

THE  
FOREIGNER IN FAR CATHAY.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

ALTHOUGH numerous bulky volumes have been written upon China and the Chinese, and intercommunication with Western countries has been vastly extended of late years, it is marvellous how vague, and in some cases how erroneous, are the popular notions prevalent in Europe and America in regard to the country and our relations with it. Everyone believes perhaps, and rightly, that China counts her population by hundreds of millions, and that her territory occupies a very considerable proportion of the Asiatic continent; and misty impressions are cherished no doubt as to the existence of evidences of an advanced state of civilization in the way of a literature, a philosophy, a highly-perfected social system, and so

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on. But test the information a little further, and it will be found that the prominent idea with regard to a Chinaman is that he is a quaint but stolid besotted creature, who smokes opium perpetually, and drowns his daughters as fast as they appear; whose every-day food consists of puppies, kittens, rats, and such like garbage; whose notions of honour, honesty, and courage, are of the loosest; and to whom cruelty is a pastime. This opinion may not quite tally with the impressions as to civilization and social advancement above alluded to, but no trouble is taken to explain the contradiction, and the more ridiculous and familiar fancy is indulged in.

Even less perhaps is known respecting the communities of our countrymen and other foreigners who make China a place of resort either for their own profit or for the benefit of the natives. If speculations on the subject take any shape at all, it is in a direction by no means complimentary to the persons concerned. The merchants are set down as adventurers, with whom smuggling is a habit, men of few scruples, violent, and ever ready to plunge the mother-country into war to

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serve their personal ends. Missionaries are characterized as indiscreet, officious, over-zealous, and peculiarly partial to appeals to the persuasive powers of the “inevitable gunboat;” whilst consuls and naval commanders are regarded as much too apt to abet both classes of residents, instead of restraining them within legitimate limits. It is nevertheless imagined that notwithstanding these adverse circumstances, contact with foreigners is on the whole humanizing and improving the Chinese, and that an appreciation of the benefits of Western civilization and progress has taken fast hold of their minds, and must in due time bear useful fruit.

It will be seen from the following pages that, although some of these notions may have had their basis in fact, yet others of them are entirely unfounded, whilst none can be accepted without qualification. Foreign residents in China will be shown to represent their native countries somewhat more worthily than they have had credit for. Several of the customs of the Chinese which come more immediately under the observation of their foreign visitors will be described, and an attempt made to

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prove that, with a few drawbacks of character, they exhibit many interesting and even commendable traits; and a few remarks will then be ventured upon in conclusion as to the results of the intercommunication between the two races thus far, and as to the hopes which may be entertained in respect to the future.

## CHAPTER II.

### POSITION OF FOREIGNERS IN CHINA.

TRADITION and reading together have doubtless familiarized the minds of most Englishmen with the general outline of the history of our past intercourse with China, and rendered it needless to do more here than pass briefly in review the more prominent features which have marked its course down to the present date. How that centuries ago adventurous travellers visited the country at rare intervals, and brought away those tales of its fabulous wealth, the barbaric magnificence of its court, the high, but quaint civilization of its people, and the excellence as well as oddity of its wares, which have formed the framework of our notions about China ever since. How that after awhile, Spanish, Portuguese, and other navigators carried their clumsy but wonderful craft into Chinese ports, and laid the foundation of a commercial intercourse, whilst by their acts they sowed those first

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seeds of ill-will and distrust, the lamentable fruit of which we are reaping in these days. How that later on the British East India Company extended its agencies to Canton, and founded a trade which for success and mutual confidence has scarcely been surpassed. How that with this trade opium crept in to be a valuable commodity of traffic, becoming in after years, incidentally with other causes, the bone of contention that plunged China into her first war with a European power. How that the struggle which ensued resulted in the freedom of British subjects from native jurisdiction, and the establishment of five centres of trade in the place of one, Canton, as had been the case up to that time. And how that sundry disputes and hostilities supervened from time to time, which eventually culminated in a second and third war, that secured for us not only an extension of trading privileges, but the right of ministerial representation at the Chinese metropolis, Peking, as at this moment enjoyed.

And here it may be remarked parenthetically that the succession of collisions with Western powers, which has marked the history

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of China during the past thirty years, has done her grievous harm. They have gradually but effectually undermined the prestige of the ruling powers, and so have led directly to the series of devastating rebellions which have ravaged the country of late years, sapped its resources, and brought the government to the helpless condition in which it now practically lies. It may be argued that the responsibility of this result lies not so much with foreign powers as with the Chinese, whose extravagant assumptions, obstructive efforts, and want of good faith, in every instance induced the collisions which followed. To a certain extent this may be true. But it must be maintained that we—I say we, for after all England has been the chief actor on the scene—have been to blame, in that, when collision was inevitable, the operations were not so carried through as that the lesson taught should be effectual, leaving little or no likelihood of a repetition on the part of the assailed of their previous misapprehension or misconduct. It has been our misfortune, in every desultory act of hostility against local Chinese officials, as well as in every more serious process of war with the

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nation itself, always to stop contented with a momentary success, leave, as it were, the coping-stone of the fabric unlaid, and then to withdraw the pressure just when it was beginning to tell, credulously taking it for granted in either instance that the pledges extorted by a temporary violence would be faithfully kept.

An example or two in which this unhappy fatality betrayed itself will suffice by way of illustration. When Captain Elliot attacked the city of Canton in 1840–41, after the repudiation by the Emperor of the truce which his minister (Keshen) had agreed to in the Pei Ho River, on the condition that the British squadron should forthwith return to the South, he easily succeeded, through the valour of our sailors and soldiers, in driving the enemy from every stronghold round the city in a few hours' time, and this notwithstanding the choicest of the Tartar and Chinese troops of that day had been congregated from all parts of the country for the express purpose of defying our pretensions, and "sweeping" us from the soil of China. And how did our representative use this happy success? By entering



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the city of Canton, so long proclaimed as being too sacred for the foot of the foul foreigner, and occupying it until the arrogant assumption had been withdrawn and redress obtained? By no means. He accepted overtures of peace *outside* the walls, whilst actually contemplating them as limits of a forbidden precinct, and withdrew his forces for a handsome pecuniary indemnity, leaving the Chinese to crow over their success, and the identical work to be done all over again many years after, at the expense of a vast amount of blood and treasure. The mistake was repeated under the late Sir Henry Pottinger. He took city after city on the coast, and routed army after army in an incredibly short space of time, and by appearing with a formidable squadron before Nanking, where a foreign ship had never before been seen, he so terrified the Chinese that they professed themselves ready to submit to any terms. The result was so far good, for he exacted the famous treaty of Nanking, which has been the basis of our extended commercial privileges since; but Sir H. Pottinger, too, withdrew his forces at the moment of triumph, and was deluded by his wily anta-

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gonists into shifting the scene of detailed negotiations back, as of old, to Canton, instead of onwards to Peking, thereby sacrificing all the practical benefits which had been so dearly purchased on both sides. In the wars of 1858 and 1860, which followed as an only natural consequence, our diplomacy was attended with similarly untoward results. The ready acceptance by the late Lord Elgin in the first instance of overtures of peace whilst yet short of Peking, ended, as is well known, in the fearful catastrophe of Taku, which convinced Lord Elgin that the blow, to be effectual, must be struck at the capital. The accustomed courage and strategy of our forces brought him there without difficulty; but he contented himself with occupying only one gate of the beleaguered metropolis as a temporary measure, and, like his predecessors, he, too, hurried away to claim the merit of his success, leaving undetermined the crucial question of access to the Emperor, which in the eyes of the Chinese is the one all-important turning point of their dispute with foreigners as to international relations; and the solution of which may yet have to be arrived at through the expenditure