



THE AUTHOR

MOUNT OMI AND BEYOND

A RECORD OF TRAVEL ON
THE THIBETAN BORDER

BY

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"THROUGH THE YANGTSE GORGES," ETC.

WITH A MAP AND ILLUSTRATIONS

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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

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

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 Mandarinates, 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