

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05276-4 - An American Engineer in China

William Barclay Parsons

Excerpt

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Preface

THE following pages are designed to present a view of China and the Chinese from the stand-point of industrial development as it exists at present and along the lines it is likely to follow in the future. Such phases of the Chinese question as the missionary problems, and the causes and treatment of the recent political disturbance, are left entirely to be dealt with by others, as, likewise, are all matters of government, internal and foreign politics, and personal or national characteristics, except in so far as they may come within the subject scope. In the years 1898 and 1899 the author was in China, under retainer of an American syndicate to examine, survey, and report on an extensive railway enterprise, and the duties connected with his professional work placed him in an exceptional position to study and observe this interesting country and its people from a quite different point of view from that taken by other writers. The journey made in the course of the survey had a special interest, in that it traversed Hu-nan, that province of China of which the least was known, and presented the opportunity, successfully availed of, to obtain an entrance to, and an

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[More information](#)

official recognition in, Chang-sha, the one large city in China which hitherto had been closed to foreigners. The author was accompanied by a corps of engineers, consisting of Mr. R. C. Hunt, Chief of Staff, and Messrs. A. E. Coulter, H. B. Magor, W. K. Brice, and W. S. K. Wetmore—to whom were added Mr. Charles Denby, Jr., as interpreter and manager, and Dr. R. B. Jellison as physician. Shêng Ta-jen, Director-General of Imperial Chinese Railways, kindly attached to the party Mr. W. W. Rich, his consulting engineer, and Woo Yung-fô, and Lo Kwok-shui, two of his secretaries. The two last mentioned gentlemen had been educated in the United States, the latter as an engineer. They both had been recalled in the midst of their collegiate studies, and subsequently Mr. Woo entered the Chinese navy, where he served as flag-lieutenant to Captain Lang, R.N., at that time acting as Chinese Admiral. When Admiral Ting succeeded Captain Lang, Mr. Woo was transferred to the former's staff, and stood at the side of his chief in the conning tower of the flag-ship in the famous battle of the Ya-lu in the Japanese War.

The journey was not without its rough as well as its interesting side, and was one of some considerable personal risk. The party was accompanied by a large force of Chinese soldiers for

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

Preface

7

protection, Chinese officials to indicate its character, and a body of coolies acting as porters, for all stores had to be carried. Provisions, except eggs, fish, and fresh meat, were purchased before starting in sufficient quantity to maintain the party in the field for some months. The articles mentioned above were obtained without trouble, and usually as presents from the local officials, the meats consisting of buffalo, sheep, goat, deer, wild ducks and chicken.

The author desires to take this opportunity to express his sense of personal obligation to Their Excellencies: Shêng, the Director-General of Railways and Telegraphs, with whom the author was necessarily brought into close contact; Chang Chih-tung, the great central Viceroy, through whose territory the survey was made; and Wu Ting-fang, China's able representative in Washington; to Mr. Conger, the United States Minister at Peking, the latter particularly for such personal aid as his official position permitted; and to Mr. John Goodnow, United States Consul-General at Shanghai.

Part of the matter contained in this volume has previously appeared in *McClure's* and *Engineering Magazines* and *Harper's Weekly*, and is republished through the courtesy of the respective editors,

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Excerpt

[More information](#)

8

Preface

although now entirely rewritten and enlarged.
All the illustrations are from photographs actually taken on the expedition, and for the most part represent Chinese life as it exists in the interior of the Empire.

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William Barclay Parsons

Excerpt

[More information](#)

A Table of the Chapters

Chapter	Page
I. China	15
II. American Concession	44
III. Hu-nan, The Closed Province of China	54
The Entrance	70
The Interior	90
The Exit	109
IV. My Chinese Impressions	127
V. Commerce and Commercial Relations	148
VI. Finances of China	181
VII. Chinese Construction	198
VIII. Inland Communication	221
IX. Railways	245
X. The Yellow Peril	286
XI. China in the Twentieth Century	306

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-05276-4 - An American Engineer in China
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Excerpt
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05276-4 - An American Engineer in China

William Barclay Parsons

Excerpt

[More information](#)

A List of the Illustrations

The American Engineers in the Field	<i>Frontispiece</i>	
		Page
Stairway Leading to Temple of Confucius, Peking . . .		22
Carved Stone Animals Lining the Road Leading to the Ming Tombs		26
Four Members of the Tsung-li Yamén and Mr. Conger in the Court-yard of the Yamén		28
Yang-tze Kiang, between Han-yang and Wu-chang . . .		32
A Part of the City of Victoria, on the Island of Hongkong, at the Base of the Peak		38
The Last of Hu-nan		47
Junks on the River Han with Hankow in the Distance . .		55
A Group of Natives who Have Never Seen a Foreigner Before		59
Another Group of Natives		61
Coolies Waiting to be Employed as Carriers		63
Coolie Carrying my Bedding		64
A Yamén Runner		65
The Procession		72
Placard Bearers who Preceded the Procession to Announce Our Coming		73
Chinese Soldiers who Formed Our Guard		75
A Chinese Hsien Magistrate and His Red Umbrella, in- dicative of His Rank and Presence		77
Main Court-yard of the Governor's Yamén at Chang-sha .		85
River Gunboat		90
A Peculiar Custom by Chinese Women of Wearing Heat- ing-Baskets		95

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05276-4 - An American Engineer in China

William Barclay Parsons

Excerpt

[More information](#)**A List of the Illustrations**

	Page
The Descent from the Che-ling Pass on the South Side	100
Two Faithful Friends	102
The Wall and Gateway on the Border between Hu-nan and Kiang-si	106
A Bridge over Dry Ground with a Coolie Climbing the Approach Steps on the Left	107
A Kwang-tung Pawnshop and Surrounding Village	110
Under Two Flags	122
Chinese and Manchu Ladies of the Upper Class	128
A Neglected Buddhist Temple	139
Chinese Graves	141
Flags were Everywhere in Profusion	144
General Liu Kao-chao at Tiffin	146
Wall Along Yang-tze Kiang at Wu-chang, Opposite Hankow	152
Road-side Shrine in Which Papers are Burned	166
A Hu-nan Farm-house	168
A Chinese Saw-mill	177
A Military Officer and Two Privates	180
"Bell" Cash	197
A Very Old Arch in Eastern Hu-nan, Previously Unex- plored	200
Ping-hsiang Bridge	202
A Beautiful Single Span	204
Arch near Peking	206
A Small Bridge	208
Wooden Cantilever Bridge at Li-ling, over the Lu Ho	210
Pagoda near Wu-chang	211
Chinese House Construction—a Combination of a Wooden Frame and Brick Walls	212

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05276-4 - An American Engineer in China

William Barclay Parsons

Excerpt

[More information](#)**A List of the Illustrations**

13

	Page
The Famous Wall of the Tartar City, Peking, with One of the Gate-towers	214
The Great Wall of China	216
The Siang Kiang	224
A Freight-boat Being Poled Against the Stream	228
A Sail That May Have Seen Better Days, but Which is by no Means a Unique Specimen	230
A Female Skipper	232
The Equality of Sex. A Man and a Woman at the Oar	233
A Cantonese Slipper Boat	235
Fast Freight by Wheelbarrow	237
The Author Travelling in an Official Chair	238
Boy Carrying Coal from the Mines to the River	240
A Typical Road on Top of a Dyke between Rice-fields	241
A Road Paved with Stone Slabs Showing the Groove Cut by Wheelbarrows	242
The "Rocket of China" and Mr. Kinder	248
Khojack Tunnel on the Sind-Peshin Railway, India	268
Japanese Passenger Train	270
Typical Large Railway Station in Japan	272
Typical Small Railway Station in Japan	274
Passengers Getting on a Train in China	276
Japanese Railway Freight Station	278
Second-class Train on the Imperial Chinese Railway	282
First-class Train on the Imperial Chinese Railway	284

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-05276-4 - An American Engineer in China

William Barclay Parsons

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Since the publication of this volume the following facts regarding the Chinese officials shown in the picture on page 28 have come to light.

Hsü Yungi was beheaded by order of the Empress during the siege of Peking.

Wang Wen-shao died from exposure during the flight of the Imperial party.

Chao Shu-chiao is one of the officials whom Minister Conger thinks should be beheaded.

Yü Keng has recently been appointed Chinese Minister to France and is now in Paris.

WILLIAM BARCLAY PARSONS.