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FROM PEKING TO MANDALAY

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CROSSING THE YALUNG RIVER. (*See p.* 191.)

[*Frontispiece.*

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FROM

PEKING TO MANDALAY

A JOURNEY FROM NORTH CHINA TO BURMA THROUGH TIBETAN SSUCH'UAN AND YUNNAN

BY Reginald F. Fleming JOHNSTON, M.A., F.R.G.S.

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY
DISTRICT OFFICER AND MAGISTRATE, WEIHAIWEI

WITH MAP AND ILLUSTRATIONS

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
1908

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TO

DAVID PLAYFAIR HEATLEY

WHOSE PRESENCE IN THE EAST WOULD BRING HAPPINESS
TO EXILE, AND WHOSE ABSENCE IN THE WEST HAS
CAUSED HIS BANISHED FRIEND TO TURN
MANY TIMES WITH LONGING TO
THE SETTING SUN.

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FROM PEKING TO MANDALAY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE journey of which an account is given in the following pages was not undertaken in the special interests of geographical or other science nor in the service of any Government. My chief object was to gratify a long-felt desire to visit those portions of the Chinese Empire which are least known to Europeans, and to acquire some knowledge of the various tribes subject to China that inhabit the wild regions of Chinese Tibet and north-western Yunnan. Though nearly every part of the Eighteen Provinces has in recent years been visited and described by European travellers, my route between Tachienlu and Li-chiang was one which — so far as I am aware — no British subject had ever traversed before me, and of which no description in book-form has hitherto appeared in any European language.

From the ethnological point of view the Chinese Far West — to which the greater part of this book is devoted — is one of the most interesting regions in the world, and presents problems the solution of which would settle many of the vexed questions relating to the origin and inter-relations of the

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Asiatic peoples. As for its geographical interest, it may be sufficient to say here that the principalities of Chala and Muli contain what are probably the highest spots inhabited by man on the face of the globe, and that several of the passes crossed by my little caravan are loftier than the highest of the passes existing along the route traversed by the British expedition to Lhasa. My own contributions to geographical and ethnological lore are of the slenderest; but if I can persuade some of my readers that Tibetan Ssuch'uan and western Yunnan are worth visiting, be it only for the glory of their mountain scenery, I shall consider that my book has fulfilled the most useful purpose to which it aspires.

For those who are seized by a craving to revert for a time to something like the nomadic life of our remote forefathers, or to pass like the old Hindu ascetics into "the homeless state," there can be no country in the world more full of charm than some of the wilder and less-peopled regions of the Chinese Empire. There are enormous areas in that country covered with primeval forests in which man's foot has never trod, lofty mountains whose peaks are crowned with sparkling diadems of eternal snow, grand and savage gorges in which Nature has carved for herself in indelible letters the story of the world's youth, and gloomy chasms through which rush the mighty rivers that carry to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific snows that melted on the white roof of the world. And amid all this magnificence and desolation there are lovely valleys and stretches of garden-land

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that might have been chosen as the Edens of a hundred mythologies, and which in historic times haye been the homes of religious recluses and poets, who, like others of their kind in Western lands, found in silence and solitude a refuge from the bitterness and pain of the world, or a hermitage in which, amid scenes of perennial beauty, they could weave their flowers of thought into immortal garlands of human words.

It is a mistake to regard the Chinese as essentially a prosaic race, caring only for material things and nothing at all for what we should call things of the spirit. If they have less power of artistic creation than the Japanese—and even that may be doubted—they are quite as sensitive as the people of any other race to the magic of beauty in either nature or art; and especially do they—like our own Ruskin—take a vivid delight in the loveliness of mountain scenery. There is a well-known story of a Chinese scholar who, like the scholars of most lands, was blest with few of this world's goods, and, unlike a great many of them, was noted for his zealous devotion to the service of his country's gods. One night he heard the voice of an invisible being that spoke to him thus: "Your piety has found favour in the sight of heaven; ask now for what you most long to possess, for I am the messenger of the gods, and they have sworn to grant your heart's desire." "I ask" said the poor scholar "for the coarsest clothes and food, just enough for my daily wants, and I beg that I may have freedom to wander at my will over mountain and

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fell and woodland stream, free from all worldly cares, till my life's end. That is all I ask." Hardly had he spoken when the sky seemed to be filled with the laughter of myriads of unearthly voices. "All you ask?" cried the messenger of the gods. "Know you not that what you demand is the highest happiness of the beings that dwell in heaven? Ask for wealth or rank, or what earthly happiness you will, but not for you are the holiest joys of the gods."

To those of our own day—and there are many such—whose highest ideal of happiness is that of this poor Chinese scholar, to roam at will through the beautiful places of the world, or perhaps even to dwell in some lonely hermitage far removed from

"The weariness, the fever and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan,"

it must be a bitter reflection that man is by his own works dooming himself to lose for evermore the privilege of freedom and the solace of isolation. When an authoritative voice informs us, in connection with wireless telegraphy, that "our ultimate ideal must be instantaneous electrical communication with every man on earth, ashore or afloat, at a cost within the reach of every one," what becomes of the unhappy man who finds one of the greatest joys of travel in the very fact of his utter loneliness, and in the knowledge that he is for the time being severed from all possibility of communication with his civilised fellow-men? The writer I have just

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quoted[1] assures us that owing to the recent triumphs of science "a severance of communication with any part of the earth — even the Antipodes — will henceforth be impossible. Storms that overthrow telegraph posts, and malice that cuts our cables, are impotent in the all-pervading ether. An explorer like Stanley in the tropical forest, or Geary amid ice-fields, will report daily progress in the *Times*. . . . Sir William Preece's dream of signalling to Mars may (say by utilising Niagara for the experiment) yet be realised." Thus even a flight to the virgin continents of another planet will not give the future traveller the delicious sense of freedom that comes from the knowledge of complete isolation or of entire severance from the cares of civilised life. How can we expect our mistress Nature to be gracious to us if we, with our unholy inventions, woo her so much more rudely and roughly than did her lovers of the golden time when the earth was young? For my own part I rejoice that a wireless-telegraphy apparatus has not yet become an indispensable item in every traveller's equipment, and that no law has yet been enacted penalising any individual who presumes to sever himself from communication with his fellows.

If it appears churlish and ungrateful to speak of the pleasures of separation from all those comforts and delights that Western civilisation has placed within our grasp, and without which

[1] Mr J. Henniker Heaton, M.P., in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, September 1906.

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the normal European would hardly find life worth living, it is only fair to remember that no one is in a position to appreciate such comforts and delights so heartily as the man who has been temporarily deprived of them; though the depth of his appreciation will, of course, vary according to the extent of his dependence on the amenities of civilised life during his ordinary existence as a social unit.

The journey described in this book was not the first undertaken by me in the countries of the Far East. Towards the close of 1902 I travelled through the French province of Tong-king (erstwhile tributary to the Chinese Empire) and ascended the Red River to the high plateau of Yunnan. After traversing that province from east to west I reached the town of Ssumao, and thence struck southwards into the Chinese Shan States and the French Protected States of Upper Laos. A journey of many days in a dug-out canoe down one of the most beautiful rivers of that country gave me a delightful opportunity of becoming acquainted with the domestic life of the Lao-Shans—surely among the most attractive and hospitable races in the world. Leaving my canoe at the charming little Laos capital, Luang Prabang, I proceeded down the Mekong on a raft and visited the ruins of the obliterated kingdom of Vien-chan. There I left the Mekong and wandered overland through the great dry plain of eastern Siam to Korat. From Korat I was speedily conveyed by the prosaic means of a

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railway to the perplexing city of Bangkok, with its curious medley of East and West, old and new, its electric trams, its royal white elephants, its gilded pagodas and State umbrellas, and its forlorn collection of European legations. Except for the baggage-coolies hired at intervals along my route, I was for the greater part of this four months' journey unaccompanied by friend or servant. At one point, indeed, I was literally alone: for in the country of the Lao-Shans my four baggage-coolies, owing to some unreasonable dread of perfectly non-existent dangers, suddenly left me to my own devices, and returned to their homes, obliging me to abandon all my baggage except what I was able to carry in my own hands and pockets. It was then that my eyes were first opened to the fact that civilised man encumbers himself with a great many material possessions which he could quite well do without; for at no time did I suffer the least inconvenience from the loss of any of the articles which up to that point I had considered absolutely essential to my comfort and well-being. Servants and heavy baggage can indeed easily be dispensed with in any tropical country in which the natives are not unfriendly, and provided that the traveller is willing to subsist entirely on such food as the country affords; and it is undoubtedly the case that a traveller with few *impedimenta* can penetrate with ease into remote places that are inaccessible to one whose train includes numerous coolies and beasts of burden. One who is travelling with some definite scientific object in view must, of course,

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carry a suitable equipment of scientific instruments, and may require a retinue of servants and surveyors; but it is the mere wanderer—especially he who wanders in search of things strange and beautiful—not the scientific explorer, whose requirements I am here considering. It is perhaps unwise to render oneself absolutely dependent for supplies on the friendliness of natives, but in my own case it so happens that I have never met with inhospitable treatment from any of the Asiatic peoples among whom I have travelled, whether Chinese, Tongkingese, Tibetans, Shans, Siamese, or Burmese. I leave it to others who have had different experiences to tell their own tales.

At other times during my residence in China I have found opportunities to make tours, either in connection with official business or on leave of absence, in other parts of the Far East. In China I have made several excursions into the interior of the provinces of Kwangtung, Kwangsi, Kiangsi, and Shantung. In 1904 I travelled through the German colony of Kiaochou and the provincial capital, Chinan-fu, on my way to the little town of Ch'ü Fou, where I visited the tomb of Confucius and was entertained by the Duke K'ung, said to be the seventy-sixth descendant of the great sage in a direct line; and on the same occasion I ascended the famous sacred mountain of T'ai Shan, where the Emperor Shun is said to have sacrificed to heaven in the third millennium B.C. At the close of the same year, while the Russo-Japanese war was still raging, I was enabled

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through the kindness of a distinguished naval officer to pay an interesting visit to the capital of the distracted kingdom of Korea.

The journey described in the following pages was of a more ambitious character than those just mentioned, and occupied the greater part of a year. My intention was to ascend the Yangtse to the province of Ssuch'uan, and thence to make my way across that province to those principalities of eastern Tibet that now own allegiance to the emperor of China. I intended if possible to make my way southward through those states, and so enter the province of Yunnan; whence, as I knew from the narratives of former travellers, I should have no difficulty in making my way into Upper Burma. The details of my route I left to be determined by circumstances. Though I was occasionally subjected to minor disappointments and delays, the assistance of the various local officials and the friendly spirit shown by the people among whom I travelled enabled me to carry out my plans with success.

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CHAPTER II

PEKING TO ICHANG

THE first part of my journey was accomplished with great rapidity, and my description of it will not occupy long in the telling. I had no desire to spend a longer time than was absolutely necessary in northern China, and was glad enough to avail myself of every facility for reaching Ichang—the port on the Yangtse where steam navigation ceases —as soon as possible. The recent completion of the northern section of the great trunk railway of China has rendered it possible to travel from Peking to Hankow in four days,[1] and so makes it unnecessary to undertake a long and somewhat dreary journey on horseback or in springless carts over hundreds of miles of dusty plains and impossible roads.

I left Wei-hai-wei on 6th January 1906 in the steamer *Shuntien*, and reached the ugly and depressing little port of Chin-wang-tao on the 8th. In the evening of the following day, after a night spent in Tientsin, I reached the capital, and was glad to exchange the discomfort of a monotonous

[1] Since reduced to thirty-six hours.

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A FLEET OF JUNKS.

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railway journey for the luxury of that excellent Peking hostelry the "Hôtel des Wagons Lits." The next four days were spent in paying visits at the British Legation and elsewhere, and in fighting ineffectual battles against an unusually aggressive dust-storm. No one, except perhaps a traveller in the desert of Gobi or over the sand-dunes of Khotan, can form any conception of the penetrating power of Peking dust. Parched throats, husky voices, bloodshot eyes, are the price that must be paid for the pleasure of a walk through the streets of Peking during a dust-storm; even one's own residence is no sanctuary, for double window-sashes and padded doors are alike powerless to withstand the scourge. Most of the legations are fairly well protected by their lofty park-walls, but how to keep an ordinary Peking house or hotel free of dust is as insoluble a problem as that which baffled Alice's Walrus and Carpenter.

Peking being now one of the ordinary objectives of the modern globe-trotter, I will not encroach upon the province of the compiler of tourist guide-books by attempting a description. Even the Englishman who has never left his native soil knows something of the city that defied all the Powers of Europe seven years ago, and paid so bitterly for her defiance. There have, of course, been great changes in Peking since those dark days; but away from the railway stations and the legation quarter, with its bristling guns, its battlemented walls and its heterogeneous army of foreign guards, there is little to show that Peking was so recently in the grip of a victorious and remorseless

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enemy. Its streets, temples, shops and palaces are very much as they were in 1900, showing the same mixture of grandeur and sordidness, splendour and decay. As for its people, who will venture to say how much or how little they have changed? That they love the people of Europe no better than they did eight years ago may be taken for granted: I am not aware that we have done anything to win their affections. That they have learned something of the secret of European prowess, and have realised why our arms were resistless, even against their Boxer champions, is no doubt true; and if this lesson does not, for some strange reason, fill them with admiration and reverence for Europe, it is certainly teaching them where to seek a cure for the ills of their own country. Events are now making it clearer every day that a true spirit of national feeling is rising among the people, and that the best minds in China are devoting themselves to the problem of their country's salvation. Nowhere is this state of things more obvious than in Peking, but it is not only in the capital that the new spirit is working strange wonders among the Chinese people. China is, indeed, rapidly growing to be more than a mere geographical term. The racial solidarity that is the underlying cause of her wonderful power of passive resistance shows no signs of disintegration at the present time, and it will form the best possible foundation for a new national patriotism. Only ten years ago an English traveller and politician, predicting the partition of China, explained that he used the word "China" only for convenience, for "there

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is really no such thing as 'China' at all."[1] For such a view there was some excuse at a time when humbled China was lying wounded and helpless at the feet of victorious Japan, but few, I fancy, will be inclined to endorse it now.

The position of Peking at the present time is one of peculiar interest, for all the different forces that are now at work to make or mar China issue from, or converge towards, the capital. There, on the Dragon Throne, beside, or rather above, the powerless and unhappy emperor, the father of his people and their god, sits the astute and ever-watchful lady whose word is law to emperor, minister, and clown alike. There dwell the heads of the Government boards, the leaders of the Manchu aristocracy and the great political parties, the drafters of new constitutions and imperial decrees, and the keen-witted diplomatists who know so well how to play against European antagonists the great game of international chess. To Peking come the memorials of viceroys and provincial governors; indictments and denunciations against high officials for ultra-Conservatism or for Radicalism; bulky petitions from visionary students who have studied Western politics, and hope against hope that their proposed measures of reform may chance to come under the imperial eye. And there the great Powers of the West, reproducing in miniature the mighty armed camps of Europe, watch each other with jealous eyes from the gates of their embattled legations.

[1] *The Far East*, by Sir Henry Norman, p. 593.

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The Lu-Han railway, by which I left the Capital on 18th January, brought me to Hankow on the evening of the 16th. The total distance is 1,228 kilometres, or about 759 miles. The provinces traversed by this great trunk line are Chihli, Honan, and Hupei. The line for the most part lies through a rich, flat country, studded with innumerable trees, villages, and farmsteads, but presenting no features of special interest to the ordinary traveller. The train stopped every evening, and resumed the journey early each morning, the first stage being completed at Shun-tê-fu, in Chihli. The second day we entered the province of Honan and crossed the Yellow River by the great bridge which has been the subject of so much criticism and discussion in engineering circles in the East. The construction of this bridge — a screw-pile structure almost two miles long — was by far the most serious and costly work that faced the French and Belgian engineers in the course of their labours, the chief difficulties consisting in the enormous rise and fall in the river and the shifting sands and almost fathomless mud of its bed. What must strike most travellers who are devoid of any technical knowledge of engineering are the great length of the bridge, the flimsiness of its appearance (for its massive supports are sunk far below the bed of the river), and its narrowness. Whether it is really fit to stand the strain of an abnormal summer flood, and whether its piers have been sunk sufficiently deep to ensure permanent stability, are questions which time and experience alone can solve. It had only been opened a few

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SOUTH BANK OF YELLOW RIVER, WITH VIEW OF RAILWAY BRIDGE.

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weeks before I crossed it, and since then traffic has had to be suspended more than once. Only one train could pass over the bridge at a time, and each was taken across by a special light engine.

The second day's journey was completed at Chêng-chou, half an hour's journey from the south bank of the Yellow River. Here I found a quasi-European inn named the "Hotel Pericles," kept by an Italian ex-railway employee. Macaroni and chianti and the genial conversation of our host, Mr P. Mouchtouris, and two of his compatriots, afforded a cheerful interlude in a somewhat monotonous journey.

At the close of the third day we found ourselves at a place called Chu Ma-tien—a railway depôt only, not within sight of any large centre of population. On the following day we passed through the mountainous country that divides the provinces of Honan and Hupei, with scenery the most picturesque to be found anywhere between the two railway termini. Hankow itself, which was reached a few hours later, lies on the flat banks of the Yangtse, at a distance of about 600 miles from Shanghai. On the opposite bank of the great river lies the provincial capital, Wu-ch'ang, the seat of Government of the viceroy or governor-general; while on the same side of the river as Hankow, but separated from it by the Han river, lies Han-Yang. These three places together form what is practically one vast city of something like two million inhabitants: a city so favourably situated in the heart of China

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that it can hardly fail to become a commercial capital of pre-eminent importance. The large European trading community is fully alive to this fact, and building land is rapidly increasing in value. It is the terminus of the ocean-going vessels, and the starting-point of the smaller cargo and passenger-steamers bound for Ichang, about 390 miles further up the river. Hankow also derives great advantage from its position—denoted by its name—at the mouth of the Han, one of the Yangtse's greatest tributaries, itself navigable for native cargo boats for no less than 1,200 miles. Finally, Hankow is at present the terminus of China's only trunk railway, that by which I travelled from Peking, and it will soon be similarly connected with Canton in the south. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that there is hardly a city in the whole world that has a greater commercial and industrial future before it than Hankow.

That the railway will pay, and pay enormously—especially when the connections with Canton and Kowloon are completed—is a matter beyond all possibility of doubt. That it will be of real benefit to the people of China is more to the point. It will undoubtedly enable the native merchants and farmers to send their goods and produce to markets which were formerly unattainable by them, and will go far towards minimising the misery caused by local famines. There is plenty of evidence that the Chinese are everywhere anxious and delighted to avail themselves of the wonderful new force that has been introduced into their country: the old days when the

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Shanghai-Wusung railway had to be sold by the foreign owners to the Chinese Government, and was then deliberately wrecked and abolished to appease the prejudices of anti-foreign mobs,[1] have passed for ever away. The final proof—if one were needed—that the Chinese Government has definitely surrendered its old anti-railway policy, lies in the fact that it is itself promoting the construction of purely Chinese lines such as that from Peking to Kalgan; lines not only owned by Chinese capitalists, but actually engineered and constructed by Chinese engineers and contractors. The recent opposition of the Government to the construction of such lines as that from Kowloon to Canton, or from the Burmese frontier to T'êng-yüeh, lies simply in the rapidly-growing national hostility to the monopolisation of Chinese industrial enterprises by foreign capital, and the interference of foreign Powers—based on their subjects' pecuniary stake in the country—in the internal affairs of the empire. Therefore, though we hear a great deal just now about the difficulties placed by Chinese officialdom in the way of the employment of foreign engineers and foreign capital in railway construction and the exploitation of mines, this must not be interpreted as a reluctance on the part of China to have railways built or to have the mineral wealth of the country opened up. It is merely that the Chinese wish to build their own railways, and to work their

[1] But there is another side to this story which does not reflect much credit on the foreigners concerned. This aspect of the matter has been fully detailed by Mr Chester Holcombe, in *The Real Chinese Question*, chap. i.

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own mines, in order that international disputes and political dangers may be avoided and that China may be exploited for the primary benefit of the Chinese Government and people, rather than for the benefit of foreign Governments and foreign capitalists. The European points out that the Chinese, either from want of money or from lack of technical knowledge and experience, are incapable of giving effect to these admirable ideals, however much they might wish to do so; to which the Chinese retort that rather than tolerate foreign interference, they prefer to wait until these disadvantages can be obviated, even if the country's advance in wealth and civilisation is thereby retarded. This attitude, even if economically unsound, is quite a natural one in the circumstances; but, unfortunately, there are a number of people in Europe and in the Far East who seem to regard any attempt made by China to keep or regain control of her own resources as a kind of international crime, which must, if necessary, be punished by gun-boats and bayonets. We resent the introduction of a Chinese element into British Columbia, Australia, and South Africa, but we make bitter protests against the "anti-foreign feeling in China" if the responsible statesmen of that country refuse to silence the cry of "China for the Chinese."

The Viceroy Chang Chih-tung—one of those able statesmen who prevented the spread of Boxerism in the Yangtse valley and so saved foreign commercial interests there from a serious disaster — was one of the first high officials in

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China to realise the benefit that would accrue to all classes of the community from the construction of railways. "Is there any one power," he wrote, "that will open the door of learning for the scholar, the farmer, the workman, the merchant, and the soldier? To this question we reply emphatically, there is, and it is the Railway. The potentialities of the scholar lie in extensive observation; of the farmer, in finding a ready sale for farm products; of the workman, in the increase of machinery; of the merchant, in cheap and rapid transit; and of the soldier, in the quick despatch of the munitions of war. . . . The Railway is the source of the wealth and power of Western countries. . . . How can the people of our Flowery Inner Land progress, or even exist, without railways?"[1] This emphatic declaration by one of the greatest and most patriotic of Chinese officials is significant in more ways than one. China is to have railways, not merely as a means of rapid transport for merchandise and produce, but for the purpose of consolidating the military strength of the empire.

It must be a matter of serious regret to Chinese statesmen that the resources of the country—both in capital and in engineering skill—were not sufficient to enable China to undertake the whole financing and construction of the great trunk railway; and there can be little doubt that as soon as China is in a position to act upon Article V. of the Belgian Agreement, which she

[1] *China's Only Hope*, by Chang Chih-tung, translated by S. I. Woodbridge, 1901.

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is entitled to do any time after 1907, she will refund all the Franco-Belgian capital advanced to her under the terms of that Agreement, and take over entire control of the whole northern section of the railway. It would probably be to the entire advantage of legitimate foreign trade and enterprise in China that she should do so, and the eventual benefit to be derived by China herself would be incalculable—provided, of course, that she honourably fulfilled her commercial treaties with the Western Powers.

On arrival at Hankow I spent two days in making such meagre preparations as I considered necessary for my long journey into the interior; for Hankow—being only four days distant by steamer from Shanghai—is the last town where it is possible to purchase European stores at a reasonable price.

Shallow-draft steamers with excellent accommodation for both Chinese and Europeans leave Hankow for Ichang two or three times a week. The traffic is divided among British, Chinese and Japanese companies. It was by a Japanese steamer that I started for the Upper Yangtse on 18th January. Our journey was not devoid of unforeseen incident. All went well until the 21st, when we ran on a shoal. All our efforts to get off proved unavailing till the 23rd, when by means of the process known to naval men, I understand as kedging, we hauled ourselves into deep water. This, however, was not effected without breaking a chain-cable and losing a

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valuable anchor, which sank irrecoverably in the mud. Our Japanese captain then announced that the vessel drew so much water that he could not then attempt the only available channel, and that there was no alternative but to return to Hankow and discharge some of the cargo. This caused intense dissatisfaction among the hundreds of Chinese passengers, most of whom were on their way to their homes to spend Chinese New Year's Day (which fell on 25th January) with their families. Some of the passengers, I was informed, actually threatened to use force to compel the captain to proceed, and were only pacified when they were given the option of going ashore in the ship's boats, and finding their own way to their several destinations. Twenty or thirty passengers availed themselves of this offer, and were packed into a single boat towed by the ship's steam-launch. On their way to the shore some unfortunate accident caused the boat—which was by no means over-crowded—to upset, and all the passengers were thrown into the water. I never learned the exact number of those who were drowned, for no proper tally of the passengers who had embarked appears to have been kept, but it was almost certainly not more than three. The rescued passengers were all bundled into the steam-launch, the boat (which was bottom upwards) temporarily abandoned, and the survivors brought back to the ship. The families of the poor fellows who paid so severe a penalty for their anxiety to reach their homes were doubtless waiting to welcome them with all the exuberant

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