

this place appears to have been from eight to ten feet lower than the surface of the current, and the violence of the torrent was such that houses, groves, villages and even the walls of large towns went down before it.

What had been a highly cultivated and very populous district was, in the course of a few hours, transformed into a turbid lake. It is estimated that nearly two and a half millions of people lost their lives. The river took a new course to the Yellow Sea.

The Chinese government, by advice of engineers, determined to repair the breach in the embankments above Kai-Fong Foo, and restore the river to its former northerly channel into the Gulf of Pechili. A levy of soldiers was made for the labor, and a sum equal to ten millions of dollars in American money expended in material.

The people of the northern provinces violently opposed the work. The terrible river had left them, and they had no wish to have it restored to their part of the country. Mobs destroyed the purchased material for rebuilding the dikes, and bloody conflicts with the military followed. Nevertheless the work was persevered in.

During the winter of 1887 the Great Breach was in part filled, and the river restricted to its old high channel between the embankments. Then in July came tidings of a heavy rainfall in the Mongolian mountains, and knowing that high water in Honan would follow by August and September, the government bestirred itself earnestly.

New appropriations had been made when we were called to Kai-Fong Foo, with other engineers, to advise with the imperial mandarins what to do with the long mismanaged Hoang Ho.

Wo Hei Feng, a dignified old Chinese statesman, presided over the deliberations. The older engineers were first asked their opinions. They advised the strengthening of the embankments as quickly as possible. They were in favor of using all the government money that was available to build dikes.

It soon became evident to me that Lee Wung and Wo Hei Feng were also strongly inclined to that course. They had secured a fat appropriation, and meant to use it up.

But during our trip up the river Wright and I had reached a conclusion that such a course would be folly, considered as national policy; and I am proud to say that, when asked his opinion, Wright spoke what he believed to be the truth.

"I am sorry," he said, "to disagree with older engineers, but it seems to me that a great mistake has been made in diking this great river. Five hundred miles from the sea and nine feet above the surface of the country on both sides, held up only by mud banks a few yards in width!

"This river is bringing down millions of tons of alluvium every year, which nature intends shall be spread out over the lowlands; but your dikes compel it to raise its bed instead. So your dikes must go higher every year, and that means broader and thicker. Periodically and surely the river breaks loose and drowns millions of people. That, in brief, is the story of your fight against nature and the Hoang Ho.

"The Egyptians never banked up the Nile, but adapted themselves to the annual overflow. No one was drowned, and the coat of rich alluvium deposited on the lowlands every year rendered them rich and fertile. They worked with nature instead of against her, and the great annual rise of the Nile became a blessing. This river might be China's blessing, but by your erroneous policy you have made it 'China's Sorrow.'

"What would I now advise, do you ask? This—let the river alone. Let it raise its lowlands and build its delta as nature designs it shall. Put your money back into the treasury. Warn the peo-

ple of inundations. Help them to get out of the way for a time. They will soon adapt themselves to the annual overflow. To go on building higher embankments will drain your national treasury every year, and result in periodical catastrophes like that of last season."

Something like a grin went around when Wright sat down. I thought that old Wo Hei Feng appeared a little thoughtful, as if perplexed; but the others laughed openly, especially Lee Wung.

"Our young brother appears to forget," remarked one of the English engineers, "that in the United States, where the people consider themselves the smartest in the world, an exactly similar policy of levee-building is pursued for the banks of the lower Mississippi by engineers of the highest education and experience."

"I admit that this is true," said Wright, "but it is unwise none the less, and will result in making the lower Mississippi 'America's Sorrow,' instead of the bearer of fertility, like the Nile."

As Wright was laughed at, and there was an appropriation to expend, we went to work on the embankments above Kai-Fong Foo that afternoon, aligning the works and directing the Chinese foremen with their gangs.

The earth for the immense dikes had to be raised fifteen feet out of trenches. We had

charge, too, of facing the river side of the banks with timber, which had been brought down the river in junks, and had under our immediate orders about eight thousand men.

Frost was employed in the commissariat department. He went to Kai-Fong Foo every morning, but returned in the launch at night. Lee Wung usually came with him, for the little mandarin was deep in the appropriation, and for certain reasons greatly interested in what was going on. All the Chinese officials here were jealous of one another.

We worked hard, though we believed the plan a bad one. There was need of hard work, too, for the river was rising steadily. The vast yellow stream, a mile in width, was boiling and swirling, almost level with the tops of the dikes.

On the other side, in great trenches, fifteen feet below the surface of the river, were seventy or eighty thousand Chinese laborers at work, throwing up mud for the banks, chattering and laughing, cooking and eating.

"Look at the poor fellows! They don't realize the danger, or if they do, they don't care," Wright would say.

Frost, Lee Wung, Wright and I slept on the launch, for it was more comfortable there than on shore. On the night of the eleventh of the month we lay moored to the embankment.

(To be continued.)

