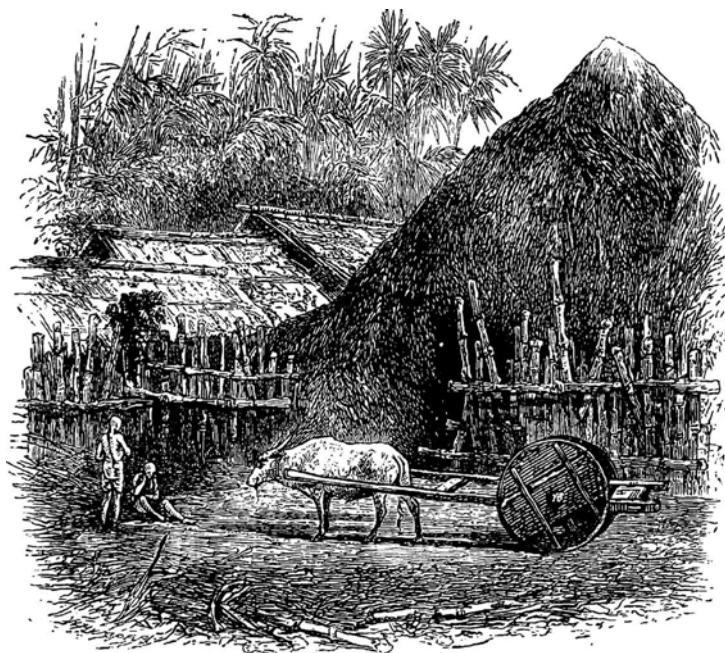


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 Isabelle Williamson  
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A CHINESE BULLOCK CART ON A COUNTRY ROAD.

## OLD HIGHWAYS IN CHINA.



### CHAPTER I.

Old highways—Their great interest, antiquarian and modern—China's daughters—Our vehicles—Their construction and motion—Our start—Our travelling companions, their dress and idiosyncrasies.

FROM Chefoo to Peking is a journey of about seven hundred miles, and we go by the Old Highways.

Old Highways indeed! old, almost beyond historical record. Trodden by the feet of more than a hundred generations, they are yet fresh as of yore, and ever and anon present landscapes of the rarest beauty. To one

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acquainted with the language and habits of the people these highways are a never-ending book of antiquity, from which to read the story of the past, blended with the life thoughts of the present. China comes to us like a submerged continent newly upheaved from the ocean of time; and on its vast extent there are no objects of interest greater than China's daughters. Beautiful they are with a certain beauty of their own. On them, alas! centuries of non-culture have pressed heavily; but now, Undine-like, each Chinese maid and matron seems rising and asking for a soul.

On the journey my interest was chiefly in the women, and I looked at all through a woman's eyes.

April 7th is the day fixed for our start. The muleteers promise to be in good time; all arrangements have been made, and nothing has to be done in the morning but to load the animals.

Our preparations have not been extensive, as we depend on native sources for our supplies. We take a few pounds of sugar, a pound or so of tea, four tins of condensed milk, a small bag of sea biscuit, three bottles of arrowroot, a few articles of crockery, and a small medicine chest. Our clothing is in a carpet sack, which serves for a pillow. A dressing bag does a like duty. These, and a Chinese quilt for each, comprise our travelling outfit.

There is a small mountain of books to be conveyed, inasmuch as to sell and distribute good books is one of the main objects of our journey. They also are piled up in readiness.

Mules are always used for long journeys, as they are hardy and sure-footed. True to their promise, at early dawn the muleteers lead the mules into our

*OUR VEHICLES.*

19

courtyard. To convey our books and baggage we require six animals. They are all examined to see that they are in good condition. One mule has a large wooden pack-saddle; a second has a pair of immense panniers.

Our vehicles are called shendzles, and each shendzle requires two mules. These shendzles are of the simplest construction, and are very light. Three small wooden pack-saddles are laid on the ground about three feet apart. These are fastened to two poles about eighteen feet long. After the poles are securely tied to the upturned saddles, three narrow but strong strips of bamboo are arched over the poles. Reed matting is spread upon the bamboos, and sewn firmly to them with twine. Between the poles, about two feet from either end, there is stretched a broad band of cowhide. The shendzle mules have wooden pack-saddles, and in the centre of each saddle is fixed an iron spike, standing upright. In the middle of the band of untanned cowhide a hole is pierced, and in putting the shendzle on the backs of the mules, the poles are raised so high that the iron spike on the saddle can be run through the hole in the cowhide band. There is no strap or fastening. There you are—balanced. Very careful driving is required, and a good muleteer is always on the watch to lay hold of the poles at any signs of toppling.

Over the shendzle we tied a sheet of vulcanised indiarubber cloth, which is most useful in travelling. It defends from both sun and rain. Every night it is spread on the sleeping-place, as a protection from damp, and in very many other circumstances it is a comfort.

Our energetic friend, Mr. Paton, looks after the packing of the books. The panniers are filled with

them. A box of them is strapped on each side of the pack-saddle, and the remainder is packed away in the under parts of the shendzles. Our quilts and eatables are put in. Everything being ready, we are invited to crawl into the place that is to be a home for many days.

We crawl in. Good-byes are said to numerous teachers and Chinese friends. All the school girls and boys and all the members of the establishment come up and wish us a good journey and a speedy return. We say good-bye to Mr. Paton, and to the sunny-haired English baby in the arms of her smiling mother. How fair and sunny the two look beside the bronzed and yellow-tinted sons and daughters of China!

Well, of all vehicles a shendzle is one of the funniest. Outwardly, it looks like a gigantic chrysalis; inwardly, it seems comfortable as a couch. There is great difficulty in the balancing of it. Slung simply on the backs of the mules, an unlucky, awkward movement of the traveller within it may send it rolling down the first precipice. So soon as we are fairly started, one is requested to sit 'a little more to the north'; then, 'a little more to the south'; 'no, not so much'; till, after a variety of orders and counter-orders, at last the muleteer is satisfied. We climb a hill immediately after starting, and we soon find that the mules have had no training, and never by any chance step together. We are rocked from side to side cradle fashion, then jolted to and fro from head to heel.

Backwards, forwards, see-saw, zig-zag, jerk, jolt, jog, joggle!—the proverbial 'baby on the tree top' must have had quiet compared to this.

Sea-sickness is disagreeable, but *mal de shendzle* is worse. However, the disagreeable experience usually

passes away with one day ; and it is found that, although it is a very unsocial, yet it is not an altogether unpleasant, mode of travel. Few can read in a shenzle, and those who do read must have books of very large type. A Chinese book in good-sized type may be read with comfort.

Our travelling companions are two muleteers, a help for bookselling, and a man who is half servant half man of business. My muleteer, who claims the lead, is a roguish looking man, rather surly and taciturn. He has some ugly scars on his visage, and a peculiar leer in one eye. He is strong and hardy, and has the reputation of being a perfect walking map. His head is adorned with a marvellous cap of soft grey felt. On ordinary days it looks like a plain skull-cap. As the weather changes I discover that this cap is a *multum in parvo*. If the wind blows hard from the north, he immediately doffs his cap, and pulls out a flap that defends his ear and neck. If the mornings are cold, the cap has flaps to cover both ears. Should the sand be driving in his face, an immense scoop is projected in front to protect his eyes. When it rains, a great peak appears, to prevent the water running in at the collar of his jacket. His jacket is of blue cotton, wadded. His continuations are buff-coloured leather. He has white cotton stockings quilted with cotton, and black cloth shoes with a most liberal allowance of sole. He carries a whip at his girdle, but, to my great comfort, seldom uses it. The other muleteer is a younger man, with a quiet look. He is dressed much in the same style—only his continuations are of olive-green leather, and he is not the proud possessor of a *multum in parvo* cap.

The bookseller was engaged the evening before we

started. He was recommended as a 'decayed gentleman.' He is very much decayed indeed, but he has a cheery, happy-go-lucky way, and is not an unpleasant travelling companion. He has a faculty of making friends, not enemies. We were obliged to take him in the place of a dear old man who became ill just before we left, and who died ere we returned from our journey.

The man Friday is a fine, tall, handsome Chinaman, a good scholar, and a gentleman in his manners. He can do anything, from writing a Chinese document to boiling an egg, and he has a marvellous facility for making palatable whatever provisions we can get at inns or country markets. He is the butt of the party. His mounting on his mule is one of the sights not to be lost. Many directions he receives as to his demeanour on his steed. 'Sit to the east,' is shouted to him; again, 'To the west'—'More to the back'—'Nearer to the front'—and he makes an effort to comply as far as he can. His perch is on the mule with the panniers, and he falls off on an average three times a day. It is supposed that he goes to sleep, and thus overbalances the panniers. His falls are not serious, as the panniers save him, and he is generally found seated in one of them. He always persists in packing the crockery in these panniers, as a proof that he has no fear of an upset, but after reducing us to one teacup, he becomes exceedingly careful to put it in the snuggest place in my shendzle. I fear I must be troublesome to him, as I constantly tease him to read all the sentences the Chinese write on their doors, and also the ornamental scroll-work with which they decorate their dwellings. He is a most agreeable companion, and never loses his temper: his wits he sometimes loses.

## CHAPTER II.

Our first halting-place—An old friend and his family—Hearty welcome and cordial greetings—How mandarins become rich—The famous mountain, Ai-Shan—Legendary lore—A quaint and beautiful story pertaining to Ai-Shan.

OUR path lay off the main road and through a fine valley. The greater part of the way was a watercourse, lined on each side with lovely trees.

We had arranged to stay the first night at the house of one of our church members, a faithful old man with small ability but a true heart. He and his friends were expecting our visit. As we emerged from the shade of the trees, and were crossing a stony ridge at the head of the glen, in the dim twilight, we could descry figures and hear voices hailing us, and shouting, 'Take the north road.' Presently we met the old man and his son, their faces beaming. In the distance we could see lights and hear the hum of a village.

As we got near to the house, just on the edge of the hamlet, we found nearly all the villagers assembled. The greetings were numerous and cordial. Women came round, and were introduced as the mothers of sons named to us. Indeed, a woman's title in China is usually the name of her eldest son; and what title is sweeter to a mother's ear?

Everything was made tidy for us. The best *kang*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Brick bed.



was lit, and the mill-room arranged for a sitting-room. For a long time Dr. Williamson sat conversing with the men on religious subjects. In the inner room, entering by another door, I saw the women. It was pleasant to find how much of Scripture truth the women and girls knew.

The family of our host consisted of his wife, a son, and a daughter, the brightest little Chinese maiden I have ever seen. She was greatly interested in my buttoned boots; the particular fault of this little Chinese maid was a tendency to be untidy in her gaiters and shoes. So she at once informed her mother that she would not need to be scolded for her besetting sin if her shoes and gaiters were all in one piece, as mine were, and if they were made of leather. Altogether she took my heart—a cheery, sunny, little lassie.

The story of this family is a good illustration of how an unjust magistrate may oppress his people. Some five or six years ago this man had, in foreign employment, saved about one hundred and twenty thousand cash. For a peasant this is quite a little fortune. The mandarin of the district, a very petty magistrate indeed, knew this. For some time he sought an occasion to bring this man up before him on some offence. First he had him arraigned on a charge of having broken down a small mud embankment, and sent water and stones over a field belonging to a neighbour. But it was clearly proved that the water and stones had found their way into that field without Shoo's help. At the time of the floods the man was at his work in Chefoo, some twenty miles away; and his wife could not have walked such a distance in the storm. This charge thus fell to the ground, though a horde of underlings had to



be paid their fees. Nevertheless the mandarin raised another case against him, and kept it on and on, till, by fines and otherwise, he got the one hundred and twenty thousand cash Shoo had saved. He then released his victim, who had all the costs of the suit to pay. Old and poor, he has to begin again; and he says, 'If I save any money now, I'll be careful not to let my neighbours know.'



A CHINESE OFFICIAL.

There is nothing a respectable Chinaman fears more than to get into the clutches of the mandarins. He prefers to suffer loss rather than go to law to recover a debt, particularly if he has any money to lose.

After a comfortable night, and after seeing a great many Chinese who were clamouring around us before

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26            *THE FAMOUS MOUNTAIN, AI-SHAN.*

sunrise, we started from Mee Kow about seven A.M. Almost immediately on leaving Shoo's village, afar on the horizon, framed in by the arching trees, rises on our view the lofty Ai-Shan. Its summit is strikingly like the dome of St. Paul's, but under a bluer sky. The general outline of the whole mountain is suggestive of a majestic cathedral. Its highest peak is seen afar off on the sea by the mariner, and guides him into harbour.

The following is a legend of this mountain :—

A young girl, beautiful and affectionate, lived under the shadow of the celebrated Ai-Shan. Her father owned property in junks, and was very rich. She had two brothers older than herself. Her father and her two brothers set sail for the south, one fine autumn day. They went each in charge of a junk. The girl was sorry to part with them; but they comforted her by promising to return in the following summer, when the soft south wind would waft them gently home to their own quiet bay, and they would bring beautiful presents for her, as by next autumn she would be wearing the scarlet dress of a bride.

Months passed, and the young maiden dwelt with her mother. When the winter wind howled round their home at night, she used to shiver, as she thought of her dear father and brothers in the junks, tossing on the stormy sea. Sometimes an old friend of her father would come to visit them. This man was also rich, and a junk owner. The fair young maiden sat inside the damask embroidered curtains, and listened to the tales of the sunny south which the old junk owner was in the habit of telling her mother. Inside the curtain she sat because it was not etiquette for her to be seen; but