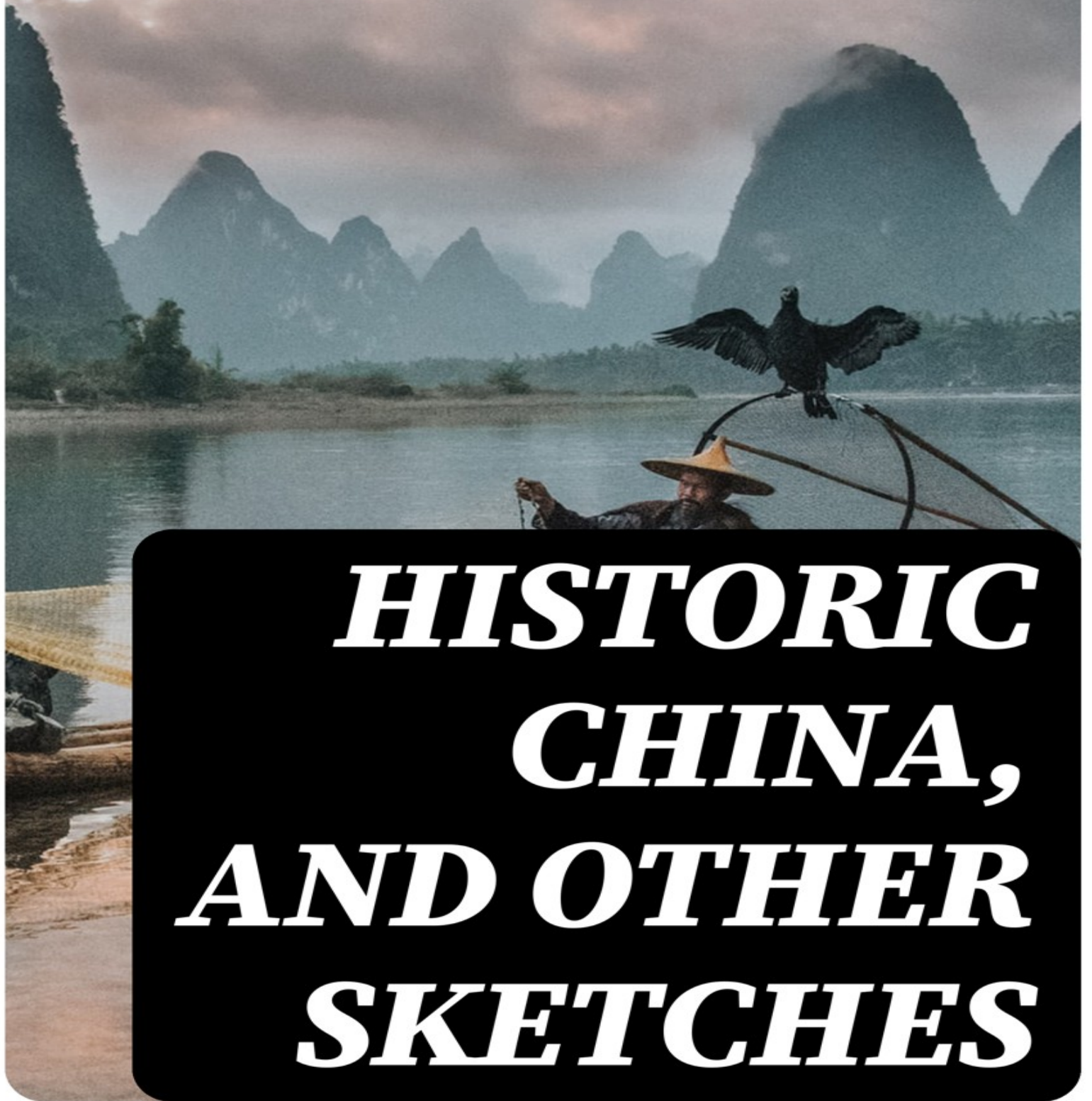


***HERBERT  
ALLEN GILES***



***HISTORIC  
CHINA,  
AND OTHER  
SKETCHES***

**Herbert Allen Giles**

# **Historic China, and Other Sketches**

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# To Warren William de la Rue, "As a mark of friendship."

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## PREFACE

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The following *Sketches* owe their existence chiefly to frequent peregrinations in Chinese cities, with pencil and note-book in hand. Some of them were written for my friend Mr. F. H. Balfour of Shanghai, and by him published in the columns of the *Celestial Empire*. These have been revised and partly re-written; others appear now for the first time.

It seems to be generally believed that the Chinese, as a nation, are an immoral, degraded race; that they are utterly dishonest, cruel, and in every way depraved; that opium, a more terrible scourge than gin, is now working frightful ravages in their midst; and that only the forcible diffusion of Christianity can save the Empire from speedy and overwhelming ruin. An experience of eight years has taught me that, with all their faults, the Chinese are a hardworking, sober, and happy people, occupying an intermediate place between the wealth and culture, the vice and misery of the West.

H. A. G.

Sutton, Surrey, 1st November 1875.

# CHINESE SKETCHES

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## THE DEATH OF AN EMPEROR

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His Imperial Majesty, Tsai-Shun, deputed by Heaven to reign over all within the four seas, expired on the evening of Tuesday the 13th January 1875, aged eighteen years and nine months. He was erroneously known to foreigners as the Emperor T'ung Chih; but T'ung Chih was merely the style of his reign, adopted in order that the people should not profane by vulgar utterance a name they are not even permitted to write.[\*] Until the new monarch, the late Emperor's cousin, had been duly installed, no word of what had taken place was breathed beyond the walls of the palace; for dangerous thoughts might have arisen had it been known that the State was drifting rudderless, a prey to the wild waves of sedition and lawless outbreak. The accession of a child to reign under the style of Kuang Hsu was proclaimed before it was publicly made known that his predecessor had passed away.

[\*] Either one or all of the characters composing an emperor's name are altered by the addition or omission of certain component parts; as if, for instance, we were to write an Albart chain merely because Albert is the name of the heir-apparent. Similarly, a child will never utter or write its father's name; and the names of Confucius and Mencius are forbidden to all alike.

Of the personal history of the ill-fated boy who has thus been prematurely cut off just as he was entering upon manhood and the actual government of four hundred million souls, we know next to nothing. His accession as an infant to the dignities of a sensual, dissipated father, attracted but little attention either in China or elsewhere; and from that date up to the year 1872, all we heard about His Majesty was, that he was making good progress in Manchu, or had hit the target three times out of ten shots at a distance of about twenty-five yards. He was taught to ride on horseback, though up to the day of his death he never took part in any great hunting expeditions, such as were frequently indulged in by earlier emperors of the present dynasty. He learnt to read and write Chinese, though what progress he had made in the study of the Classics was of course only known to his teachers. Painting may or may not have been an Imperial hobby; but it is quite certain that the drama received more perhaps than its full share of patronage. The ladies and eunuchs of the palace are notoriously fond of whiling away much of their monotonous existence in watching the grave antics of professional tragedians and laughing at the broad jokes of the low-comedy man, with his comic voice and funnily-painted face. Listening to the tunes prescribed by the Book of

Ceremonies, and dining in solemn solitary grandeur off the eight[\*] precious kinds of food set apart for the sovereign, his late Majesty passed his boyhood, until in 1872 he married the fair A-lu-te, and practically ascended the dragon throne of his ancestors. Up to that time the Empresses-Dowager, hidden behind a bamboo screen, had transacted business with the members of the Privy Council, signing all documents of State with the vermilion pencil for and on behalf of the young Emperor, but probably without even going through the formality of asking his assent. The marriage of the Emperor of China seemed to wake people up from their normal apathy, so that for a few months European eyes were actually directed towards the Flowery Land, and the *Illustrated London News*, with praiseworthy zeal, sent out a special correspondent, whose valuable contributions to that journal will be a record for ever. The ceremony, however, was hardly over before a bitter drop rose in the Imperial cup. Barbarians from beyond the sea came forward to claim the right of personal interview with the sovereign of all under Heaven. The story of the first audience is still fresh in our memories; the trivial difficulties introduced by obstructive statesmen at every stage of the proceedings, questions of etiquette and precedence raised at every turn, until finally the *kotow* was triumphantly rejected and five bows substituted in its stead. Every one saw the curt paragraph in the *Peking Gazette*, which notified that on such a day and at such an hour the foreign envoys had been admitted to an interview with the Emperor. We all laughed over the silly story so sedulously spread by the Chinese to every corner of the Empire, that our Minister's



knees had knocked together from terror when Phaeton-like he had obtained his dangerous request; that he fell down flat in the very presence, breaking all over into a profuse perspiration, and that the haughty prince who had acted as his conductor chid him for his want of course, bestowing upon him the contemptuous nickname of "chicken-feather."

[\*] These are—bears' paws, deers' tail, ducks' tongues, torpedos' roe, camels' humps, monkeys' lips, carps' tails, and beef-marrow.

Subsequently, in the spring of 1874, the late Emperor made his great pilgrimage to worship at the tombs of his ancestors. He had previous to his marriage performed this filial duty once, but the mausoleum containing his father's bones was not then completed, and the whole thing was conducted in a private, unostentatious manner. But on the last occasion great preparations were made and vast sums spent (on paper), that nothing might be wanting to render the spectacle as imposing as money could make it. Royalty was to be seen humbly performing the same hallowed rites which are demanded of every child, and which can under no circumstances be delegated to any other person as long as there is a son or a daughter living. The route along which His Majesty was to proceed was lined with closely-packed crowds of loyal subjects, eager to set eyes for once in their lives upon a being they are taught to regard as the incarnation of divinity; and when the Sacred Person really burst upon their view, the excitement was beyond description. Young and old, women and children, fell simultaneously upon their knees, and tears and sobs

mingled with the blessings showered upon His Majesty by thousands of his simple-minded, affectionate people.

The next epoch in the life of this youthful monarch occurred a few months ago. The Son of Heaven[\*] had not availed himself of western science to secure immunity from the most loathsome in the long category of diseases. He had not been vaccinated, in spite of the known prevalence of smallpox at Peking during the winter season. True, it is but a mild form of smallpox that is there common; but it is easy to imagine what a powerless victim was found in the person of a young prince enervated by perpetual cooping in the heart of a city, rarely permitted to leave the palace, and then only in a sedan-chair, called out of his bed at three o'clock every morning summer or winter, to transact business that must have had few charms for a boy, and possessed of no other means of amusement than such as he could derive from the society of his wife or concubines. Occasional bulletins announced that the disease was progressing favourably, and latterly it was signified that His Majesty was rapidly approaching a state of convalescence. His death, therefore, came both suddenly and unexpectedly; happily, at a time when China was unfettered by war or rebellion, and when all the energies of her statesmen could be employed in averting either one catastrophe or the other. For one hundred days the Court went into deep mourning, wearing capes of white fur with the hair outside over long white garments of various stuffs, lined also with white fur, but of a lighter kind than that of the capes. Mandarins of high rank use the skin of the white fox for the latter, but the ordinary official is content with the curly fleece of the snow-

white Mongolian sheep. For one hundred days no male in the Empire might have his head shaved, and women were supposed to eschew for the same period all those gaudy head ornaments of which they are so inordinately fond. At the expiration of this time the Court mourning was changed to black, which colour, or at any rate something sombre, will be worn till the close of the year.

[\*] Such terms as "Brother of the Sun and Moon" are altogether imaginary, and are quite unknown in China.

For twelve long months there may be no marrying or giving in marriage, that is among the official classes; the people are let off more easily, one hundred days being fixed upon as their limit. For a whole year it is illegal to renew the scrolls of red paper pasted on every door-post and inscribed with cherished maxims from the sacred books; except again for non-officials, whose penance is once more cut down to one hundred days' duration. In these sad times the birth of a son—a Chinaman's dearest wish on earth—elicits no congratulations from thronging friends; no red eggs are sent to the lucky parents, and no joyous feast is provided in return. Merrymaking of all kinds is forbidden to all classes for the full term of one year, and the familiar sound of the flute and the guitar is hushed in every household and in every street.[\*] The ordinary Chinese visiting-card—a piece of red paper about six inches by three, inscribed with its owner's name in large characters—changes to a dusky brown; and the very lines on letter paper, usually red, are printed of a dingy blue. Official seals are also universally stamped in blue instead of the vermilion or mauve otherwise used according to the rank of the holder. Red is

absolutely tabooed; it is the emblem of mirth and joy, and the colour of every Chinese maiden's wedding dress. It is an insult to write a letter to a friend or stranger on a piece of plain white paper with black ink. Etiquette requires that the columns should be divided by red lines; or, if not, that a tiny slip of red paper be pasted on in recognition of the form. For this reason it is that all stamps and seals in China are *red*—to enable tradesmen, officials, and others to use any kind of paper, whether it has already some red about it or not; and every foreigner in China would do well to exact on all occasions the same formalities from his employes as they would consider a matter of duty towards one of their own countrymen, however low he might be in the social scale.

[\*] Mencius. Book v., part ii., ch. 4.

Certain classes of the people will suffer from the observance of these ceremonies far more severely than others. The peasant may not have his head shaved for one hundred days—inconvenient, no doubt, for him, but mild as compared with the fate of thousands of barbers who for three whole months will not know where to look to gain their daily rice. Yet there is a large section of the community much worse off than the barbers, and this comprises everybody connected in any way with the theatres. Their occupation is gone. For the space of one year neither public nor private performance is permitted. During that time actors are outcasts upon the face of the earth, and have no regular means of getting a livelihood. The lessees of theatres have most likely feathered their own nests sufficiently well to enable them to last out the prescribed term without serious inconvenience; but with us, actors are

proverbially improvident, and even in frugal China they are no exception to the rule.

Officials in the provinces, besides conforming to the above customs in every detail, are further obliged on receipt of the "sad announcement" to mourn three times a-day for three days in a particular chapel devoted to that purpose. There they are supposed to call to mind the virtues of their late master, and more especially that act of grace which elevated each to the position he enjoys. Actual tears are expected as a slight return for the seal of office which has enabled its possessor to grow rich at the expense too often of a poor and struggling population. We fancy, however, that the mind of the mourner is more frequently occupied with thinking how many friends he can count among the Imperial censors than in dwelling upon the transcendent bounty of the deceased Emperor.

We sympathise with the bereaved mother who has lost her only child and the hope of China; but on the other hand if there is little room for congratulation, there is still less for regret. The nation has been deprived of its nominal head, a vapid youth of nineteen, who was content to lie *perdu* in his harem without making an effort to do a little governing on his own responsibility. During the ten years that foreigners have resided within half a mile of his own apartments in the palace at Peking, he has either betrayed no curiosity to learn anything at all about them, or has been wanting in resolution to carry out such a scheme as we can well imagine would have been devised by some of his bolder and more vigorous ancestors. And now once more the sceptre has passed into the hands of a child who will grow up, like

the late Emperor, amid the intrigues of a Court composed of women and eunuchs, utterly unfit for anything like energetic government.

The splendid tomb which has been for the last twelve years in preparation to receive the Imperial coffin, but which, according to Chinese custom, may not be completed until death has actually taken place, will witness the last scene in the career of an unfortunate young man who could never have been an object of envy even to the meanest of his people, and who has not left one single monument behind him by which he will be remembered hereafter.

## **THE POSITION OF WOMEN**

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It is, perhaps, tolerably safe to say that the position of women among the Chinese is very generally misunderstood. In the squalid huts of the poor, they are represented as ill-used drudges, drawers of water and grinders of corn, early to rise and late to bed, their path through the vale of tears uncheered by a single ray of happiness or hope, and too often embittered by terrible pangs of starvation and cold. This picture is unfortunately true in the main; at any rate, there is sufficient truth about it to account for the element of sentimental fiction escaping unnoticed, and thus it comes to be regarded as an axiom that the Chinese woman is low, very low, in the scale of humanity and civilisation. The

women of the poorer classes in China have to work hard indeed for the bowl of rice and cabbage which forms their daily food, but not more so than women of their own station in other countries where the necessaries of life are dearer, children more numerous, and a drunken husband rather the rule than the exception. Now the working classes in China are singularly sober; opium is beyond their means, and few are addicted to the use of Chinese wine. Both men and women smoke, and enjoy their pipe of tobacco in the intervals of work; but this seems to be almost their only luxury. Hence it follows that every cash earned either by the man or woman goes towards procuring food and clothes instead of enriching the keepers of grog-shops; besides which the percentage of quarrels and fights is thus very materially lessened. A great drag on the poor in China is the family tie, involving as it does not only the support of aged parents, but a supply of rice to uncles, brothers, and cousins of remote degrees of relationship, during such time as these may be out of work. Of course such a system cuts both ways, as the time may come when the said relatives supply, in their turn, the daily meal; and the support of parents in a land where poor-rates are unknown, has tended to place the present high premium on male offspring. Thus, though there is a great deal of poverty in China, there is very little absolute destitution, and the few wretched outcasts one does see in every Chinese town, are almost invariably the once opulent victims of the opium-pipe or the gaming-table. The relative number of human beings who suffer from cold and hunger in China is far smaller than in England, and in this all-important respect, the women of the working classes

are far better off than their European sisters. Wife-beating is unknown, though power of life and death is, under certain circumstances, vested in the husband (Penal Code, S. 293); while, on the other hand, a wife may be punished with a hundred blows for merely striking her husband, who is also entitled to a divorce (Penal Code, S. 315). The truth is, that these poor women are, on the whole, very well treated by their husbands, whom they not unfrequently rule with as harsh a tongue as that of any western shrew.

In the fanciful houses of the rich, the Chinese woman is regarded with even more sympathy by foreigners generally than is accorded to her humbler fellow-countrywoman. She is represented as a mere ornament, or a soulless, listless machine—something on which the sensual eye of her opium-smoking lord may rest with pleasure while she prepares the fumes which will waft him to another hour or so of tipsy forgetfulness. She knows nothing, she is taught nothing, never leaves the house, never sees friends, or hears the news; she is, consequently, devoid of the slightest intellectual effort, and no more a companion to her husband than the stone dog at his front gate. Now, although we do not profess much personal acquaintance with the *gynecee* of any wealthy Chinese establishment, we think we have gathered quite enough from reading and conversation to justify us in regarding the Chinese lady from an entirely different point of view. In novels, for instance, the heroine is always highly educated—composes finished verses, and quotes from Confucius; and it is only fair to suppose that such characters are not purely and wholly ideal. Besides, most young Chinese girls, whose parents are well off, are



taught to read, though it is true that many content themselves with being able to read and write a few hundred words. They all learn and excel in embroidery; the little knick-knacks which hang at every Chinaman's waist-band being almost always the work of his wife or sister. Visiting between Chinese ladies is of everyday occurrence, and on certain fete-days the temples are crowded to overflowing with "golden lilies"[\*] of all shapes and sizes. They give little dinner-parties to their female relatives and friends, at which they talk scandal, and brew mischief to their hearts' content. The first wife sometimes quarrels with the second, and between them they make the house uncomfortably hot for the unfortunate husband. "Don't you foreigners also dread the denizens of the inner apartments?" said a hen-pecked Chinaman one day to us—and we think he was consoled to hear that viragos are by no means confined to China. One of the happiest moments a Chinese woman knows, is when the family circle gathers round husband, brother, or it may be son, and listens with rapt attention and wondering credulity to a favourite chapter from the "Dream of the Red Chamber." She believes it every word, and wanders about these realms of fiction with as much confidence as was ever placed by western child in the marvellous stories of the "Arabian Nights."

[\*] A poetical name for the small feet of Chinese women.

## **ETIQUETTE**

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If there is one thing more than another, after the possession of the thirteen classics, on which the Chinese specially pride themselves, it is *politeness*. Even had their literature alone not sufficed to place them far higher in the scale of mental cultivation than the unlettered barbarian, a knowledge of those important forms and ceremonies which regulate daily intercourse between man and man, unknown of course to inhabitants of the outside nations, would have amply justified the graceful and polished Celestial in arrogating to himself the proud position he now occupies with so much satisfaction to himself. A few inquiring natives ask if foreigners have any notion at all of etiquette, and are always surprised in proportion to their ignorance to hear that our ideas of ceremony are fully as clumsy and complicated as their own. It must be well understood that we speak chiefly of the educated classes, and not of "boys" and compradores who learn in a very short time both to touch their caps and wipe their noses on their masters' pocket-handkerchiefs. Our observations will be confined to members of that vast body of men who pore day and night over the "Doctrine of the Mean," and whose lips would scorn to utter the language of birds.

And truly if national greatness may be gauged by the mien and carriage of its people, China is without doubt entitled to a high place among the children of men. An official in full costume is a most imposing figure, and carries himself with great dignity and self-possession, albeit he is some four or five inches shorter than an average Englishman. In this respect he owes much to his long dress,

which, by the way, we hope in course of time to see modified; but more to a close and patient study of an art now almost monopolised in Europe by aspirants to the triumphs of the stage. There is not a single awkward movement as the Chinese gentleman bows you into his house, or supplies you from his own hand with the cup of tea so necessary, as we shall show, to the harmony of the meeting. Not until his guest is seated will the host venture to take up his position on the right hand of the former; and even if in the course of an excited conversation, either should raise himself, however slightly, from a sitting posture, it will be the bounden duty of the other to do so too. No gentleman would sit while his equal stood. Occasionally, where it is not intended to be over-respectful to a visitor, a servant will bring in the tea, one cup in each hand. Then standing before his master and guest, he will cross his arms, serving the latter who is at his right hand with his left hand, his master with the right. The object of this is to expose the palm—in Chinese, the *heart*—of either hand to each recipient of tea. It is a token of fidelity and respect. The tea itself is called "guest tea," and *is not intended for drinking*. It has a more useful mission than that of allaying thirst. Alas for the red-haired barbarian who greedily drinks off his cupful before ten words have been exchanged, and confirms the unfavourable opinion his host already entertains of the manners and customs of the West! And yet a little trouble spent in learning the quaint ceremonies of the Chinese would have gained him much esteem as an enlightened and tolerant man. For while despising us outwardly, the Chinese know well enough that