

**Yates Stirling**



*A United States  
Midshipman  
in China*

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[goodpress@okpublishing.info](mailto:goodpress@okpublishing.info)

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# Introduction

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THOSE who have read “A United States Midshipman Afloat” will recall that Philip Perry and his friend, Sydney Monroe, recent graduates of the Naval Academy at Annapolis, had been but a short time in the regular naval service when the battle-ship “Connecticut,” to which they had been assigned, was ordered to a South American port. Here they found a revolution in progress, and it became the duty of the young men to prevent the delivery of certain machine guns and other war material which had been shipped from America to the insurgents. In this they were successful after some stirring adventure on land and sea.

The present book shows the same young officers on a United States gunboat in the Yangtse River at a time when the lives of foreigners in China are in peril. A further account of their experiences in Eastern waters will be found in “A United States Midshipman in the Philippines.” In all of these books the endeavor has been to portray some of the bold enterprises which are all in the day’s work for a naval officer, and to show how our modern navy accomplishes big things in a quiet way.



# Illustrations

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A United States  
Midshipman in China

# CHAPTER I

## AN INCIDENT OF THE RIVER

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THE United States gunboat "Phoenix" lay at anchor in the swift current of the Yangtse River opposite the Chinese city of Ku-Ling. The surface of the water seemed tranquil, but a closer look over the side of the ship showed to the observer the strength of the muddy flood that swept for thousands of miles through the length of the Chinese Empire, from the far-away snows of the mountains of Tibet onward to the waters of the Pacific Ocean.

Two young midshipmen were standing at the gunboat's rail in eager conversation. Their eyes were intent upon the scenes on the shore scarce a hundred yards away.

"Oh, there's Langdon!" exclaimed Philip Perry, the taller of the two lads, as the form of the government pilot, Joseph Langdon, was seen coming from the ward-room companion ladder. "Langdon, have you ever seen this much talked about Chang-Li-Hun?"

"Seen him?" Langdon echoed, approaching the speaker. "I've talked with him many a time, and you can take my word for it, there isn't a man in all China whom I wouldn't sooner have for my enemy. He's a past craftsman in oriental subtlety and diplomacy. He rules his own people with a rod of iron, and if an official displeases him, off goes his head in the most approved Chinese fashion."

Both midshipmen suppressed an unconscious shiver as the American pilot of the Yangtse River illustrated the death



of the disgraced official by chopping at his own thick neck with a great sun-tanned, muscular hand.

“Everything looks peaceful enough ashore there now, doesn’t it?” Sydney Monroe, Phil’s friend and classmate, said in a tone of inquiry. “It doesn’t seem as if the foreigners were much in fear of the dangers of Chinese violence. Look!” he exclaimed; “there are European women and even children walking along the streets.”

“That’s the danger in China,” Langdon returned in a troubled voice. “Living in this country is like being on top of a presumably extinct volcano. No one knows when it will break out. Sometimes it comes without the usual rumblings.”

“There must have been some rumblings,” Philip Perry exclaimed, pointing suggestively at the half score of foreign gunboats representing all the European navies.

“Yes,” Langdon answered, “there have been many signs which have greatly alarmed those who have made a study of the Chinese situation. This viceroy has within the last few weeks allowed many insults by his people to foreigners to go unpunished, and will not listen to the appeals of the foreign consuls. The missionaries all over the provinces are in fear of some terrible calamity, and it is through their urgent demands that these war-ships are here.”

“What do the foreigners fear?” Sydney asked, interestedly.

“Fear!” Langdon exclaimed. “Why, almost every kind of torture and death. When once the Chinese are allowed to avenge themselves upon the foreigner there’s no limit to their cruelty.”

“Why can’t we appeal to the Chinese government at Peking to protect foreigners?” Phil asked gravely. “Haven’t we a treaty with China for protection of United States citizens here?”

Langdon gave the lad a withering look, as he replied:

“This viceroy is not letting Peking know what is happening in his provinces. If he succeeds in making the country over which he rules dangerous and unprofitable to foreigners without doing more than kill a few missionaries and ruining foreign trade, Peking will apologize for the deaths and pay an indemnity to the families of those killed and then to sustain him in the eyes of his people decorate him with the Order of the Dragon. But if he goes too far, then Peking, in order to save herself from an invasion of foreign soldiers, will disgrace the viceroy in one of the many ways known best to the Chinese.”

“Here comes the captain now,” Sydney exclaimed as a small white canopied steam launch shoved off from the jetty and stood toward the “Phoenix.”

All three walked toward the gangway to meet Commander Hughes, the captain of the gunboat, who had been ashore to visit his consul and gather the latest news of the much feared uprising among the fanatical natives.

“Well, Webster,” Commander Hughes exclaimed in hearty tones to the executive officer, as he put his foot on the quarter-deck, returning in a precise manner the salutes of the officers standing near. “Keep your guard for the mission ready to land at a moment’s notice. I saw that half-breed Emmons, the oracle of the river. He is non-committal, but I can see he fears trouble. He promised to warn me in

plenty of time. Emmons says that the Tartar general, commanding all the soldiers under the viceroy, is not in sympathy with this movement, and if he can urge the viceroy to take steps to suppress it, our presence here may yet be unnecessary.”

After the captain had entered his cabin the two midshipmen turned eagerly upon the pilot.

“Who is this half-breed Emmons the captain speaks of?” Phil demanded.

“Do you see all those launches over there?” the pilot inquired, pointing to the near-by docks where many small vessels were unloading.

“Well, they belong to Emmons,” he added, “and he’s very rich. His mother was a native woman and his father an American merchant skipper. Emmons wears Chinese clothes and to meet him on the street you’d take him for a native. We’re lucky to have Emmons with us, but if the viceroy suspects that he is, he’d enjoy nothing better than to confiscate his property and expel him from the provinces, even if he doesn’t have him executed.”

“Where’s this mission?” Sydney asked gazing searchingly out over the green sloped hills of the country.

Langdon held a pointing finger steadily out to the right of the walled Chinese city.

“About five miles from here,” he said. “It’s built in the middle of an ancient Chinese graveyard and is a thorn in the side of the Chinese. It was erected three years ago, and by order of this same viceroy. No other site could be used. He knew that the Chinese would never rest until they tore the building down. It took nearly two years to build; all the work

was done by Christian converts. I don't blame the captain for feeling uneasy, for in my opinion that mission will be the first point of attack."

Phil and Sydney were soon after below in their rooms finishing their unpacking; for they had but recently arrived on the station and had joined the gunboat just previous to her leaving Shanghai on her four-hundred mile cruise up the great Chinese river. So interested were they during the day, viewing the shifting scenery, and at night so much of their time had been occupied in standing watch on the gunboat's bridge, that they had quite forgotten their trunks as yet unpacked in the ward-room passages.

After dinner that evening, while the midshipmen were enjoying the bracing fall air on the quarter-deck, Phil was suddenly summoned to report immediately to the captain.

Receiving Commander Hughes' instructions to take the steam launch and board each of the foreign gunboats, the midshipman left the cabin to carry out his orders, much elated at the exalted rôle he was playing in the affairs of nations. About an hour later, having visited each of the foreign gunboats and given to their commanding officers his captain's letters, the launch breasted the swift current of the river on her return to the ship. The coxswain of the launch was steering his boat close to the hulls of the junks moored to the jetty, in order to avoid the strength of the current. The river was silent; no sound could be heard save the whir of the tiny engine and the rush of the tide against the sides of the launch.

As the boat passed within the shadow of a high-sided junk, such as are used by the wealthy Chinese as house-

boats, a piercing cry rang out over the quiet water from her deck, directly above Phil's head; then he heard the sound of a scuffle, followed by the splash of a heavy body in the dark waters astern of the launch. The lad was on his feet in an instant; throwing off his coat, he sprang out on the launch's rail, ready to go to the assistance of the unfortunate one who had been swallowed up in the treacherous waters. The coxswain had by signal stopped the headway of the launch and all eyes were searching the waters astern: the ripples that closed over the body were visible, while some yards down stream an object floated, all but submerged, rapidly borne away by the hurrying flood.

The lad stood irresolute for the fraction of a second, fear of the treacherous flood tugging at his heart; then overcoming this momentary weakness, he turned to the coxswain beside him:

"Go down to leeward and pick me up," he ordered, gathering himself together and springing far out into the dark river.

As he struck out boldly sinister stories of the enchanted water surged back to him. He had heard how the suction from the muddy bottom was known to drag to their death even the strongest swimmers: men who had missed their footing while stepping into boats alongside their own ships had disappeared beneath the yellow surface never to rise again. The Chinese superstition was that a dragon lived in the river and that all persons who fell into his home were drawn to the bottom and devoured by the monster.

Phil struggled manfully against these weird fancies, yet he was conscious of the force acting to suck his body down

while he exerted all his strength to keep his head above the engulfing waters. The high-sided junks flashed by him as he swam with the current toward the victim struggling despairingly in the embrace of the river dragon. In a few moments his strong strokes had brought him alongside the drowning man. He grasped the man's clothing and drew him closer, seeking a firmer hold. Avoiding the waving arms, Phil's hand worked its way along the body until it reached his head, and there his fingers closed about the long braided cue; twisting this around his hand, the lad swam out toward the middle of the river. The Chinaman struggled violently, striving to grasp Phil's hand. The boy saw with terror that if the Chinaman succeeded they would both drown.

"Be still or I'll let you go!" he commanded, forgetting in his anxiety that he was talking to a Chinaman, but nevertheless the man quieted down and Phil's hopes rose.

With the stinging water in his eyes, he gazed about him for the launch; he could scarcely see; the oppressive darkness seemed to be closing in about him. Then out of the night there loomed the sides of many junks, massed in tiers, directly in the path of the current carrying him. This new and terrible danger filled him with despair: even the strongest swimmer could not expect to survive if he were drawn under that wooden wall of vessels; if he were not crushed between their huge hulls he would be forced beneath the surface for so long a time that life would be extinct before he rose again. His one chance was to breast the tide, swimming out from shore in the hope that thus he might clear the outside junk.



The hulls seemed ever closer and the lad's efforts weaker. The Chinaman was a dead weight upon him; if he abandoned the man he could save himself. Would it not be just? He could not hope to save both himself and the Chinaman, therefore, was he not obeying the first law of nature by abandoning the unfortunate man to his fate? But Phil, even with death staring him in the face, dismissed these unnerving thoughts from his mind. He would save the man or drown in the attempt! As he swam manfully ahead, supporting the fully conscious but terrified Chinaman, and casting anxious glances behind him at the fast approaching menace, his heart was gladdened at the sight of the launch standing in boldly between him and the junks, now but a few dozen yards away. Then he saw the boat turn slowly, painfully, toward him in the grasp of the cruel, relentless current which seemed to sweep her down under the yawning whirlpool. He closed his eyes to shut out the sight. If the launch failed to turn inside the distance she would be swept under the mass of shipping and be capsized; then the brave men who had fearlessly taken this risk to save him would all find a watery grave in the river.

“She can't make it!” he gasped despairingly.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **AN UNPLEASANT ENCOUNTER**

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PHIL had ceased to struggle; his doom was too close upon him to hope to escape it. His one chance was the launch. A low cry of joy burst from him as he saw her turn safely under the overhanging bows of the junks and steam swiftly toward him. Yet he knew that all danger had not passed; the current was still sweeping him down while the boat must keep her headway else she would be carried back under the shipping. The launch loomed above him; he saw her anxious crew gathered in the bow ready to grasp the struggling men as they were swept by on the crest of the flood.

He was conscious of strong arms about him, and the next moment he and the rescued Chinaman were safely on board the launch, while she was steaming at full speed for safety away from the treacherous shore.

After the rescued Chinaman had been resuscitated, and Phil had recovered from his terrible exertions, he ordered the coxswain to land at the foreign concession. The Chinaman lay on the deck of the launch, fully alive but not showing by word or sign his gratitude to the midshipman who had saved his life at the risk of his own.

As the boat stopped at the stone steps of the jetty, the Chinaman arose unsteadily to his feet, grasping the boy's hand in both of his, then without a word stepped quickly out of the launch and was lost in the night.

Phil was so astonished at the man's action that it was some moments before he realized that a ring had been left

in his hand. He examined it eagerly in the dim light of an oil lantern; what was his surprise to find that it was of massive carved gold, set with a green jade stone.

As the launch was secured alongside of the "Phoenix's" gangway, Phil stepped to the coxswain's side and took the sailor's rough hand in his own, much to the embarrassment of the latter.

"Blake," the lad said earnestly, "you saved my life, and you did it as coolly as if you had been only making a landing alongside the ship."

"It was nothing, sir," the coxswain answered quickly, his face beaming; "but to think of your jumping into this river to save a Chink," he added admiringly.

"My act was upon impulse," Phil declared earnestly, "and took no real nerve, while you deliberately measured your chances and saw that the odds were dead against you; one slip, one spoke too little helm, one revolution too few with the engines, and you and your crew would have been swept underneath that mass of junks, and knowing this you took the chance and had the nerve and grit to steer your boat cleverly to safety and me with her. My act is insignificant beside yours."

Leaving the coxswain still wondering at his words of praise, Phil reported his return and went at once to his room for dry clothes. Although the hour was early, and there were many things over which he would have liked to talk with Sydney and their new friend Langdon, when once in dry, warm clothes he found his exertions of the past hour had sapped his strength, and he was soon fast asleep. Nor did

he awake until the sun was streaming in through his port-hole.

Turning out promptly, and making a hasty toilet, he was soon in the mess-room, where he found the full mess at breakfast, and all discussing the seriousness of the present crisis.

As he put his hands on the table the brightness of the ring the Chinaman had given him startled him; the deep green of the stone stood out clearly against the white tablecloth. Langdon, sitting beside him, espied it immediately and grasped the boy's hand, examining the ring closely.

"Royal jade!" the pilot exclaimed. "Where did you get it? That's one of the finest stones I've seen in years."

Phil felt abashed, not wishing to relate his experience before the mess.

"I'll tell you later," he whispered, withdrawing his hand before the attention of the rest of the mess could be attracted. Then turning to the executive officer, presiding at the head of the mess-table, he asked anxiously:

"Is there any news, sir, about sending the guard to the legation? If it is going I should like to be allowed to go in the detail."

Sydney hastened to add his plea to go along also, and Mr. Webster's face broadened in an amused smile as he watched the eager faces of the midshipmen.

"I can tell you," he replied heartily, "that you are both in the detail, so you may rest easy. I for one hope there will be no necessity for the expedition. China is a dangerous country when once aroused." Then, turning to Phil, whose

joy showed plainly in his face, while his pulses beat faster, he added:

“What’s this we hear about your rescuing a Chinaman from drowning last night? It’s all about the ship forward, yet aft here we’re the last to hear of it.”

Phil colored painfully while he outlined the episode of the river; he said but little of his part, but praised unstintingly the coolness and courage of the coxswain of the launch.

“Coxswain Blake belittles his own part as much as you praise it,” Mr. Webster remarked kindly, as the officers rose from the breakfast table.

In Phil’s room after breakfast, Langdon examined the ring closely in hopes of discovering a clue to the identity of the owner.

“There’s nothing here to tell,” the pilot announced after careful scrutiny, handing the ring back to the midshipman; “it’s of great value among the Chinese; undoubtedly the man was rich and he left with you the only article of value he was then wearing. The Chinese are a queer lot; their superstitions will not allow them to save a fellow-being from drowning, but when they themselves are saved by a foreigner they will at once put aside the obligation by giving their rescuer a costly gift. Your Chinaman doubtless considers his debt is paid.”

After breakfast was over the midshipmen asked and received permission to visit the foreign concession.

“You must go in uniform,” Lieutenant Webster replied to their request, “and the captain’s positive orders are not to enter the Chinese city.”

The lads quickly agreed to keep to this rule, and a half hour later the "Phoenix's" steam launch landed them on the stone jetty abreast the ship.

Here they were immediately surrounded by a score of Chinese ricksha coolies, each one anxious to enlist their patronage in engaging a jinricksha, which is the customary conveyance of the far Eastern countries. The lads were soon seated each in one of these miniature carriages; and the coolies in the shafts darted off at a lively pace down the smooth macadamized roadbed of the Bund.

"Where shall we go first?" Sydney questioned, raising his voice so as to be heard above the rattle of the wheels.

Phil shook his head in sign of perfect indifference. The sensation of riding in one of these novel carriages for the first time was distinctly pleasant. He felt half exhilarated and half ridiculous. However, before they had traveled a block, he lost his feeling that every one was looking at him, a grown man riding in a baby carriage, and began to thoroughly enjoy the situation. The throngs on the streets interested him, and the color scheme pleased his eye; the gayly dressed natives sprinkled here and there with the more sombre garb of the Europeans or Americans.

"I don't care," he answered as Sydney repeated his question. "Let them take us wherever they will. Later, though, I want to go to the bank and buy a draft to send home.

"Here we are," he added suddenly, making energetic efforts to stop his own ricksha in its mad career, as he espied the sign on a great stone building: "Hongkong Bank."



The lads alighting, bidding by sign their rickshas to wait, entered the wide doorway of the bank.

Here they met scores of Chinamen pouring continually in and out, depositing or drawing out great sacks of Mexican dollars, the token currency of China. Behind the counters, although the bank was owned by an English corporation, Phil saw only Chinese. Millions of dollars daily passed through their hands.

Leaving Sydney gazing interestedly at the scenes of activity, Phil moved over to a desk upon which were paper and ink laid out for the bank customers. As he drew near, he took casual note of a foreigner standing with his back toward the door, engaged apparently in writing. At the man's feet he saw a neatly folded paper lying. Apparently it had just been dropped from the foreigner's pocket. Stooping down, Phil picked it up, hastily glancing over it to see if it was of sufficient consequence to ask the stranger if it were his. He had barely time to note that the writing was in English when it was roughly seized from his hand, and looking up in surprise, he found himself confronted by an angry, excited face, whose dark, piercing eyes snapped with uncontrolled passion. The stranger thrust the letter into his pocket with one hand, while the other was closely clenched as if he were about to strike down the innocent offender.

"What do you mean by trying to read my letter?" the foreigner cried in a voice full of wrath.

The blood mounted to Phil's forehead as he returned unflinchingly the stranger's wild look. He was about to answer an apology when the foreigner's cutting voice stayed him.

“Just like you officious Americans,” the stranger exclaimed, surveying the neat blue uniform of the American midshipman; “always meddling in some one else’s affairs.”

“What’s the trouble, Phil?” Sydney asked in alarm, hastening to his friend’s side, upon seeing the look on Phil’s face and the menacing attitude of the other.

By an effort Phil controlled himself. His first thought was then and there to settle accounts with this infuriated man; but wiser counsel prevailed.

“I did not read your letter,” he retorted in a dignified voice. “I wished only to see if it was of any consequence in order to restore it to its owner.” Then realizing that his conciliating answer had not changed the attitude of the stranger, he added in a voice of self-contained anger:

“If you got what you deserved, it would be a sound thrashing for your slanderous tongue.”

The foreigner, hearing the lad’s just rebuke, and seeing by his muscular frame that he was capable of carrying his implied threat into execution, shrugged his shoulders eloquently, pocketed his papers and walked sullenly toward the door of the bank.

Phil stood his ground, his eyes defiantly following the stranger until the swinging doors closed behind him.

Sydney was told of the cause of the unexpected dispute and was eager to follow the foreigner and demand an apology, but Phil only laughed.

“I got in the last word; that’s something,” he said, as he quietly wrote out his order for the draft. “I wonder who he is. By his accent I should say he was of a Latin race. He spoke to me in good English, though.”

“Do you suppose he is a naval officer from a foreign gunboat?” Sydney asked by way of an answer.

“No; he’s probably some beach-comber,” Phil answered testily, taking his paper to the cashier’s desk. “And as far as I am concerned I don’t care who he is. He’s not of sufficient importance to give him any more attention,” he added, shutting his firm jaws with a snap in dismissing the unpleasant incident.

“Come on,” he said. “Let’s forget him. There are lots of things here more amusing.”

# **CHAPTER III**

## **THE PERIL AT THE MISSION GATE**

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UPON their return on board the "Phoenix," the midshipmen found all was activity. A message had been received from Emmons which had decided Commander Hughes to wait no longer before sending the guard to protect the defenseless mission on the hill some miles from the town. Persistent rumors were current that the Chinese outlaws would very soon make an effort to efface this heathen blot of stone from their sacred soil.

In the course of a half hour all was in readiness to embark the guard. Tents, rations, Colt gun and rifles were carried into the waiting boats, and in a few minutes more the small party of officers and men found themselves on the stone jetty, immediately in front of the Chinese city. Under the eyes of a quickly-gathered, curious crowd of Chinese, the sailors formed and marched along the road skirting the fortified wall of the city. After some miles had been covered, the great buildings of the mission came in sight, and soon after they were admitted within the walled compound by the anxious missionaries, whose dread of Chinese cruelty had been acquired through long residence among these fanatical people. Many of their number they had seen sacrificed by the lawless element of a superstitious and conservative race, whom they had come thousands of miles to civilize according to their Western standards.

The sailor sentinels were quickly stationed at the four corners of the walled compound, and the peaceful mission

was soon transformed into a warlike fortress.

“What do you think of all this?” inquired Phil of the pilot after the lads had finished their duties of preparing for the defense.

“I think,” answered Langdon, a grim smile on his face, “that these missionaries are wise to build their houses inside of a stone fort. The only way to succeed in civilizing the Chinese is to make sure that they don’t kill you before you’ve had a chance to show them the benefits of our methods.”

“But I mean,” urged Phil, “do you believe that there’s going to be trouble?”

“I’ve seen a great number of these threatened uprisings,” replied Langdon thoughtfully, “come to nothing for the want of a leader with energy enough to keep alive the spark of fanaticism; I hope this one will follow in their footsteps, for if the Chinese ever awaken to the knowledge of their power, our small force of ships and men could never stem the rising flood.

“Do you see the forts over yonder?” he continued, pointing to the numerous heavy gun emplacements on the heights below the city; “those batteries command the anchorage occupied by the allied fleet, and their garrisons are now wavering between their loyalty to the government at Peking, and their families and friends taking an active part in the intrigues against the lives of the foreigners. If those guns were turned against us, our position here would indeed be a serious one.”

The two midshipmen, listening to the words of one who had lived ten years among the Chinese, felt their hearts