FROM PEKING TO MANDALAY

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

THE journey of which an account is given in the following pages was not undertaken in the special interests of geographical or other science nor in the service of any Government. My chief object was to gratify a long-felt desire to visit those portions of the Chinese Empire which are least known to Europeans, and to acquire some knowledge of the various tribes subject to China that inhabit the wild regions of Chinese Tibet and north-western Yunnan. Though nearly every part of the Eighteen Provinces has in recent years been visited and described by European travellers, my route between Tachienlu and Li-chiang was one which — so far as I am aware—no British subject had ever traversed before me, and of which no description in book-form has hitherto appeared in any European language.

From the ethnological point of view the Chinese Far West—to which the greater part of this book is devoted—is one of the most interesting regions in the world, and presents problems the solution of which would settle many of the vexed questions relating to the origin and inter-relations of the

Asiatic peoples. As for its geographical interest, it may be sufficient to say here that the principalities of Chala and Muli contain what are probably the highest spots inhabited by man on the face of the globe, and that several of the passes crossed by my little caravan are loftier than the highest of the passes existing along the route traversed by the British expedition to Lhasa. My own contributions to geographical and ethnological lore are of the slenderest; but if I can persuade some of my readers that Tibetan Ssuch'uan and western Yunnan are worth visiting, be it only for the glory of their mountain scenery, I shall consider that my book has fulfilled the most useful purpose to which it aspires.

For those who are seized by a craving to revert for a time to something like the nomadic life of our remote forefathers, or to pass like the old Hindu ascetics into "the homeless state," there can be no country in the world more full of charm than some of the wilder and less-peopled regions of the Chinese Empire. There are enormous areas in that country covered with primeval forests in which man's foot has never trod, lofty mountains whose peaks are crowned with sparkling diadems of eternal snow, grand and savage gorges in which Nature has carved for herself in indelible letters the story of the world's youth, and gloomy chasms through which rush the mighty rivers that carry to the Indian Ocean and the Pacific snows that melted on the white roof of the world. And amid all this magnificence and desolation there are lovely valleys and stretches of garden-land

that might have been chosen as the Edens of a hundred mythologies, and which in historic times have been the homes of religious recluses and poets, who, like others of their kind in Western lands, found in silence and solitude a refuge from the bitterness and pain of the world, or a hermitage in which, amid scenes of perennial beauty, they could weave their flowers of thought into immortal garlands of human words.

It is a mistake to regard the Chinese as essentially a prosaic race, caring only for material things and nothing at all for what we should call things of the spirit. If they have less power of artistic creation than the Japanese—and even that may be doubted—they are quite as sensitive as the people of any other race to the magic of beauty in either nature or art; and especially do they—like our own Ruskin—take a vivid delight in the loveliness of mountain scenery. There is a well-known story of a Chinese scholar who, like the scholars of most lands, was blest with few of this world's goods, and, unlike a great many of them, was noted for his zealous devotion to the service of his country's gods. One night he heard the voice of an invisible being that spoke to him thus: "Your piety has found favour in the sight of heaven; ask now for what you most long to possess, for I am the messenger of the gods, and they have sworn to grant your heart's desire." "I ask" said the poor scholar "for the coarsest clothes and food, just enough for my daily wants, and I beg that I may have freedom to wander at my will over mountain and

fell and woodland stream, free from all worldly cares, till my life's end. That is all I ask." Hardly had he spoken when the sky seemed to be filled with the laughter of myriads of unearthly voices. "All you ask?" cried the messenger of the gods. "Know you not that what you demand is the highest happiness of the beings that dwell in heaven? Ask for wealth or rank, or what earthly happiness you will, but not for you are the holiest joys of the gods."

To those of our own day—and there are many such—whose highest ideal of happiness is that of this poor Chinese scholar, to roam at will through the beautiful places of the world, or perhaps even to dwell in some lonely hermitage far removed from

> "The weariness, the fever and the fret
> Here, where men sit and hear each other groan,"

it must be a bitter reflection that man is by his own works dooming himself to lose for evermore the privilege of freedom and the solace of isolation. When an authoritative voice informs us, in connection with wireless telegraphy, that "our ultimate ideal must be instantaneous electrical communication with every man on earth, ashore or afloat, at a cost within the reach of every one," what becomes of the unhappy man who finds one of the greatest joys of travel in the very fact of his utter loneliness, and in the knowledge that he is for the time being severed from all possibility of communication with his civilised fellow-men? The writer I have just

quoted[1] assures us that owing to the recent triumphs of science "a severance of communication with any part of the earth — even the Antipodes — will henceforth be impossible. Storms that overthrow telegraph posts, and malice that cuts our cables, are impotent in the all-pervading ether. An explorer like Stanley in the tropical forest, or Geary amid ice-fields, will report daily progress in the *Times*. . . . Sir William Preece's dream of signalling to Mars may (say by utilising Niagara for the experiment) yet be realised." Thus even a flight to the virgin continents of another planet will not give the future traveller the delicious sense of freedom that comes from the knowledge of complete isolation or of entire severance from the cares of civilised life. How can we expect our mistress Nature to be gracious to us if we, with our unholy inventions, woo her so much more rudely and roughly than did her lovers of the golden time when the earth was young? For my own part I rejoice that a wireless-telegraphy apparatus has not yet become an indispensable item in every traveller's equipment, and that no law has yet been enacted penalising any individual who presumes to sever himself from communication with his fellows.

If it appears churlish and ungrateful to speak of the pleasures of separation from all those comforts and delights that Western civilisation has placed within our grasp, and without which

[1] Mr J. Henniker Heaton, M.P., in *The Nineteenth Century and After*, September 1906.

the normal European would hardly find life worth living, it is only fair to remember that no one is in a position to appreciate such comforts and delights so heartily as the man who has been temporarily deprived of them; though the depth of his appreciation will, of course, vary according to the extent of his dependence on the amenities of civilised life during his ordinary existence as a social unit.

The journey described in this book was not the first undertaken by me in the countries of the Far East. Towards the close of 1902 I travelled through the French province of Tong-king (erstwhile tributary to the Chinese Empire) and ascended the Red River to the high plateau of Yunnan. After traversing that province from east to west I reached the town of Ssumao, and thence struck southwards into the Chinese Shan States and the French Protected States of Upper Laos. A journey of many days in a dug-out canoe down one of the most beautiful rivers of that country gave me a delightful opportunity of becoming acquainted with the domestic life of the Lao-Shans—surely among the most attractive and hospitable races in the world. Leaving my canoe at the charming little Laos capital, Luang Prabang, I proceeded down the Mekong on a raft and visited the ruins of the obliterated kingdom of Vien-chan. There I left the Mekong and wandered overland through the great dry plain of eastern Siam to Korat. From Korat I was speedily conveyed by the prosaic means of a

railway to the perplexing city of Bangkok, with its curious medley of East and West, old and new, its electric trams, its royal white elephants, its gilded pagodas and State umbrellas, and its forlorn collection of European legations. Except for the baggage-coolies hired at intervals along my route, I was for the greater part of this four months' journey unaccompanied by friend or servant. At one point, indeed, I was literally alone: for in the country of the Lao-Shans my four baggage-coolies, owing to some unreasonable dread of perfectly non-existent dangers, suddenly left me to my own devices, and returned to their homes, obliging me to abandon all my baggage except what I was able to carry in my own hands and pockets. It was then that my eyes were first opened to the fact that civilised man encumbers himself with a great many material possessions which he could quite well do without; for at no time did I suffer the least inconvenience from the loss of any of the articles which up to that point I had considered absolutely essential to my comfort and well-being. Servants and heavy baggage can indeed easily be dispensed with in any tropical country in which the natives are not unfriendly, and provided that the traveller is willing to subsist entirely on such food as the country affords; and it is undoubtedly the case that a traveller with few *impedimenta* can penetrate with ease into remote places that are inaccessible to one whose train includes numerous coolies and beasts of burden. One who is travelling with some definite scientific object in view must, of course,

carry a suitable equipment of scientific instruments, and may require a retinue of servants and surveyors; but it is the mere wanderer—especially he who wanders in search of things strange and beautiful—not the scientific explorer, whose requirements I am here considering. It is perhaps unwise to render oneself absolutely dependent for supplies on the friendliness of natives, but in my own case it so happens that I have never met with inhospitable treatment from any of the Asiatic peoples among whom I have travelled, whether Chinese, Tongkingese, Tibetans, Shans, Siamese, or Burmese. I leave it to others who have had different experiences to tell their own tales.

At other times during my residence in China I have found opportunities to make tours, either in connection with official business or on leave of absence, in other parts of the Far East. In China I have made several excursions into the interior of the provinces of Kwangtung, Kwangsi, Kiangsi, and Shantung. In 1904 I travelled through the German colony of Kiaochou and the provincial capital, Chinan-fu, on my way to the little town of Ch'ü Fou, where I visited the tomb of Confucius and was entertained by the Duke K'ung, said to be the seventy-sixth descendant of the great sage in a direct line; and on the same occasion I ascended the famous sacred mountain of T'ai Shan, where the Emperor Shun is said to have sacrificed to heaven in the third millennium B.C. At the close of the same year, while the Russo-Japanese war was still raging, I was enabled

through the kindness of a distinguished naval officer to pay an interesting visit to the capital of the distracted kingdom of Korea.

The journey described in the following pages was of a more ambitious character than those just mentioned, and occupied the greater part of a year. My intention was to ascend the Yangtse to the province of Ssuch'uan, and thence to make my way across that province to those principalities of eastern Tibet that now own allegiance to the emperor of China. I intended if possible to make my way southward through those states, and so enter the province of Yunnan; whence, as I knew from the narratives of former travellers, I should have no difficulty in making my way into Upper Burma. The details of my route I left to be determined by circumstances. Though I was occasionally subjected to minor disappointments and delays, the assistance of the various local officials and the friendly spirit shown by the people among whom I travelled enabled me to carry out my plans with success.

CHAPTER II

PEKING TO ICHANG

THE first part of my journey was accomplished with great rapidity, and my description of it will not occupy long in the telling. I had no desire to spend a longer time than was absolutely necessary in northern China, and was glad enough to avail myself of every facility for reaching Ichang—the port on the Yangtse where steam navigation ceases—as soon as possible. The recent completion of the northern section of the great trunk railway of China has rendered it possible to travel from Peking to Hankow in four days,[1] and so makes it unnecessary to undertake a long and somewhat dreary journey on horseback or in springless carts over hundreds of miles of dusty plains and impossible roads.

I left Wei-hai-wei on 6th January 1906 in the steamer *Shuntien*, and reached the ugly and depressing little port of Chin-wang-tao on the 8th. In the evening of the following day, after a night spent in Tientsin, I reached the capital, and was glad to exchange the discomfort of a monotonous

[1] Since reduced to thirty-six hours.