

**CHINA  
PAST AND PRESENT**

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To  
THE MEMORY of  
"OLD OW"

**INTRODUCTION.**

EVENTS have succeeded each other so rapidly in China, that a few months often suffice to convert "intelligent anticipations" into irrevocable history. This being so, the reader who honours these pages with perusal must charitably make allowances for views expressed under conditions which have, in some instances, now become obsolete.

In a few cases — as, for instance, the first chapter — the matter appears in print for the first time. In others, paragraphs, and even whole pages, have been entirely rewritten or recast. Acknowledgments are due to several senates, societies, faculties, and associations; also to the editors and publishers of many magazines, for their uniform kindness in allowing the present republication in book form. In particular I am requested to state that the "Letter from the Emperor of China to King George the Third" is reprinted by permission from the *Nineteenth Century*; the three articles "Diet and Medicine," "Life of a Chinese Mandarin," and "The Imperial Manchu Family," by permission from the *Cornhill Magazine*; the paper on "The Chinese Imbroglio," by permission from the *Asiatic Quarterly Review*; that on "The Multifarious Duties of a British Consul," by permission from *Temple Bar*; and that on "Chinese Sports," by permission from the *Badminton Magazine*. The map of China, based upon the late Dr. Bretschneider's first edition, is reproduced by kind permission from Mr. John Murray. If I do not mention each of the other sources by name, it is because, in receiving consent, I have not been asked to do so, and not because I am ungrateful.

E. H. PARKER.

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## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	2
<b>BOOK I: HISTORICAL AND STATISTICAL</b> .....	4
CHAPTER I: A SKETCH OF CHINESE HISTORY .....	4
CHAPTER II: THE POPULATION AND REVENUE OF CHINA .....	16
<b>BOOK II: THE "BOXER" WARS</b> .....	31
CHAPTER I: THE REVOLT OF THE "BOXERS" IN CHINA .....	31
CHAPTER II: THE "BOXERS" .....	34
CHAPTER III: THE "BOXER" IMBROGLIO OF 1900 .....	39
<b>BOOK III: RELIGIOUS.</b> .....	51
CHAPTER I: THE RELIGION OF THE CHINESE .....	51
CHAPTER II: PERSONAL REMINISCENCES TOUCHING CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES IN CHINA, COREA, BURMA, ETC. ....	57
CHAPTER III: THE SECOND MANCHU EMPEROR OF CHINA AND FILIAL PIETY .....	69
CHAPTER IV: LETTER FROM THE EMPEROR OF CHINA TO THE POPE .....	73
<b>BOOK IV: THE IMPERIAL POWER</b> .....	76
CHAPTER I: THE IMPERIAL MANCHU FAMILY .....	76
CHAPTER II: FROM THE EMPEROR OF CHINA TO KING GEORGE THE THIRD .....	81
CHAPTER III: THE EMPEROR OF CHINA AND LORD AMHERST .....	88
<b>BOOK V: THE FOREIGNER IN CHINA</b> .....	92
CHAPTER I: LIFE IN CHINA .....	92
CHAPTER II: PERSONAL REMINISCENCES TOUCHING OPIUM-SMOKING .....	100
CHAPTER III: THE MULTIFARIOUS DUTIES OF A BRITISH CONSUL .....	109
CHAPTER IV: THE FOREIGN OFFICE, THE TSUNG-LI YAMÊN, AND THE FAR EAST .....	118
<b>BOOK VI: MANDARIN OR OFFICIAL</b> .....	126
CHAPTER I: THE WAY CHINA IS GOVERNED .....	126
CHAPTER II: THE LIFE OF A CHINESE MANDARIN .....	135
CHAPTER III: WHAT'S IN A (CHINESE) NAME? .....	141
CHAPTER IV: THE "PEKING GAZETTE" AND CHINESE POSTING .....	145
<b>BOOK VII: CELESTIAL PECULIARITIES</b> .....	151
CHAPTER I: DIET AND MEDICINE IN CHINA .....	151
CHAPTER II: LEPERS IN CHINA .....	156
CHAPTER III: CHINESE GAMES AND SPORTS .....	159
<b>BOOK VIII: POLITICAL</b> .....	166
CHAPTER I: A PLEA FOR RUSSIA .....	166
CHAPTER II: THE BALANCE OF POWER .....	171
CHAPTER III: THE FAR EASTERN QUESTION .....	181
CHAPTER IV: THE GERMAN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE IN CHINA .....	192
CHAPTER V: ANGLO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS .....	202
<b>BOOK IX: THE SEAMY SIDE</b> .....	207
CHAPTER I: CHINESE PUNISHMENTS .....	207
CHAPTER II: INFANTICIDE IN CHINA .....	213
CHAPTER III: CHINESE SLAVERY .....	218
BY THE SAME AUTHOR .....	226

**BOOK I: HISTORICAL AND STATISTICAL****CHAPTER I: A SKETCH OF CHINESE HISTORY**

WITH us in Europe history means a great deal more than a mere tale of dynastic changes and race struggles. More especially in these islands, where free men have always to a large extent created or approved their own Governments, the annals of the people are just as interesting a study as the annals of our princes. How we began our first intelligible career as a dependency of Rome; how we adopted a veneer of Roman civilization; became a prey to Saxon and Danish invasions; drove out the Roman garrisons; softened our rude manners with Christianity; fell under the feudal organization of Frenchified Scandinavians called Normans; gradually welded Celtic and Teutonic elements into one race speaking a mixed language; forced our Kings, our priests, and our nobles to share their power with the commons; took full advantage of printing; created a navy; developed our trade; built up an over-sea empire; and rather late in the day extended the benefits of education to all classes. In a word, we have a history of material and social progress to deal with, as well as a record of race struggles and royal ambitions.

But with China it is different. Setting aside for the moment the important fermentations which have taken place within the past thirty years, and more especially the last two years, we must first of all recognize the preliminary fact that material civilization is there now very much in the stage it was 2000 years ago. The vast majority of the population is made up of peasantry, mostly living in mud, untrimmed stone, rough timber, or reed houses, according to climate, locality, and available material for building; few of even the best houses (except in towns) are floored; almost none, even in cities, have a ceiling; and if they have, it is of unsubstantially hung or pasted sheets of paper. Any accumulation of wealth beyond land, cattle, and stores of farm produce, consists in feast-day clothes, women's ornaments, and buried silver. There are no carriages, horses, or fine harness; no pictures worth more than a few shillings; no well-laid breakfast or dinner tables; no newspapers, postmen, railways, tramways, omnibuses, or even decent roads and side-paths to walk on; no bookcases, bedsteads, easy-chairs, pianos, carpets, table-cloths, writing-desks, gas, lamps, matches, or even respectable candles; no house-games, cigars, wine, beer, clean linen, washstands; or, in short, any articles of luxury. There is little difference between the unutterable meanness of Chinese poverty and that of Russian peasant poverty, as described by Princess Kropotkin. One-storeyed, often one-roomed houses, standing on, not built into, the mother earth; a few wooden or cane chairs, couches, and tables; one or two iron or copper pans and kettles; a rude hatchet, a knife or two, and scoops or ladles; coarse rice-bowls and teacups, wooden chopsticks; a spinning-wheel; coarse cotton clothes, patched and darned; water-buckets; a cow or an ox for ploughing; dirty, ragged bed-quilts; a dog, pigs, and chickens; rats all over the house, and vermin too. — The one bright spot in this dead level of material backwardness is the village school, where a very fair practical education is given, or a basis for it is suggested, by the study of books hundreds and even thousands of years old, which are nearly as intelligible in all dialects now as they were when first composed. Of course, it is understood that large towns, and especially those in reach of foreign trade, do not in all respects fall within the above indictment; and it must be added that the money-squeezing officials, the "eaters" of the people, enjoy a certain degree of sensuous luxury in valuable clothes, rich food, and expensive harems. But they form a small minority, like the Russian minority which feeds on the helpless ignorant millions.

I just digress for an instant from my proposed subject in order to point out that the outline history of China is not exactly a history of material progress and popular development; and it may therefore be told in a much simpler and shorter way than the labyrinthian history of Europe. There is no legal, medical, social,

political, theological, or other obtrusive science to complicate plain government matters. The people, subject after great wars to certain periodical changes in status between freemen and slaves or prisoners of battle, have always been free and comparatively independent farmers on their own land, or merchants in their own guilds, as they are now. They have governed themselves in municipal and village communities; with a few rare and well-known exceptions, no central government has ever done anything for them except tax them in grain, salt, money, merchandise in transit, labour, and military service. No sanitation, registry, passport, marriage, funeral, educational, or other limits or laws. No public works, except to keep off inundations; no maintenance of roads, proclamation of laws, popular voting, parliamentary representatives, licences, game-laws, fishing-laws, testamentary laws, or interference with family arrangements. Local custom has governed the people, and the people have formed custom for themselves. History, then, is simply this: What group of adventurers shall fatten and batten on the people who thus till the earth; and who shall do this under the time-honoured sanction of Heaven's decree? The written history of China is no philosophical science. It is merely a bare but priceless and accurate record of events jumbled together without sense of proportion day by day for 2000 years. Thus, Monday, January 1st, 601: "The Turks raided Peking." Tuesday, "Dame Jones made concubine of the second class." Wednesday, "Tribute from Persia and Borneo." Thursday, "The Dowager vomited blood." Friday, "General Smith defeated by the Canton insurgents; all his relations executed." Besides this bare record, there are special chapters on great men, the calendar, barbarous States, music, and ceremonies. It is for us Europeans to create a science out of individual facts, just as botanists have created a science by simply grouping in literary form the flowers growing one by one under our very noses.

All the old civilizations of antiquity, besides fighting for possession amongst themselves, have had to defend their existence, both in Asia and in Europe, against the inroads of the horse-riding or Tartar hordes. (The word Tartar is a mediæval Chinese word, used vaguely, as with us, for "nomad peoples.") When first the Chinese are heard of (and they themselves are the sole authority, for no one else records anything about them), they occupied the valley of the Yellow River and its tributaries as tillers of the soil, paying to their rulers a portion of the produce as taxes in grain, silk, and hempen cloth. Despite speculations touching their possible Babylonian or Akkadian origin, there exists no evidence whatever to show how they got there; but there they certainly were 2700 years before Christ; and, from that date until the creation of a truly historical empire about 200 years before Christ, they were from time to time engaged in pushing the indigenous tribes towards the sea, and in defending themselves against the inroads of Turks to the north and Tibetans to the west. (I use these two designations for brevity's sake, but the word "Turk" is never heard previous to A.D. 550, nor the word "Tibet" until several centuries subsequent even to that date.) This long period of 2500 years is by no means destitute of events, nor is there any statement of fact which taxes our credulity. We gain a very tolerable notion of travel and geography, and a fairly clear, if inspired, smack of humdrum Chinese life. The only thing is that dates are often inconsistent, self-contradictory, or vague; the picture lacks definite-ness, and there are more sermonizings and heart-searchings than specific lively events and results; more talk than action. The chief mouth of the then almost unknown river Yangtze ran across from near the treaty port of Wuhu to Hangchow; much of modern Kiang Su province was awash with the ocean; the Yellow River entered the sea farther north than at present, near Tientsin; successive dynasties and emperors shifted their capitals to various points in its valley; and it is quite clear that the governing classes possessed astronomical knowledge of no mean order. Certainly 1000, and probably 4000 years ago they had, by means of a seventy-six-year cycle, brought the tropical, lunar, and diurnal year into harmony; and their method of computation enables us, if not to verify even their semi-historical records, at least to say that there is no reasonable ground to suspect the truth of their standard chronicles; and even for a