

• Massey's Illustrated •

(PUBLISHED MONTHLY.)

A Journal of News and Literature for Royal Homes

NEW SERIES.]

TORONTO, CANADA, MAY, 1893.

[Vol. 5, No. 5.

TWO TECHS ABROAD.

IN FIVE CHAPTERS.

CHAP. IV.—AT THE GREAT BREACH.

If we could have remained in charge of the oil-well, with Frost's tact and experience to guide us, we might have calmed the popular excitement and opened a successful industry; but now came the message from Lee Wung to come to Kai-Fong Foo, on the Yellow River, at the earliest possible moment.

Frost surmised that Wo Hei Feng and our little mandarin had been authorized by the Emperor to attempt the re-channelling of the river. More than half of the entire province of Honan had now been under water for more than a year. Sixty thousand men were working for the imperial government on the embankments.

Our services were in requisition on a grand scale, perhaps, and we were eager for the work, in spite of our petroleum fever in Sz'chuen.

"If our little man gets his long nails into the Peking treasury," said Frost, "he is sure to pull out a million or so of taels, and it will go hard if we do not come in for a share of it."

Our engine must be replaced in the launch, and the boat supplied with coal. This work took unto three o'clock the next afternoon. Frost directed that operations at the salt-wells should go on as usual, under the Chinese foreman. The oil-well we left securely "capped," as we supposed.

Toward evening we steamed into the Yang-tze, now at flood, with a current averaging six miles an hour, and shot through the gorges at a rapid rate. We were all three in high spirits, for we could not foresee to what scenes of peril and death we were hastening, nor that one of our number would never return.

At Chin-Kiang we entered the Yun-Ho, or Grand Canal, which connects the Yang-tze and Hoang Ho, and steamed to Tai Ho, where we were met by Sun Che Lo, a good-hearted Chinese youth, the nephew of Wo Hei Feng. He had come down with instructions for us to report to his uncle and Lee Wung at Kai-Fong Foo, the capital of the Province of Honan.

With these two mandarins were six other Chinese-Tartars, high in government favor, with nearly a score of foreign engineers, mostly English, who looked upon Wright and me as "boys."

We all went up to the place known as the Great Breach, forty miles above Kai-Fong Foo. Wo Hei Feng and his staff of engineers were on board a small government steamer, and Lee Wung in his own launch with Frost, Wright and myself. The object which it was desired to accomplish was the holding of the river to its old bed, in which it had flowed previous to the inundation of the year before, by rebuilding the levees. Sixty thousand men were already at work.

Five hundred miles from the sea the Hoang Ho River enters an alluvial plain formed by the accumulations of mud which through countless ages the great stream itself has brought down. As in the case of the Mississippi, the constant deposit of mud upon the bottom of the river, more slowly flowing here, builds up its bed, raising it higher than the adjacent level, and causing it to seek a new bed on one side or the other.

This process went on without much harm so long as the river was unrestrained; but the dense population and the fertility of the land led, many centuries ago, to attempts to keep the stream within bounds, by means of dikes or levees. These now only aggravated the evil.

At intervals the Hoang Ho has burst these artificial banks, and sought an entirely new course to the sea, carrying destruction through a country which had become a vast cultivated garden, sweeping away hundreds of towns and villages, and drowning people by hundreds of thousands.

The higher and stronger the river dikes have been raised and the longer the waters have

been held to one bed, the more frightful has been the ultimate catastrophe. At last the Hoang Ho has come to bear among the people the tragic name of "the sorrow of China."

In September, 1887, after an unusually wet season, the Hoang Ho's waters broke the south side embankments at a point forty miles above Kai-Fong Foo. At that very time over twelve thousand men, in gangs of a hundred or more, stationed within a few hundred yards of each other, were at work strengthening the dike. So sudden and so violent was the irruption of the stream that over five thousand of them were overwhelmed in their flight.

The land to the southward of the stream at

