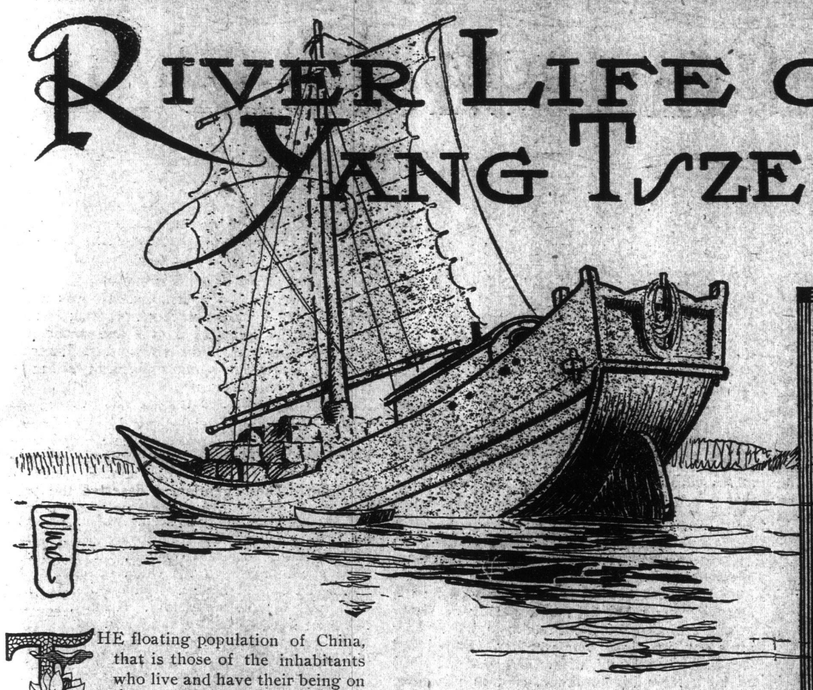
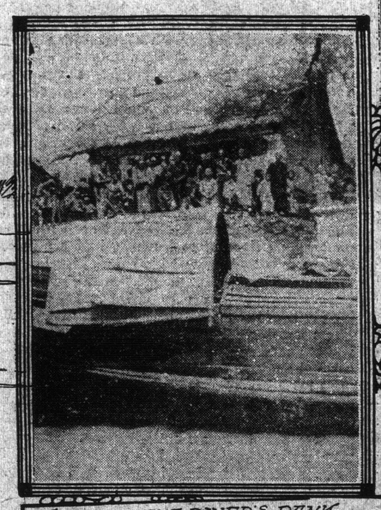
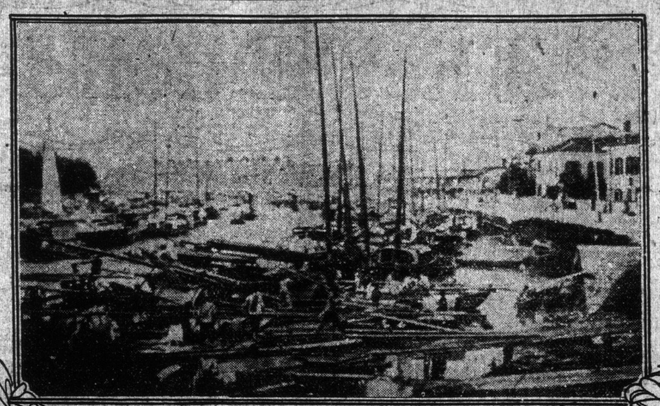
River Life on the Yang Tsze Kiang



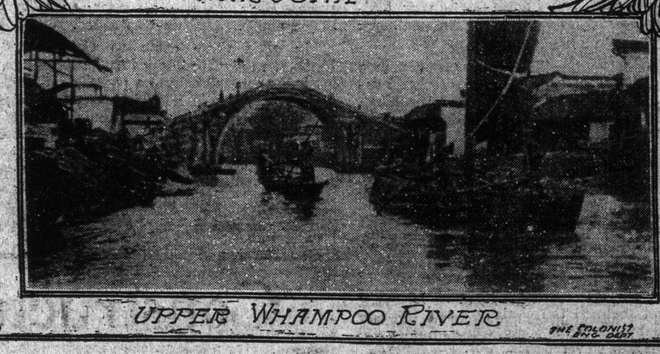


GROUP AT THE RIVER'S BANK



SOOCHOW CREEK SHANGHAI

WAR JUNK



UPPER WHAMPOO RIVER

THE FLOATING population of China, that is those of the inhabitants who live and have their being on the water, must amount to many millions. Central China is a net-work of waterways—rivers and canals. The chief product of the country—rice—is grown under water, the success of the crops depends on the abundance of the natural supply of water, the systems of distributing water over the rice fields of the country are ingeniously and painstakingly carried out, yet the water on which the whole country depends for its very life is at times one of the worst and most treacherous enemies.

Look at the map of the Chinese empire and note the huge arteries which have their source in the mountain ranges of the west. Realize the length of the Yang-Tsze from its source in the Tibetan mountains to its mouth in the Yellow Sea; try and picture in your mind the hundreds, nay thousands, of square miles of level country through which that river flows after its mad rush through mountain gorge and canyon. Remember that all those square miles have the appearance, before the rice has sprouted, of one vast lake, but for the network of banks and dykes dividing the paddy fields from one another; notice also that these fields are about the same level as the mighty river itself at normal high water, and that a rise of a very few feet will serve to obliterate the river banks and dykes for miles and miles. Then try to realize the size of the river itself. Seven hundred miles and more from its mouth, H. M. S. Glory, a first-class British battleship, has steamed, to drop anchor off the bund of the important and rapidly growing port of Hankow, the long famous centre of the tea trade, situated, as its name implies, at the mouth of the Han river, which here joins the life-giving and life-taking Yang-Tsze.

Then ponder awhile over the teeming myriads inhabiting this great fertile valley, remembering that railways as yet are a negligible quantity in this vast country, and that the great waterway is the main channel for passage and transport through the whole length of Central China, that on its broad bosom it carries the traffic of half an empire almost entirely in cranky native junks, and you may begin to realize a little what appalling disaster a sudden rise in its waters may mean.

Take a trip in one of the many luxurious steamers plying from Shanghai up the Yang-Tsze-Kiang. For miles on either side the country is as flat as a table. Here and there a clump of bamboos relieves the monotony, or a tall pagoda built to protect from all ills a town or village, but only in the dim distance hills, until the ocean has been left many miles behind. Junks and sampans everywhere; small junks and large junks, junks laden and junks light, junks sailing where possible, and junks being towed by semi-naked coolie "trackers" against wind or current; everywhere in the water junks, and along the banks, huts, and everywhere a teeming population, depending for its sustenance and its safety on the mighty river which rushes to the coast silently but very swiftly, ruthless in its whims and vagaries, making land and destroying it, ever washing and wearing away its banks and ever carrying enormous quantities of silt to be disgorged into the sea that it makes yellow for many miles from land.

Ten thousand Chinese are reported to have lost their lives recently in the great freshet that struck Hankow, unsuspecting and unprepared through the folly almost unbelievable to those of us who know not China of an official whose dignity was more to him than his fellow-countrymen's safety.

This number, swept away at one blow at one city alone seems at first incredible, but to one who has travelled on these waterways and seen at different places a river bank lined for miles with junks and huts innumerable right at the water's edge, crowded with a busy, noisy multitude, the thing is easier to understand and realize. I have heard Chinese quarters in white men's towns described as rabbit-warrens. I have seen many a rabbit-warren, but never a one that seemed to me to make a fair simile to the river-bank population of any Chinese town that I have seen. Here is a medley of sight and sound and smell. Junks of all sizes rubbing sides together, and on the bank a solid packed line of huts and houses; refuse-heaps and filth indescribable. Clickity-clack, clickity-clack, here comes a pedlar beating his castanets of bamboo to call attention to his wares; there is a tobacco vendor with water-pipes to hire for a smoke. A few yards further on is a barber plying his trade in open-air, moving with his stock-in-trade wherever business offers. At the top pitch of their voices two coolie women are indulging in abuse and the interchange of filthy compliments all unnoticed by the throng, while in the bows of that junk a Chinese head is being subjected to a vigorous and thorough search at the hands of a friend while its owner contentedly puffs at his water-pipe. Over all the continuous hum of human voice in jest, in protest, in laughter and in anger. The very water seems to sing with life.

As night advances a gradual hush falls over things, broken at frequent intervals by a voice raised high of some quarrelsome reveler or hard-hit gambler, and by the tum-tum-tum of the drums on the river gun-boats, a nerve-racking infliction on a light sleeper.

Picture to yourself such a mass of humanity asleep and caught asleep by a wall of water suddenly and silently sweeping down upon them. No time to cast off moorings or recover anchors, no time to get out oars and push out into the stream, a jumbled mass of swamped and sinking junks, bumping, squeezing, crunching, nothing but confusion and death.

Feng-shui poo how. The fates were against them. What good to struggle or complain of fate. The gods were angry. Ever the gods are angry, ever must they be propitiated.

Can we wonder, then, at the poor, superstitious junkman's regular devotion and attention to his religious duties? We can understand and realize when we see him returning from buying his stores for a trip carrying a goodly supply of joss sticks, paper money and fire-crackers; we feel no temptation to smile or mock at sunset and at dawn when he makes his kow-tow to the river-god and burns his sacrifice of paper-money and lights his joss-sticks in his honor. We watch him in sympathy as he mutters his prayer and pays his toll to the god of each rapid and dangerous stretch of water; we have seen some of the dangers that he has to brave and can sympathize with his sincere efforts to invoke superhuman aid to combat superhuman dangers.

Common Abuse of Tipping

IN a recent issue of the London Times, the following appeared, "From a Corespondent":

A treatise could easily be written on the practice of tipping, which is now universal in every part of the civilized world. Of late years the practice has been common usage in many distant lands where it was previously unknown. Once even the Gibeonites of industry in Western America who thought themselves "as good as the next man" (and sometimes, to judge by their manner, some degrees better) would have scorned to take a pourboire in the form of currency. But in these latter days, as every traveller knows, even the typical Westerner—even the "free miner" who takes one round a placer-camp—will accept a tip, and evidently expects it. Except in such out-of-the-world districts as the Kentucky hill country, the Smoky Mountains, and what is left uncivilized of the demesnes of the Hudson's Bay Company the tip is an American institution, and to be "American" it must be liberal to the verge of munificence. Elsewhere the very word seems to have passed into all languages; in Egypt and Turkey, for example, it is displacing the familiar "backsheesh," because, other things being equal, the person who begs in a monosyllable rather than a disyllable gains a little of the time which is money.

As the practice of tipping has widened its scope by conquering the new countries of the world, so it has deepened. Its power over those who live in old countries where the pourboire has long been an established institution. For example, consider the fashion of tipping in the better-class London restaurants. Ten years ago a piece of silver was always sufficient to awaken the waiter's smile; a few coppers were a sufficient guarantee that he would bring you your hat and coat with the requisite deference. Today the waiter at any good West-end restaurant expects from 15 to 20 per cent. on the amount of your bill. Anything else causes him to cast on you that look, which the boldest flinch from, intended to imply that you are a "gent" rather than a gentleman. The waiter, poor fellow, is not to be blamed for thus endeavoring to keep up the local standard of tipping. The management, which pays him no wages or even exacts a payment from him and so casts the burden of his maintenance on the public, is really to blame for the system. Not a few of the places where, a few years ago, one could dine with simple luxury and decorously at a reasonable cost have been spoilt for the person of moderate means by the lavish tipping of wealthy foreigners who leave a meteoric trail of gold and silver donations behind them as they "streak" through our poor, patient metropolis. Only the other day I saw one of these nouveaux riches give a porter half-a-crown for carrying a small bag (no doubt it was a "crip" to its owner) 50 yards along the Victoria platform. Afterwards he seemed to be holding a levee of railway servants at the door of his compartment. They stood with hungry eyes about the temporary abiding place of this incarnation of a gold mine instead of helping other passengers, third-class nonentities such as myself, to transport their more personal luggage.

But it is in certain country houses that one observes the most odious abuses of tipping. Time was when the man of moderate means could always accept an invitation to spend the week-end at some well-to-do friend's country seat or to enjoy a day's shooting. In the former case a single pound would cover all necessary donations; in the latter, a sovereign to the headkeeper and half-sovereigns, or even what the cabmen call "dollars," to his underlings were amply sufficient. In these days, however, five times as much is expected and paid as a matter of course. If, for example, you tip the chauffeur who takes you from and to the station on the same scale as, on the occasion of previous visits in days before the motor-car arrived, you tipped the groom who drove the dogcart, his manner of acceptance is apt to be positively impertinent. The chauffeur is still a spoilt darling of the servants' hall though in the best houses successful efforts are being made to reduce his status to that of the old-fashioned coachman, who, even if he is disappointed in the size of his tip, seldom or never allows his resentment to dislocate his manners. A competent authority informs me that the appearance of the chauffeur—from whom his employers too often allow undue familiarity—is one of the causes of extravagance in tipping, other servants being corrupted by his influence. However that may be, the standard of tipping in country houses has now become so exorbitant that it is more economical to spend one's week-ends at a good hotel. As for shooting invitations, no man of small means can afford to accept them. The impudence of under-tipped keepers sometimes passes all bounds. A friend of mine, who offered two sovereigns to a headkeeper, received the amazing answer of a hand placed behind the back—a most emphatic reusal to take the gift—and the significant words, "Sir, this is a paper house." That was to say, nothing less than a £5 note should have been offered to this dignitary, who, to do him justice, had shown the party the best of sport. When £10 will not cover the open-air "vails," the time has come for the man of small means to sell his guns and forget all about grouse and pheasants, and to cultivate golf as a casual recreation—for all that golf is yearly becoming a more expensive amusement.

There are still country houses where this state of things is not tolerated, and a guest's poverty is never a source of embarrassment to him or her. For the most part these citadels of true English hospitality are historic places occupied by families which have made, and are still making, English history. There the servants know that they also must play their part in maintaining the best traditions of English society. But, to speak the plain truth, such houses are few and far between. Elsewhere the rule is that the indolence or ignorance of the owners has permitted the rank growth of a system of customary exactions which is a source of discomfort to their poorer guests. No doubt the rich guest who throws his money about recklessly is also to blame. But it is surely in the power of those who have a local habitation and a name in the English countryside to prevent their houses from degenerating into a kind of expensive hotel. Ugly stories are current regarding some of these privately-owned hotels. It is said that the servants are not paid at all, tips constituting their entire wages. It has even been whispered that, in the worst cases, the servants pay for the privilege of serving; so that a part of the guest's tips go into the host's pocket. No doubt these are but idle rumors. But the fact that they circulate briskly is yet another proof that all right-thinking persons should endeavor to extirpate the existing system of extravagant tipping. Perhaps the best method of securing a reform is to forbid individual servants to receive tips on pain of dismissal, and to have all presents paid into a general fund, which is periodically distributed in the proper proportions. Country-house parties of the modern type add greatly to the work of servants, who are certainly entitled to presents as long as they are not exacted. The plan suggested has in one case proved quite successful.

Editorially, the Times said:

We publish this morning the complaint of a correspondent whose experience, we fear, can be paralleled by that of the great majority of readers, and who laments the prevailing practice of tipping, or perhaps only its abuse, in terms which might almost move Sir Edward Fry to take up the cudgels against so crying an evil and endeavor to deal with it as he has dealt with the receiving of illicit commissions. All who are acquainted with the history of the eighteenth century are aware that complaints of the same kind were quite familiar to our great-great-grandfathers, and that in their days the cost to a struggling poet or artist of dining with a noble patron was often so great as to be prohibitory. As the guest passed through the hall on his departure he was waylaid by an army of footmen, each of whom presented him with some small part of his belongings, his hat, his cane, or his cloak, and each of whom expected to be paid at least a guinea for his services. Every one knows the story of the guest who, in such circumstances, declined to receive his gloves, declaring that they were not worth a guinea; and it may fairly be presumed that the very extent to which the practice then customary became a nuisance must have paved the way to a considerable measure of reform, which in the present day, apparently, needs to be repeated. Our correspondent tells us, no doubt correctly, that it is only of late years that the expectations of servants and other recipients of tips have reached their present pitch of extravagance; and it seems clear that these expectations, like the influence of the crown in bygone days, "have increased, are increasing, and ought to be diminished."

We have no quarrel with the principle involved in some moderate recognition of services rendered to guests or to passengers; although there are hosts who strictly forbid their servants to receive gifts from the former, and certain railway companies have at least ostensibly, endeavored to pursue a similar course with regard to the latter. We doubt, however, whether it is of any avail to strive against an almost universal instinct, and whether it should not be sufficient to restrain within reasonable bounds a practice which, except as a result of a very considerable change in human nature, is never likely to be entirely abolished. The guest or the railway passenger feels, as a rule, that he establishes a quasi-friendly relation with the recipient of a tip, and that he may reasonably expect a somewhat less perfunctory degree of service than might otherwise fall to his lot. For this advantage he is usually willing to pay, provided that the cost be not beyond his means and that the hopes of the recipient are not so unduly exalted as to render a gift which is deemed insufficient an excuse for rudeness or neglect.

Some Problems of India

REVIEWING the two new books, "India Problems," by S. M. Mitra, and "India and The Empire," by M. de P. Webb, C. I. E., the London Times says:

Although there is a great outpouring of books and articles about India, the public at home have far too few opportunities of learning what the people of India think of current questions affecting themselves. They have the loud denunciation of apostles of discontent, but they do not come into contact with the thoughts of those intelligent, moderate-minded men who still represent a very large proportion of the educated classes of India. Such a book as Mr. Mitra's is therefore specially welcome. As scholar, lawyer, and journalist he has touched Indian life at many points. As a British Indian long resident in native States he is able to compare British and native rule with peculiar insight. As a Bengali he can speak with authority concerning the provinces where unrest is chiefly rife. He writes with terse vigor and directness, and his literary manner is quite devoid of that wordy incoherence into which too many of his countrymen often lapse. His book is a useful and candid contribution to the discussion of many of the perplexing issues which engross the attention of Indian administrators. He deals in turn with the present troubles, the drink traffic, the partition of Bengal, India's attitude towards Imperial preference, famines, industrial development, the Congress, the native States, and other topics, always with knowledge, sometimes with unusual erudition, and occasionally with a freshness of view that arrests attention. Sir George Birdwood, who has written an interesting introduction to the book, calls Mr. Mitra's pages "earnestly labored, accurate, illuminating, and weighty," praise which is not too high even from such an authority.

In his references to existing controversies, Mr. Mitra pointedly says that to the people of India it will make no sort of difference whether financial control is finally exercised by the Supreme or the Local governments. Decentralization will only interest them according to the degree in which it really brings the executive power into touch with local conditions. There is much force in this remark, for native opinion appears to hold that the recent commission paid too little attention to popular aspirations. We cannot approve of Mr. Mitra's handling of the question of assaults by Englishmen on natives. It is likely to convey to uninformed minds a vague impression that most Englishmen in India are in the habit of striking natives, whereas we believe it would be found that the percentage of Englishmen who have ever struck a single native in the whole of their residence is very small indeed. Mr. Mitra says that "dozens of natives of India have in past times been most brutally kicked to death by Englishmen in India." What does he mean by "past times?" Does he include the long centuries that have elapsed since Fitch and Newberry landed at Goa? Such a statement should not have been made without very specific qualification. His treatment of the O'Hara case at Calcutta in 1850 is also unsatisfactory. O'Hara was presumably acquitted at the second trial because the law was in his favor, and not, as Mr. Mitra suggests, because two eminent counsel appeared for him; and as a lawyer, the author ought to have remembered that, though juries can convict a man, they cannot "sentence him to death." Mr. Mitra, however, plainly meant to be fair, for he renders useful service by contradicting the popular delusion that no Englishman has ever been hanged for killing a native. He quotes six cases where the death penalty was exacted.

One of Mr. Mitra's interesting suggestions is that at least five Indian princes—two Hindu, two Mahomedan, and one Sikh—might be made "honorary members" of the House of Lords. Apart from constitutional difficulties, however, the idea is open to Mr. Mitra's own objection, advanced in another connexion, that "to the people of India it will make no sort of difference." He deplores the fact that in the Indian Army there is no Alibhanoff, a regret which it is less difficult to share. More practical than either of these suggestions is his plea that the Native Army should be eligible for the Victoria Cross. There is reason to believe that the disability of native officers and soldiers in this respect is keenly felt. Mr. Mitra is opposed to the proposal frequently advanced that the Viceroy should be a Royal Prince, and urges that the Royal Family "can hardly descend into the arena of politics." No doubt a Royal personage could not very well hold the Viceroyalty, under present conditions, and possibly there are objections which would prove insuperable; but Mr. Mitra omits to note how amazingly popular the idea is among Indians. Incidentally he recognizes that Lord Curzon "did a great deal to conciliate the native millions." The remark connotes an aspect of an eventful Viceroyalty which has been unjustly obscured, though no doubt history will discover it beneath the debris of controversy. Mr. Mitra is a vigorous defender of the partition of Bengal, and marshals a large array of facts in support of his views. The partition, he holds, "does not make the Bengali a farthing the worse, in pecuniary reputation, or pocket." He reminds us that the Mahrattas are separated among two or three provinces, and are not conscious of any disadvantage; and he points out, what is too often forgotten, that the Bengali language, of which we hear so much, owed its first grammar to British efforts. He examines at length the demand for the separation of judicial and executive functions, which the government of India is now tentatively trying to make.

As to Imperial preference, Mr. Mitra is not attracted by the Chamberlain programme. He thinks India is unfairly treated as it is. The British duty on Indian coal is 13 per cent. ad valorem, and on tea it is equivalent to 30 per cent., while the duty on tobacco, being imposed according to weight, operates severely against the cheap Indian product. If England would impose a reasonable duty on synthetic indigo as a chemical compound, while admitting natural indigo free as a raw material, she would enormously benefit a languishing industry. As it is, he fears the British fiscal system, instead of being altered to benefit India, will be altered in a way which will injure India, with her three hundred millions of people, while conferring benefits on eleven million people in the Colonies. We need not enter into his arguments, which by this time are tolerably familiar, but we believe that, rightly or wrongly, his views embody the present attitude of the majority of educated Indians towards the fiscal question.