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Excerpt
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An extraordinary feature in the history of manners is the utter disability of people to judge of the manners of other nations . . . with fairness and common sense. An English lady turns away her face with disgust when she sees Oriental women with bare feet and legs ; while the Eastern ladies are horrified at the idea of women in Egypt walking about bare-faced. Admirers of Goethe may get over the idea that this great poet certainly ate fish with a knife ; but when we are told that Beatrice never used a fork, and that Dante never changed his linen for weeks, some of our illusions are rudely disturbed.—*Max Muller, "Chips."*

All within the four seas are brethren.—*Ancient proverb, cited by Confucius (551–479 B.C.).*

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER

In his *Study of Sociology* Herbert Spencer tells a tale of a Frenchman “who, having been three weeks in England, proposed to write a book on English characteristics, who after three months found that he was not quite ready, and who, after three years, concluded that he knew nothing about it.” We can vouch for the accuracy of the tale, except that the hero did not happen to be a Frenchman visiting England, but was an Englishman or American visiting China. We have known him well. He went there as globe-trotter, remained awhile as visitor, and lastly made up his mind to become a resident of the Far Eastern paradise of puzzles and problems.

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Let us study him awhile and inquire how it came to pass that his enthusiasm for printer's ink met with such a remarkable collapse.

The explanation is that travel reveals the differences between one race and another—differences which are chiefly external and concern such things as Carlyle would sum up in the one word *clothes*. While residence reveals the similarities beneath all externals—the essential human characteristics common to mankind the wide world over. Add to this that Far Eastern races produce the illusion of similarity of feature in the traveller's mind, whose most frequent remark is that “the Chinese are all alike.” This being so, the external strangeness as compared with his own land invites the snap-shotter, and the apparent sameness of feature and disposition among the natives themselves provokes his faculties of generalisation. Thus he is apt to rush into print.

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But as he lengthens his stay and becomes a resident, the common human nature of the Chinese race impresses him; and a great divergency of feature and disposition becomes apparent between one native and another. The first item tends to overpower his initial sense of national difference, while the personal divergencies of character among his native acquaintances make it more and more difficult to generalise upon them. He cannot see the wood for the trees.

In dealing with the Chinese, moreover, he is dealing with the inhabitants of a continent rather than of a country. The men of Shantung and Shansi in the north may differ widely from those of more central China, and these again may differ in character as much as they do in speech from the Cantonese. To the careful observer, indeed, the features of a Hunanese will be seen to differ in a marked manner from those of a man from Szchuan in the

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west, so much so that he may generally identify the natives of either province from a mere glance at their faces.

Then the Chinese naturally divide themselves into the four classes of scholars, farmers, artizans, and traders—naturally, not only from their differing occupations, but also from their differing characteristics of disposition. The literati, for instance, are trained to an outward suavity of bearing, to the wearing of a conventional mask, which the rest have hardly learned to assume with any constancy of habit.

Thus, to sum up, it may often be easy to gain totally different answers to many a simple question about China: concerning the climate, for one part lies within the tropics and another is subject to the severest winters; concerning the food of the people, for in the north flour rather than rice is the chief item of daily cookery; concerning modes of transit, for there are comparatively broad roads in northern

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China where one may hire a cart or even a camel, while the "roads" of Mid-China differ little from field-paths, and the barrow and sedan-chair are the only vehicles obtainable by the traveller. The men of China may be correctly described as adepts at artifice, and also with almost equal correctness as of comparatively transparent dispositions (the latter being true of many a countryman); as buying and selling only after a prolonged process of haggling over prices, and of having but one price for all alike (as in the case of many a merchant and larger shop-keeper). The women may be described as universally binding their feet (as in several provinces), or of reserving that genteel mode of early torture for the more fashionable and wealthy (as in some southern provinces). It may also be affirmed that the idols of China outnumber the inhabitants (in certain parts), and also that in a score of households hardly one idol is to be found (in other

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regions). So that reliable generalisations may be exceedingly difficult to make on many a point which seems so obvious to the chance visitor to any one given region.

But should certain events transpire, such as an anti-foreign rising, which will throw up the national characteristics into contrast with those of the West, affording the resident a certain amount of aloofness, and placing him at a mental distance sufficient to gain a true perspective of the whole, then all the varied items of information which his familiarity with Chinese life and thought has placed at his disposal will be a help and not a hindrance to an attempt at national portraiture.

And what, we may ask, are the essential conditions of familiarity (say) with British characteristics on the part of a Frenchman? Surely a grasp of the language, so that he can speak it, think in it, read and write it with more or less ease, and residence in the country until he ceases to be known as

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“that foreigner,” but becomes known by name as Monsieur So-and-So.

Read *China* instead of *England*, and *Hsien-sheng* (Signor) instead of *Monsieur*, and we have some of the essential conditions of familiarity with China. To which may be added the eschewing of “foreign” steamers and the adoption of small native boats or of travel on foot in company with a native friend, until stress of experiences common to both men shall result in much community of feeling.

As sources of reliable information on popular manners may be mentioned country folk, merchants, native Christians, tale-books, and the National Records. And as sources of most unreliable information—highly commended to those who merely wish to retain their preconceived notions—Chinese guests on their society behaviour, and above all mandarins, especially those connected with the Court, whose profession it is to put the unwary foreigner off the

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scent. These latter Chinese or Manchu gentry might, with the sole alteration of the one word in brackets, adopt as their motto the confession of Nello the barber in George Eliot's *Romola*: "We (Florentines) have liberal ideas about speech, and consider that an instrument which can flatter and promise so cleverly as the tongue must have been partly made for the purpose; and that truth is a riddle for eyes and wits to discover, which it were a mere spoiling of sport for the tongue to betray."

Over the whole of Chinese officialdom floats the yellow banner, whose device represents the dragon in the act of swallowing the Japanese sun, which is "quartered" on the flag just as the crosses of St. Andrew and St. Patrick are incorporated in the Union Jack. Some centuries ago the Chinese dragon fully intended to swallow the Japanese sun. The attempt was markedly unsuccessful, but that is a mere detail, and the national banner was hence-

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forth modified as though the deed had been done. Which thing is suggestive of much.

In the following chapters it is proposed to start with a few sights which will be familiar to the most hurried visitor to Shanghai—such as a dense population, a countryman staring at some Western wonder, a Chinese urchin smoking a cigarette, a missionary in Chinese dress, a mandarin and his retinue, an elegant Chinese sign-board, a bookstall and a native newspaper—to start with such familiar sights, and to throw the searching light of careful study upon the facts and problems behind each of them.

For the benefit of the many readers who have not taken a trip to Shanghai a description of that “model settlement” may be given here. The picture has been drawn by a distinguished author and critic so graphically as to save the resident the trouble of endeavouring to revive his first