

China in Process of Transformation.

By Everard Cotes in the Toronto Globe.

Pekin, Sept. 15.—The journey by rail to Peking from Hankow, in middle China, is easy, a train de luxe running once a week. I found my way to the gusty Hankow railway station in a creaking jirikshaw, in the dark, and was received by a civil French-speaking Chinese station master. My fellow passengers included Germans, Frenchmen, Chinese, Japanese and British. We were stowed quickly into comfortable berths, and moved smoothly off to an accompaniment of loud banzais from Japanese who were upon the platform with their women-folk to say good-bye to a compatriot.

Chinese newspapers at the moment were reporting gravely the existence of a rebellion in the province of Honan, through which we were to pass. One of them went so far as to allege that four hundred people had been killed, but we knew nothing of the story at the time, and I am afraid I cannot describe our journey as even adventurous. We found out afterwards that such disturbance as had occurred had been put down some weeks before by some of the Nanking Vice-roy's troops. The published report was both exaggerated and belated.

NOT LIKE SOUTH AMERICA.
A rebellion in China, as a rule, is a comparatively harmless affair. The people inform the Governor that his exactions are in excess of custom and that he must reduce them. If he agrees the matter ends. If not, there is a demonstration, and perhaps some shooting, but this is only preliminary to a compromise, for the Peking government never backs up its officials when force has to be resorted to, and the people have far too much respect for authority to push any successes to extremes. The troops boast of the numbers of the enemy they have killed, but the fighting does not often amount to very much. A typical story is told of the taking of a city which shall be nameless, who claimed to have put down a rebellion, but explained, when pressed for particulars, that it had not been necessary to fight, since, by happy inspiration, he had taken out a tiger skin, which so frightened the insurgents that they had all run away.

IN THE YANGTSE VALLEY.
The train ran during the night northwards from Hankow through the flat valley of the Yangtse River. Wooded hills came down on either side of us at dawn, when we crossed the watershed into the Yellow River basin. All the rest of the five hundred miles to Peking, we were through level country. The only big natural obstacle was the Yellow river. The line runs right across the middle of China. It has been built by a company of enterprising Belgians, of whom so many hard things have been said that I feel almost apologetic in having failed to recognize any iniquities. If the engineering work cost more than the projectors expected, and if it be not as solid as on some other railways, I can only say that the train travelled remarkably steady and fast, that the food in the restaurant car was good, the sheets in the wagon-deli clean, the officials invariably civil and the fare demanded of me reasonable. If the undertaking, be as has been alleged, an integral part of a Russo-French scheme to rule an iron line across China from Tonkin to Siberia, and to squeeze Englishmen out of the country, I must admit that I have found it a convenient link between the British ship I landed from at Hankow and the British bank which cashed my note of credit in Peking.

A LINE THAT COUNTS.
There is, of course, no getting over the importance of the line. For patriotic reasons I sympathize with the wish that my own fellow countrymen had had the building of it. I admire the more the enterprise of the men who secured the undertaking. The robber in me availed with covetousness as the richness of the country through which we travelled unfolded itself. I found myself asking again and again. What could not Indian civilians have made of such a country, and its millions of industrious, peace-loving, law-abiding inhabitants?

For six hundred miles, from Shanghai to Hankow, as I sailed up the Yangtse river, crops had stretched as far as my eyes could carry on either bank. Now, carefully tilled fields after field, bearing promise of heavy harvest, extended for five hundred

miles at right angles to my former route. I was tracing out the bounds of a plot of thirty thousand square miles of rich agricultural land, heavily populated and industriously cultivated throughout. I had shivered often in my warmest clothes in icy blasts upon the Yangtse, though mile upon mile of rice field embankment reminded me that the country was too near to the tropics to be fit, in the summer, for white men's homes. As the railway carried me north I passed into the temperate zone. The rice gave place to wheat. Peasants at the wayside, railway stations were in coats of thick blue padded bed-quilt with long months of wear inscribed upon whitening seams. The houses grew substantial.

TO KEEP OUT EVIL SPIRITS.
A winged stone screen in blue brick frame balanced in front of every door to keep out bad spirits, for hobgoblins, as every child in China knows, cannot get round a corner. Masses of pendulous purple tree wisteria flower and white pear blossom told of spring returning to a northern land. It was the last week in April, yet real of the sun could strike me, and where the bitter, dusty wind that some of warmth made me seek out a car step in an angle where the full heat of the willow shoots on the embankment were swinging away suddenly by an unexpected siding.

At breakfast the Belgian conductor reported that we were approaching the Yellow river bridge, so we were all upon the lookout for the embankments that the school primers talk about as protecting the country from flood. We thought, at length, that we had discovered what we were looking for in the distance upon the left. It was a hundred feet high, and bore scrub jungle, joss houses and dwellings upon it. It was only too big and too much like a natural line of hills to satisfy our expectations. Then it stopped off unaccountably on the right of the track, where the country stretched away indefinitely upon precisely the same level as ourselves. Doubts about the school primer's information began to arise in our minds, and were confirmed when a gleam of water flashed out of a yellow desert of sand at the point where what we had imagined to be the embankment left off. The train stopped at the foot of the hill. A short tunnel through an outlying spur was in front. On the left was a wide, flat-bottomed gully, which ran into the range longitudinally, and afforded a vista of irregular masses of brown, bare, piled-up loam covered with slim black frameworks of bushy trees. The branches were thickening with budding leaves, too small as yet to throw any softening shadow upon the glaring dust.

NOT LIKE THE BOOKS.
On the right a black giant mille-pede strode on long, thin legs into the distance across a waste of sand and water. The bridge was there indeed. The spur through which the railway tunneled alone concealed its head. There was no embankment. The line where the green crops ended and the yellow parterre of sand and water began stretched away to the horizon without break in level. There was nothing visible to prevent the peasant streams from extending when in flood over the cultivation to any extent. An illusion was destroyed which the hills on the left could not restore, however like embankments they might seem. It is possible that the Yellow river may live elsewhere upon its long course up to the traditions of a stream embanked upon either side until it is high above the surrounding country. It does nothing of the kind, so far as I could see at the point where the Belgian railway crosses it.

There was barely time to take a photograph of the gorge before the train plunged into the tunnel through the spur and the roar of reverberating steel girders announced that we were upon the bridge. Behind us, lining the channel upon the left, was

now the range of hills which ended abruptly at the railway. The river-bed beyond shrank indefinitely into a wide expanse of girders stretched out over what seemed to be some miles of a desert, streaked with winding peasant streams.

LIFE ALONG THE RIVER.
Cautiously we rumbled forward and looked down through open frameworks far below upon alternating dusty stretches and rushing water. In places the streams were grubbing, like a terrier after a rat, at the base of the perilously slender columns which supported the track. One wondered how much of the foundations had been undermined since the last preceding train had crossed. Some of the dusty stretches were dotted with hundreds of blue human ants toiling to build up at the more seriously threatened points breastworks of sand, which the water may or may not respect when it rises. Down-stream a hundred junks floated placidly upon an expansion of the river, their sails gleaming away-like in the strong midday light.

The prolonged rumble of unstable girders gave place at length to the substantial hum of metal permanent way. We had reached the farther bank, and the train took heart and quickened its pace. We sped through flat, low-lying country across a slimy embankment a few feet high, which gives the river bed on the northern shore some slight hint as to the course intended for it, a hint which appears to be omitted altogether beyond the hills on the southern bank.

Miserable huts, where once were thriving villages, reminded us that the population, over thousands of fertile square miles, have not yet recovered from the floods in which millions of human beings perished barely a generation ago. The river still flows in the channel which it carved in summer fury, when it changed its course from the south to the north of the Shantung Peninsula and adopted the Pechili Gulf in place of the Yellow Sea, for its outfall. It is an obstacle which must always cause much

anxiety to the railway.

SCENES BY THE WAY.

At almost every station where the train stopped we found a crowd of blue-coated Chinese countrymen prepared to take intelligent interest in our affairs. Of local traffic there was little, for few but foreigners travel by express in China, the man of the country preferring cheaper means of conveyance. The people had marched in sometimes long distances to look at us. In only rare instances did they either beg or endeavor to dispose of inferior Chinese bronzes or more pretentious curios left upon their hands by unscrupulous dealers from Birmingham. At every stopping place was a soldier in black coat and red herringbone, carrying an 1888 pattern Mauser rifle from the HanYang arsenal, and proud to show us how smartly he could come to attention at the word of command. There was no ammunition in his pouch, but we felt we were being taken care of by the anxious Chinese government, which is always somewhere in the background to watch over the safety of their troublesome stranger. At a surprisingly large number of apparently insignificant halting places we were received by a comfortable Belgian station master.

A BRITISH ENTERPRISE.

A pair of steel rails glistening on a stone-ballasted side track which braced away upon the left reminded us that a British company, calling itself the Peking Mining Syndicate, is developing a coal field in the middle of northwestern China, and some day will supply mineral of good quality to both Peking and Hankow.

Eruptions of rough earth amongst smooth green crops, with a cypress tree or two alongside and a substantial stone table in front, where ancestors' guests can sit conveniently to read inscriptions engraved by pious descendants upon expensive stone pillars, became more and more frequent features of the landscape as the second morning wore on. Pre-

sently we entered a region which was little else than a vast graveyard. The horizon bristled with sharp-pointed earth heaps, each representing a tomb. Although the Chinese place the coffin merely upon the open ground and heap up earth on top of it without any attempt at sinking it below the surface, not a single neglected mound or protruding board was visible. The heaps were in groups, each representing a family. Behind every one was a sheltering mound to keep evil spirits away and preserve the fashui (good luck) of the locality. These mounds are generally upon the north. It is on them that good spirits rest, with one elbow upon the tiger and the other on the dragon that guard the resting places of the dead. The graves are in the fields and cultivation goes on around them. Well-fed ox and corpulent donkey yoked as a pair, draw a substantial cart past the train. Blue poke bonnets on wheels with five mules between the strings, potter along the highways. They are the famous Peking carts that even a Chinese country quagmire does not appal. Houses grow frequent. Fruit trees, with masses of pink blossoms, are on every side. We pass through a stone archway in an ancient wall. Grey, weather-worn battlements and keeps tower upon the left. We are in the middle of an enormous Chinese city. It is Peking.



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