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Archibald John Little

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Mount Omi and Beyond is Archibald John Little's account of his travels in the Szechuan province of China. His journey took him from Chongqing to Mount Omi and the Tibetan border. Little professed to add nothing to the records of geographical exploration through his work, but aimed simply to provide a 'picture of China as it exists far removed from Western influence'. Little compares this part of China with Europe in the middle ages - in the colourful dress of the people, the absence of technology, and lack of communication with the outside world. He believed that this was a world nearing its end, as Western influences were reaching the Chinese ports through trade. Published in London in 1901, it contains a 'Sketch Map of Northern and Central Szechuan' and fifteen black and white photographs. Several other books by Little and by his intrepid wife are also reissued in this series.

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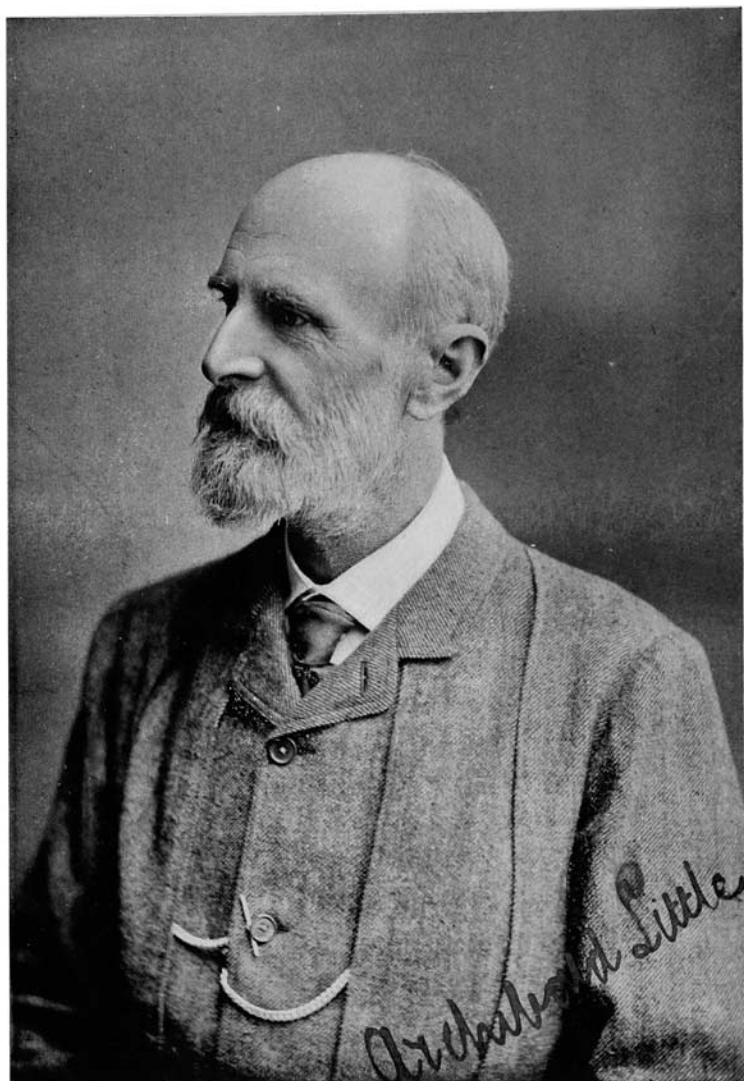
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THE AUTHOR

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M O U N T O M I
A N D B E Y O N D

A RECORD OF TRAVEL ON
THE THIBETAN BORDER

BY

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

AUTHOR OF

“THROUGH THE YANGTSE GORGES,” ETC.

WITH A MAP AND ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1901

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P R E F A C E

IN publishing an account of what might almost be called “A Walking Tour on the Thibetan Border,” I tender no addition to the records of geographical exploration, but simply a picture of China as it exists far removed from Western influence—a China which must ere long pass away as old Japan has done, though with slower steps. Many travellers have passed through the country on their way to and from Thibet, but few have lingered over the Chinese portion as we did, and none have travelled precisely the same route.

China is often regarded as a land of plains and paddy-fields, and it is a surprise to many dwellers on the Coast to learn that, barring the small Cheng Tu plateau in Northern Szechuan, there is scarcely an acre of level ground west of Ichang—nothing but range upon range of precipitous mountains. In penetrating these and in living in a far inland city like Chungking, one finds one’s self *en plein moyen age*, and is enabled to realise the lives of our ancestors before the Reformation awakened men to think for themselves, and started them on the course which has left the Chinese, once our superiors, so far behind. We realise there how our own ancestors managed to live contentedly, as they undoubtedly did, in such, to us, utter discomfort. No newspapers, no public post, no roads beyond foot trails, no street

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cleaning, no drains, no fires in winter, and no ice in summer. Against these drawbacks, however, we have the brilliant costumes of the Middle Ages pervading China to-day, all but the very poorest being richly and gracefully clad, while our modern dress is as unbecoming as our street architecture unattractive. The æsthetic feeling had the upper hand in our Middle Ages as it has in China to-day. We admire but with all our progress cannot rival the Gothic buildings of our rude forefathers. Chinese buildings seem to grow up intrinsically picturesque and in exquisite harmony with the surroundings among which they stand. Any one who has had the good fortune to peruse Garnier's Exploration of the Mékong must have been impressed by the romantic beauty displayed in his views of the mountain cities in Yunnan and Eastern Thibet. It is this harmony of Chinese towns and hamlets with surrounding nature that adds so much to the charm of the mountain views in inhabited districts. In uninhabited regions one has at least Nature pure and undefiled—not scarred by a funicular railway nor blistered with mammoth hotels.

Returning to the coast after a few years in the interior, it is hard to remember in what an incredibly backward condition ninety-nine hundredths of this vast and populous Empire yet remain. In Shanghai and the larger Treaty Ports, where the magic wand of Western progress has transformed Chinese stagnation into a bustling and prosperous activity, one fancies one's self in Europe until (as few residents do) one ventures out of the "settlements" into the native cities alongside, where filth and decay still reign supreme. The results of the war with Japan are gradually breaking down, in a friendly, or, where needs must, a forcible way, the opposition of the officials to the enlightenment of their people as to better things. Hence the life I have here

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described is nearing its end. Whether this end will be utter decay or a new life the next century will show. At present the Chinese, under their generally incompetent and corrupt Mandarinate, are like sheep without a shepherd. The wolves are howling round them. Will a *Chiu seng Chu*, the Messiah of Chinese lore, arise and save them, or will the fate of Poland overtake them? Any change from their present state can hardly but be for the better.

A simple remedy there is, had the officials but the sense to grasp it, namely, the opening up of China to European enterprise in the same way that Japan has thrown herself open by the late Treaty Revision. By this means order and progress may yet be infused into China, her immense resources be developed, and she be saved from the decay and decrepitude that have crept over her. The Western Powers had gone on propping up the crazy sham until a shove from the Japanese capsized it. The question before us residents in China now is: Will our representatives be instructed to work for progress, or will they be told to submit to snubs and to do their best as hitherto to support all the old abuses, fearing to face the unknown future, led by events instead of trying to guide them?

My wife was my companion on the trip to Ta Chien Lu, and to her energy in photographing under most difficult conditions and the trying interruptions of unruly crowds I am indebted for the illustrations that decorate this book.

These chapters originally appeared, as they were written, in the columns of the *North China Herald*, to the kindness of whose editor I am indebted for leave to republish them. I am encouraged to hope that they may now find approval among the larger circle of home readers.

The foregoing lines were written in 1899 before my return

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to China. Since then events have moved apace. Our future here depends it seems to me upon the action of the Allies in the North. If they are satisfied with the capture of Peking, and are bamboozled into a peace and a new treaty yielding on paper everything demanded, it will be 1860 over again, with the addition that the Chinese are now roused and it will only be a question of waiting until they are better and more universally armed to make another and possibly successful attempt to throw off the foreign yoke under which they now labour—officials and people alike.

But if the Allies with Britain and Japan in the van persevere until they have caught the Empress and Prince Tuan and the rest and bring them to trial, and set Kwanghsü or a “progressive” nominee on the throne—consistently opposing partition meanwhile—then we may hope for the real opening up of the country with resulting prosperity and peace.

ARCHIBALD JOHN LITTLE.

CHUNGKING,
September 1900.

The best thanks of the Author are due and are hereby tendered to the Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society and to Mrs. Isabella Bishop for permission to reproduce the map which accompanies this volume.

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