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978-1-108-04553-7 - A Journal of the First French Embassy to China 1698-1700

François Froger

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**A Journal of the First
French Embassy to China, 1698-1700**

It was not until the early twentieth century that the previously unpublished source of this 1859 work was identified as being itself a reworking of François Froger's *Relation du premier voyage, fait en 1698, 1699 et 1700*, a journal of his experiences as a young engineer while sailing with the first French ambassadorial party to China. This translation by Saxe Bannister (1790–1877) supplements the original official account with anecdotes and notes: the work is therefore based on composite primary evidence. This does not detract, however, from the worth of this book, in which Bannister uses a lengthy introduction and appendices of further primary evidence to apply what can be learned from earlier works to the contemporary context of the Opium Wars, aiming to promote a more peaceful and balanced attitude towards China. It is a useful example of scholarly propaganda in the history of nineteenth-century Anglo-Chinese relations.

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A Journal of
The First French
Embassy to China
1698-1700

FRANÇOIS FROGER

TRANSLATED BY SAXE BANNISTER



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A JOURNAL
OF THE
FIRST FRENCH EMBASSY
TO CHINA,
1698-1700.

TRANSLATED FROM AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT BY

SAXE BANNISTER, M.A.
QUEEN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD.

WITH

AN ESSAY

ON THE FRIENDLY DISPOSITION OF THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT
AND PEOPLE TO FOREIGNERS.

"If I might presume to hope that my description of the manners and institutions of the people of INDIA could contribute in the smallest degree to render them more respected, and their condition more happy, I should close my literary labours with the satisfaction of thinking that I have not lived, or written in vain."—*The Works of Dr. Robertson, by Dugald Stewart*, 8vo. 1840, vol. viii. p. 359.

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1859.

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This Volume is Dedicated

TO

ADMIRAL SMYTH, F.R.S.

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES,
AND OF THE ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY,

IN thankful acknowledgment of much instruction and much benefit received from that accomplished seaman, by an humble geographical student—the Editor of this old Journal.

In the “History of the Mediterranean,” Admiral Smyth has shown, in the union of nautical science with antiquarian lore, how well dry research may be brought to bear upon great interests in modern navigation; and how the patient traces of the plumb-line, known only upon mouldy manuscripts, can be revived

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to help out our better, but defective stellar observations. To Admiral Smyth the Editor of this Journal is further indebted for encouragement in a geographical work that may still, as we more and more cover the earth with our fleets and our people, be found to be of eminent use in guiding our progress. That work is the construction of selected maps of sea and land upon a vast *uniform* scale, to give clear perceptions of what is now too often vague; and enable us to judge of men and things of deep interest, where, at present, our ignorance baffles the best designs. Should this work be executed worthily of its object, it is to Admiral Smyth, at the head of a distinguished list of other approvers of it, that the Editor will owe his success.

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I.

The urgent need of better intelligence respecting China and Japan. The Method adopted by Mr. Locke and Lord Somers to secure proper intelligence upon all our affairs beyond sea.

HARD as it may be, correctly, and in all their complex bearings, to estimate the prodigious

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passing events in the East, the intrinsic importance of those events deeply interests thinking men; while their novelty or their grandeur strikes the imagination of the most unreflecting. Their issue, for ill or good, perplexes the coolest reasoner; but the more hopeful view of things on this occasion has powerful encouragements for us all. At least the persuasion gains strength daily, that, both for our own sakes and for the sake of our multitudinous fellow-creatures throughout Asia, we are bound to become better acquainted with whatever in their condition affects us, and upon all points in which our influence may affect them. These objects, it may be said, without presumption, will be materially promoted by examining such neglected details as are presented in this volume upon former communications, especially with China, by ourselves and the French. The dates of most of those details are comparatively recent; and they bear directly on the actual condition of things in the East. Those details have been mainly collected from official and other inedited stores in our own and in foreign archives.

The substance of the volume is a journal kept

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on board a French ship of war sent to China by Lewis the Fourteenth. The manuscript of that document is in the writing of the early part of the last century. It was obtained casually in London: and, from the character of other MSS. among which the Journal was discovered, it seems to have been in the possession of a distinguished emigrant of the first French Revolution—having probably belonged to the family of a former minister or intelligent sea-officer. This journal is ably compiled, but several errors in the spelling of even trivial words show it to have been a copy of a more correct original.

It contains a genuine narrative of proceedings to which the journalist was more or less a party, on board the ship or in Canton, from its sailing in 1698 and its return to France in 1700. The French mission to China in 1698, here described, was unknown to our later ambassadors, although it affords a valid precedent that must have helped their suitable reception at the court of Peking, where such reception has been held to be of extremely difficult attainment, and is still not without perplexity. By the liberal decision, however, of the Chinese Em-

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peror himself, this French mission was originally destined for the northern port of Ning-po, and for the capital. It proceeded to Canton in consequence of the lateness of the season. But at Canton the Viceroy, it is expressly said, “wished to honour the French,”—foreigners as they were,—and relieved them at once from the payment of customs. In regard to the prostrations of the Kotou, the Viceroy permitted the French officers to offer their respects to the Emperor in any way “creditable to both nations.” This was, therefore, settled amicably and on equal terms, when the French envoy declined to do the act of humiliation often imposed in such cases.

This took place, indeed, in Canton, not at Peking, in the actual presence of the Emperor. But the original plan of the embassy not being carried out, from stress of weather only, the narrative represents the Emperor as invested with a sort of ubiquity—the authorities in Canton studiously turning to the supposed imperial presence with the reverence that would have been given to their great head, if actually before them. The waiver, therefore, of the offensive ceremony in question at the provincial city in 1698 is to be

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held indicative of the disposition of the Chinese at that time to receive the foreigners with becoming courtesy. Consequently, in the actual condition of our intercourse with China, the production of this journal, containing such details, properly illustrated, will certainly promote the more peaceful tenor of that intercourse.

Lord Amherst in 1816, and Lord Macartney in 1792, were carefully provided with information in print and in manuscript, concerning what were thought to be *all* the former diplomatic communications with the Chinese Government from Portugal, Russia, Holland, and Rome.

History was diligently searched for instances of missions to and from the Emperors for the last six centuries, including the narratives of travellers. Even a Chinese Embassy to Lisbon was not quite overlooked, although not so fully described as its interest required. Such precedents were sought for in order to justify our claim of admittance to the Emperor on terms of reasonable equality, seeing that submission was not to be thought of, to ceremonies implying that subjection to China which must have weakened negotiations for fair trading, and for

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mutually useful social intercourse. It is to be regretted that the habitual secrecy of diplomatic proceedings defeated the good intentions at that time manifested by us. Lord Amherst being unaware of any suitable example previous to Lord Macartney's of 1792, was unwilling to rely on that supposed solitary case. When, therefore, the Court of Peking, under the influence of really fleeting jealousies, would not yield in 1816 what its representative at Canton had readily granted in 1698, our minister came away in no small discredit. From that time our trade with the Chinese has suffered much embarrassment; wars have broken out between us; and our opium smuggling has been persevered in to an amount and with an evil character unparalleled in the history of trade.

It is in the absence of proper intelligence respecting the disposition of the Chinese government and people towards us, that *force* has been mainly depended upon as the means of opening their country advantageously at once to us and to themselves. But the most eager advocate of force will gladly renounce it if the object we all aim at can be won by ways of

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peace ; and the discovery of these happier ways will assuredly be promoted by the publication of authentic reports of such communication with the Chinese government as this Journal of the Mission from France ; and also by the production of such particulars as are here collected from official sources respecting several important British missions to Pekin.

It will not be denied, that a competent knowledge of the matters which statesmen are concerned about, is indispensable to the discharge of their duties. Nor will it be doubted that the first of Italian philosophers, Vico, was right in making great powers and the best intentions subordinate to knowledge in the direction of life. It is then to be expected that eminent men should not neglect good means of acquiring such intelligence. Accordingly, we have not been without those of the highest reputation, who have studiously devised excellent methods of that kind of instruction. What the philosopher declared in theory, the wisest of our statesmen long ago developed practically in the analyses of national events beyond affecting us. The early plan of administering our colonies.

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mainly traceable to the first Earl of Clarendon and Sir William Temple, and set forth in the royal Instructions of 1670 to the Committee of the Council for Plantations, expressly provided for the transmission of good intelligence from the Colonies home. That committee, after the Revolution of 1688, become the Lords of Trade and Plantations, frained, under the guidance of two other equally illustrious men, Locke and Lord Somers, a method of periodical analysis of that intelligence for the public instruction.

What was so deliberately planned, stands upon the Journals of Parliament to this day, as it was followed out during several years, until unwisely discontinued. The system included the Indian along with the Colonial Administrations; and it aimed at securing in both a due regard to philanthropy in the exercise of our growing power abroad.

The department under which so much was well done, is now represented by two Secretaries of State for the Colonies and India; and efforts have not been wanting to call the attention of the Government to a system admirably adapted to aid it in all its functions. No longer since

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than in 1841, the Earl of Derby, at that time Secretary of State for the Colonies, and commencing his Ministry with a zealous execution of its duties, encouraged a special plan for the revival of those periodical analyses; but that plan was peremptorily put by, under an influence in the Colonial Office, which had been during many years hostile to publicity, and adverse to the best-conceived designs of Colonial reformation so much struggled for of late. In an evil hour, the Earl of Derby submitted to that influence; but we are come to better times, when it may reasonably be expected, that with the present greater need of what may be thus easily obtained for our guidance at home, our Colonial and Indian ministries will ere long revive what is open to no objection, and must tend to the best results. It is hardly rash to assert, that with the *timely* publication of the documents respecting China to be here produced after sixty years' suppression of them, the present favourable opening of this rich country to our trade might have been commanded long ago; whilst they will be seen to be of a character to silence all possible objections to their publication almost

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concurrently with the events to which they relate.

We possess, in this way, means of intelligence at our command such as no nation ever had before; and a field lies before us for the wise, humane, and vigorous application of that intelligence, surpassing even our own great colonizing works.

At the same time, proof exists, amounting to demonstration, that the neglect of what was approved in 1842, by our Colonial Minister, has led to unparalleled horrors, and enormous waste of treasure in one region alone—South Africa. That region was selected at the time, to develop the method of our Colonial analyses proposed; and with due intelligence, the best and most successful *system* of Colonial rule ever carried out with the sanction of Parliament, could not have been abandoned, as in ignorance it then was. Without that intelligence,—for Parliament was kept in the dark on the subject of South Africa ten whole years,—we first had the burthen of the two needless Caffre wars of '46—'51 to bear,—and they have been followed by the utter ruin of a small people,—our neighbours eager to

share our civilization upon fair terms. Yet their ruin is at this moment on the brink of completion, whilst we are parcelling out their lands, for which we have paid an enormous price, both in coin, blood, and honour.

II.

The need of improved principles of intercourse with the Chinese. The Earl of Elgin to the Merchants of Shanghai. Our conquests to be stayed in the East, and its people to be treated with more justice.

THERE is urgent need, moreover, of much improvement in the political and commercial principles by which we are to conduct our intercourse hereafter with the people of China. Since the late treaties, indeed, with its government, the cautions sagaciously given a few months since by the Earl of Elgin to the merchants of Shanghai, in order to moderate their too eager expectation of profit from the trade of that vast country, and in order to guide all our proceedings with its inhabitants, have become

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of paramount urgency to the Western Nations, in all their relations with the East. Proper inquiries into the special history of the Chinese, and into the history of the travels, the trade, and diplomacy of the more western world with the far East, will show that a great debt is owing from us to that too little known people. The Earl of Elgin, in reply to a previous address from the merchants of Shanghae, conceived not only no sanguine anticipations of commercial success, but also in a spirit of aggression, as if the government of China required extraordinary stray “demonstrations before its lofty pretensions could be reduced to pliancy,” says—

“You express the trust that the result of my exertions may be ‘more fully to develop the vast resources of China,’ and to ‘extend among the people the elevating influences of a higher civilization.’

“The expectations held out to British manufacturers at the close of the last war between Great Britain and China, when they were told that a new world was opened to their trade, so vast that all the mills in Lancashire could not

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make stocking stuff sufficient for one of its provinces, have not been realized; and *I am of opinion that when force and diplomacy shall have done all that they can legitimately effect, the work which has to be accomplished in China will be but at its commencement.*

“When the barriers which prevent free access to the interior of the country shall have been removed, the Christian civilization of the West will find itself face to face, not with barbarism, but with an ancient civilization in many respects effete and imperfect, but in others not without claims to our sympathy and respect.”*

This solemn and most wise judgment from our own ambassador, purports that besides the “*legitimate* uses of force and diplomacy,” there are other proper means of intercourse with the Chinese wherewith to win our way to their reasonable confidence; and the precept must be made our familiar text, and be enrolled among our household words. There is need of such spurs to just and prudent resolves in all our proceedings in the supposed new work

* See Appendix A, for the entire address of Lord Elgin.

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now opening upon us. The great principle of humanity which Lord Elgin really rests upon, cannot fail to become at once the subject of earnest investigation, if the present occasion be properly used by the men appointed to watch, that the policy of this country be shaped to its lasting and honourable advantage. We shall not assuredly be wanting in our old, brave qualities by becoming more resolutely peaceful. But that principle of humanity, bitterly as we have to repent of its violations by us, lies deep enshrined in our history; and it has been settled by the parliamentary declaration that wars for conquest and the enlargement of dominion are repugnant to the true genius of our people and the best dictates of the constitution. Upon our relations with the whole East, critical events are before us; and we are under the holiest obligation to give heed to these portentous signs, however bravely danger must be repelled and difficulties struggled against. With no thought of abandoning what we hold, the past may be repaired with honour by listening to the counsels of experience. Our hopeful prospects in China and Japan offer easier means of com-

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pensating the Eastern world for great commercial and political wrongs done there by us. Those vast regions are also linked to us by another more newly-opened world from Hudson's Bay, "the *Baltic* of North America,"* destined at no distant period to teem with the free and hardy founders of settlements direct across to British Columbia, and to prosper in friendly rivalry with our republican brothers in the south.

But the loftier principles of humane policy must be made our pole-star in this fresh career of real, national greatness, in the spirit in which Parliament declared in the last century, "that to pursue schemes of conquest and extension of dominion in India are measures repugnant to the wishes, the honour, and policy of this

* It will be permitted to the editor of this Journal to state, that this designation of Hudson's Bay, so strongly significant of capabilities equivalent to those commanded by Danes, Norwegians, Swedes, Germans, and Russians, on another freezing sea, was, he thinks, first given to the American Hudson's Bay in letters written some years ago by a relative of his from California, to urge on ministers to take timely steps for colonizing our northern possessions from these islands.

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nation;” * and therefore expressly forbade all wars without authority from home, except in case of actual or prepared hostility.

It is, then, our policy at home that must be curbed ; and after half a century’s fatal abandonment of the sagacious resolution by the parliament of George the Third, her present Majesty has wisely been advised to proclaim to India that “ we desire no extension of our present territorial possessions” there ; and the Queen promises what a great minister, Charles James Fox, so earnestly called for, “ a *system* of measures that would secure peace and prosperity to India.”

Another great man arrived at an analogous conclusion respecting the East, by historical deduction. Principal Robertson, at the close of his eminently honoured life, declared his confidence and satisfaction that his own labours upon India would tend to correct the erroneous opinions which commonly prevailed, to the injury of its swarthy tribes. He was persuaded that with more KNOWLEDGE the European rulers of

* 1783, 21 Geo. III. c. 65, and 1793, 33 Geo. III. c. 52.

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India would direct their sway there more and more humanely.

Such observations, to be found among the very last of the writings of the eloquent Scottish divine, have the solemnity of a dying man's declaration; and they should be weighed at a crisis when our churches are too prone to offer up their prayers for *our own* people, instead of the "*whole* race of mankind," the objects of a broader and therefore wiser service. The authority of Dr. Robertson is not the less deserving of trust, since in his works is displayed the rare excellence of profound historical truth united with brilliant grace of style,* and his just conclusion upon India applies with equal force to China. It was a conclusion formed at a memorable period in our own career beyond sea. There had also been growing up for half a century all over Europe, throughout the Christian world, a warm feeling in favour of our more humane treatment of the world not Christian. The liberation of France and Germany was becoming deeply imbued with phi-

* Lord Brougham's *Lives of the Men of Letters of the time of George the Third*, p. 258.

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lanthropy. America shared the spirit in the avowed sentiments of Franklin, Benezet, and Washington. Here, independently of the avenging inquest by Mr. Burke and his illustrious supporters into atrocities committed in Hindostan, the King's ministers zealously entered upon a diplomatic intercourse with China, which originated in a cordial invitation of such intercourse from the Court of Peking.

Indeed, of the good influences of the eighteenth century, so fit to be set off against its corruptions and its crimes, not the least important was the earnest endeavours of France and Britain to search out and enlighten the dark places of remote regions. The peaceful missions of the time to China and Japan are to be traced to such explorations under the Bougainvilles and the Cooks of those days. To set the negro slave free, and to bring hope to the convict's cell, were great works; but it was better to aim as men then did, and are only beginning to do so again, at the prosperous spread of our civilization far and wide, without sacrificing our fellow-men of any class or nation in our progress.

III.

The Chinese Government well disposed in the last two centuries to encourage friendly intercourse with foreign governments; and at a critical period, prepared to grant domestic reforms, based upon a love of TRUTH, and calculated to facilitate such intercourse with us.

THE invitations from two aged and most distinguished Chinese Emperors, Kang-hi, in 1697, and Kien-Long, in 1786, to European powers of the first rank, to open diplomatic intercourse with Peking, were surely conclusive refutations of the common opinion respecting the exclusive character of the Chinese government. Allowance will be readily made for circumstances which have given rise to that erroneous opinion; and the difficulties of the whole case can be properly accounted for by a fair consideration of the perplexity with which a proud and not incorrupt Eastern Court must have looked upon the steady progress of Western nations—the Russians in the North—the British in India for a century—towards its greatness. The conduct of the Western ecclesiastics, admitted liberally

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into the heart of China, had not always proved their Christianity to be humble and peaceful as they professed it was. Other bodies of men—of various European nations, long frequenters of the Chinese coasts, and only of latter times limited to the trade of Canton—had too often exhibited habitual disorders and mutual jealousies, that lowered them all in the eyes of the Chinese government and people. And when, at length, the dominant traders, the agents of the East India Company, acquired with their greater wealth a higher character, there was permitted to grow the frightful opium smuggling, to our immense profit, and ruinously to China, which alone was enough to mar all the good we ever did there.

What influence is justly to be attributed to European agencies, as stimulants to the Chinese troubles of the last fifty years, cannot be well estimated ; but the efforts made by the Imperial government to stay the source of those troubles, call for our profound respect.

Concurrently with our diplomatic mission to Peking, under Lord Amherst, in 1816, offering to China that just system of intercourse with

the west which the former sovereigns had approved, the Emperor issued a proclamation to his people, in order to initiate an era of great reformation in the country itself, declaring such reformation to be the only way to save it from convulsion.

“ Govern,” said his Imperial Majesty to the officers of the state, “ govern with truth and sincerity, and order will be the result ; if not, anarchy will ensue. To an individual, to a family, even to the sovereign, and the whole empire, nothing further is required but TRUTH. At this moment great degeneracy prevails ; the magistrates are destitute of truth, and multitudes of the people are false.”

The gigantic rebellion then begun in China, and raging to this day, is attributed by the Emperor, in the spirit familiar to Chinese usage, to his own “ moral defects ;” but it is to the Imperial functionaries of all ranks that this appeal is the most earnestly addressed.

It was an appeal of the highest authority for *administrative reform* on a gigantic scale, and to be based upon popular sympathies.