel of the foreigner's business with the native turns, but, in many cases, also the hub, the spokes, the rim, and, in fact, the whole wheel, save the paint, which may be taken to represent the firm which gives it the colour of its name."

But in spite of the important position which the compradore holds in international commerce, he is relatively unknown beyond the circle in which he lives. His social position has been open to doubt, and, until only a few years ago, he was regarded by educated people in China as a mere servant in the employ of a

foreign merchant, having no will of his own, and working in every possible way against the interests of his fellow-countrymen for the benefit of his employer. On the other hand, however, we hear from time to time complaints made in the foreign Press that "the compradore gains wealth at the expense of his nominal principal, and controls the trade through the foreigner's ignorance of the language," or, to adopt more expressive phrases, that "the compradores as a class are all fat, whilst their foreign principals are generally lean."

It is needless to say that while one party depreciates the capabilities of the modern compradore, the other exaggerates the importance of his position as a medium of trade by neglecting to count the other main causes of successes and failures of business; and the fact remains that the nature of the compradore system has not been really understood by all.

In the present paper I shall endeavour to give a short account of the origin and the underlying causes of this custom, and especially of its subsequent developments, and shall touch upon the question of its economic value to commerce and of its effect upon the political and social progress of the Chinese nation at large.

Now if we trace the origin of this indirect means of international commerce, we go back to the time when the first batches of European traders, particularly the Spaniards and the Portuguese, came over to China and obtained permission to trade. At the very outset they were confronted with the difficult situation that no respectable native tradespeople would willingly come forward to make exchanges of goods with the foreigners. To obtain their provisions for daily need, they had to employ the few natives who would serve them for want of better employment. It was, therefore, the duty of these native servants to go to the native city with some foreign goods in order to exchange them for provisions for the foreign residents. To them the Spanish name "Compradors" (meaning purchasers) was first applied.

Now apart from this historical fact that the Chinese people had favoured this method of second-hand dealing with the foreigner, there are fundamental difficulties in the way of free and direct trading. First comes the language difficulty, which, by the way, the Western traders have preferred to leave unconquered, not so much because they are unable to as because they lack the will to conquer it. It is also nearly impossible for a foreigner to comprehend the great variety of customs, of com-

mercial practices, and even of civilisation, comprised within the bounds of the Chinese Empire. Besides these, there are other obstacles which the Government is at present endeavouring to remove, but which have proved to be great impediments to the growth of both the internal and foreign trade, namely, the want of uniformity in the systems of weights and measures used in different provinces, and the unsettled state of national currency, coupled with the unregulated issue and circulation of money certificates and credit bills by the old-fashioned native banks.

To the foreign trader, therefore, a trustworthy and confident native is of invaluable assistance to his business. Even in the early stage of the compradore system, the compradore was not merely used as an interpreter and canvasser for a foreign firm, but was also the consultative agent as to the business reputation and the stability of all the Chinese traders who had dealings with the firm. When, therefore, the foreign trade of China began to expand, and emerged completely from the simple barter system to monetary and credit transactions, the position of the compradore as the medium of trade was further strengthened and improved, until now we have lost the trace of his having been a mere purchaser of provisions for his foreign principal.

Speaking generally, the compradore of the former days was strictly an employee or servant of a foreign firm; but with subsequent growth of commerce, and of competition among the foreign traders themselves, more freedom of action was allowed, and his remuneration gradually took the form of commissions and shares of profit relative to the amount of business done by the firm which he served, in addition to a fixed sum representing his salary. Many new firms have dispensed with this item of salary for their compradores. The result is that nowadays the compradore may be regarded in many cases as a departmental manager of the business which he represents; in some as an active partner or an independent trader, such as a commission agent or a commercial factor in Western countries. This is especially the case with all import and export business. There nearly the whole commercial arrangement is left to the compradore so far as the native market is concerned. It is the compradore who brings the buyers and the sellers together, settles all disputes, secures the owner against loss, and gives his advice as regards the condition of the market and so forth.

At this point the business policy or morality of the compradore may be naturally called to question, seeing that he has so many opportunities to practise fraud and to commit a breach of trust.

Speaking generally, we may say with fair truth that one seldom hears any complaint made against the compradore in all the older and well-established firms and companies, and that it is only in those new and more or less speculative businesses that failures and complications happen every now and then, which, however, may or may not be due to the unscrupulous dealings of their compradores. In many recent cases it was found that the owner of the firm was actually a man of straw, and the whole of the interest bearing security-money deposited by the compradore made up the total capital of the business. This arises from the fact that among the middle-class Chinese merchants in the open ports the position of a compradore has come to be regarded as a very profitable one, and many independent and well-to-do business men do not hesitate to accept any offer that may come their way. Naturally, the foreign adventurer has here a splendid chance of playing the fool with the natives, especially when the latter do not understand any foreign language, as is the case with many compradores nowadays.

There is one feature of the compradore system which somehow has escaped general attention, namely, the custom of employing compradores in those businesses which are capitalised and owned purely by the Chinese, and are organised on the modern Western lines. The two notable examples are the Commercial Bank of China at Shanghai, and the China Merchant Steamship Navigation Company. The compradore of the former naturally deals with all the foreign customers of the Bank, and the compradores of the foreign banks in China; the compradore of the latter is really the chief transport agent for foreign shippers who may send goods by the steamers of the Chinese Company. In some cases, however, where foreigners are employed as managers, it seems to me that the compradore is little more than an interpreter between the owners or the directors, as the case may be, on the one hand, and the foreign manager on the other.

So far I have endeavoured in a brief space to indicate the causes and the present state of affairs in connection with this peculiar feature in China's foreign trade. We may now make a few general observations as to its economic value to commerce, and the general effect of the existence of such a commercial institution upon the political and social progress of China since the first days of her foreign trade. From what we have seen, the compradore is undoubtedly one of the parties interposing between the original producer and the ultimate consumer; and as such he must get his share of the profit of commerce, for

which the consumer has to pay more than what is necessary. This is theoretically true. In practice, the effect may be still worse. It is usual for a compradore to increase his share of profit by creating corners and price combinations of all sorts, either with his fellow-compradores of the other firms in the same trade, or with the native wholesale dealers. In the former case, the foreign traders are often coerced into buying dearer materials for export; in the latter, the native retail traders have to pay higher prices for foreign goods. But in either case the ultimate loss falls to a greater or less extent on the native consumer, because, in the case of a foreign manufacturer buying raw materials from China and exporting the finished goods again to China, the price he charges on the goods exported in the absence of competition is necessarily determined by the price of the raw material plus labour and other fixed charges. This, of course, may be taken as a condition in favour of the growth of native manufactures apart from the question of tariff.

But when we turn to consider the political and social effects, we find that the compradore was at least partly responsible for the well-known fact that the Chinese nation until quite recently remained practically unchanged in ideas and customs ever since the beginning of her trade with the Occidental nations some three centuries ago. As the compradore has been in the way of direct intercourse between the foreign and native traders, so also he has been an obstacle to any approach of mutual good understanding between the two peoples. Besides, we must not lose sight of the mutual influence of the causes and the effects in a case like this; for instance, the compradore is the outcome of misunderstanding and dissimilarity in language and customs, but he is also one of the great factors which have hitherto prevented or delayed the removal of such misunderstanding and dissimilarities, since it would endanger his interest in his capacity as the medium of foreign trade. As he was practically the key for each side to learn of the customs and ways of the other, he could easily effect his purpose by either colouring his story with a due amount of mystery, or otherwise by misrepresenting the truth.

On the whole, this system of indirect trading, while it has smoothed away many likely conflicts and difficulties in the way of trade for the foreigner, is also an economic disadvantage to both parties; and by the very nature of this system in reconciling in a superficial way Western notions and policies of trade with those of the Chinese, it has hindered the natural growth of the

Chinese nation which would have otherwise taken place under the stimulating influence of international trade.

In conclusion, we may sum up the situation somewhat as thus : there is as yet no evidence that the compradore system will soon die out, but, with the coming settlement of the currency problem, with the new machinery of law in full operation, with the spreading of technical education, and with the removal of many other difficulties in the way of trade, it is reasonable to hope that his services may gradually lose the importance which they have now attained, and that foreign and Chinese business-men may more and more come into direct personal contact, which cannot fail to have a beneficial result to all alike.

KUANG YUNG PAO

CONSUMERS' STRIKES IN FRANCE.

STRIKES among working men are now so frequent that they may be considered as a normal phenomenon of industrial life. On the other hand, strikes among consumers are rare occurrences and of real originality. They seem to prognosticate an important departure in economic evolution. In any case they have not lacked variety or success. Such strikes, called by some boycotts, have taken place in Germany, the United States, and even in France. They have arisen concerning beer, spirits, milk, gas-rates, &c. Boycotting has even been tried, not without efficacy, in international conflicts. The Turks especially have had recourse to it several times for lack of more efficacious weapons. But recent cases in the North of France have had certain quite peculiar features.

In the first place, the leading, and at times the only actors in the movement have been women—women of the people, ordinarily, no doubt, of a quite peaceful temperament. But is it not symbolical to see the consumer represented by women, by those who keep house or the *ménage*, by the *ménagère*, as we say in France? For in the economic order of things it is the man who represents production : he bears the tools ; and it is the woman who represents consumption : she carries the basket. Thus the strikes have been strikes, not of the tools, but of the baskets !

In the next place, the consumers in these cases have not been content to take up a passive resistance, as in the other boycotts just mentioned. They did not confine themselves to