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Through the Yang-tse Gorges

Or, Trade and Travel in Western China

ARCHIBALD JOHN LITTLE



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THROUGH THE YANG-TSE GORGES

OR

*TRADE AND TRAVEL IN
WESTERN CHINA*

BY

ARCHIBALD JOHN LITTLE, F.R.G.S.

“Let me journey down
On the great river, that from town to town,
Through meadow miles; 'twixt gorges of the hills,
Sweeps through the land's whole length, and ever fills
Its widening channel deeper.”

YU-PE-YA'S LUTE.

“Good government obtains, when those who are near are made happy, and those who
are far off are attracted.”

CONFUCIUS.

“Lun yu,” xlii. 16, 2.

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TO MY WIFE,

TO WHOSE LOVING AID AND ENCOURAGEMENT THIS SMALL LITERARY

VENTURE OWES ITS EXECUTION,

I dedicate this Work.

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PREFACE.

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THE following pages comprise nothing more nor less than a transcript of the journal kept by me during a two months' journey from Shanghai, the metropolis of the Coast, to Chung-king, the commercial metropolis of Western China. This journal was written up each night, as I travelled along in the native boat, and was despatched home by successive mails for the amusement of my friends in England. I have been induced to publish it in the belief that impressions formed and recorded day by day on the spot give a better idea of the actual state of things in China, than many of the elaborate and carefully compiled books which attempt a more exhaustive description of the country.

So much interest is now felt at home in the "Flowery Land," and such very erroneous conceptions appear to be entertained in regard to China, her wealth, her strength and prowess, and her value as an ally—qualities of which, in my opinion,



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only the remote potentiality exists at present—that no apology is needed for presenting a literal picture of the country I traversed.

With the exception of the ubiquitous missionary, the travellers who have ascended the “Great (and sole) Highway” of China to its highest navigable point may be counted on the fingers of one hand. So tedious are the antiquated modes of travel, that of the thousands of European residents at the treaty ports, few have the leisure or inclination to journey outside of the routes covered by our “barbarian” steamers. Of the voyage to Chung-king, up the Yang-tse river, a distance of 1400 nautical miles, 1000 miles are traversed by steamer to Ichang in a week’s time. The remaining 400 miles occupy from five to six weeks, a longer time than it takes to go from London to Shanghai. Since the execution of the celebrated “Chefoo Convention” in 1875, the placing of steamers on this upper route has been under discussion, but Chinese obstructiveness has thus far succeeded in staving off the evil day, and nothing but strong pressure on the part of the foreign ministers accredited to the Court of Peking will bring about this much needed innovation, an innovation as much desired by the native merchants and traders as it is dreaded by the official and literary classes. Apart from the laudable fear of injury to the livelihood of the existing junk-men, anything that leads to further contact between foreigners and the people at

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large is deprecated as lessening the influence of the profoundly ignorant ruling class; and thus, notwithstanding the heavy losses in life and property that the present system of navigation entails, this further contemplated invasion of the inner waters of the Empire is strenuously resisted.

In reading this journal, in which I have depicted the existing difficulties of the route, it must be borne in mind that the Yang-tse is not only the main, but the sole road of intercommunication between the east and west of this vast empire. Roads, properly so called, do not exist in China; narrow footpaths alone connect one town and village with another, and, except by the waterways, nothing can be transported from place to place but on men's backs. In the far north, it is true, cart-tracks exist, and clumsy two-wheeled springless carts are there in use, but in Central and Southern China, land travel is absolutely confined to paths, so narrow that two pedestrians have often a difficulty in passing each other. Traces of magnificent paved roads, of the ancient dynasties, still exist in nearly every province; but they have been destroyed by neglect, and have been disused for centuries past. Since the date of the Mongol invasion (1279), every incentive to progress has come from without, and every foreign well-wisher of the Empire, especially if resident, is impelled to do his utmost to carry on this progress.

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The rulers of China should take to heart Bacon's words: "Since things alter for the worst spontaneously, if they be not altered for the better designedly, what end will there be of evil?" Railways have been long talked of, but so far, the short line, built some years ago, which connects the Government coal-mine of Kai-ping with the nearest canal, is the only road in existence. Trunk-lines running north and south are said to have been authorized, but as long as the Government eschews foreign aid they are not likely to be built. A line running east and west presents almost insuperable difficulties, owing to the precipitous mountains and deep gorges into which the whole country west of Ichang is cut up. Hence the necessity of turning the great natural highway of the Yang-tse to the best advantage. Of the great gain to trade, and to British manufacturing interests more especially, which the cheapness of intercommunication between Eastern and Western China would effect, I have spoken more at length in my introductory chapter.

I must not conclude without paying a tribute of admiration to Captain Blakiston and Dr. Alfred Barton, for their valuable and accurate work, "Five Months on the Yang-tse." These energetic pioneers preceded me over the same ground just twenty years before. Nothing has altered in the interval, and but for the fact that their want of knowledge of the language debarred

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them from free intercourse with the people, and so cut them off from many interesting social facts, the publication of this journal would have no *raison d'être*.

ARCHIBALD JOHN LITTLE.

ICHANG, 16th July, 1887.

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