

THE NEW CHINA: ITS PRESS

Walter Kirton, of London, Who Married in Zion, Writes of the Rise of Chinese Journalism.

Walter Kirton, war correspondent of the London Graphic, who was married in Salt Lake last winter to Mrs. Vivian Jones, has mailed to The Herald a copy of an article which he recently wrote on "The New China: Its Press." The article is as follows:

"One afternoon recently I was passing along the Bund of Shanghai on my way to have a talk with the editor of a Chinese newspaper, the name of which may be represented by three hyphenated syllables, the last being Pao, when my ricksha coolie suddenly pulled in towards a motor horn. I heard the 'Toot' of a motor horn behind us. He cantered into another ricksha coolie and there ensued an animated debate in which a great many spluttering-of-the-lip words were used, of which I did not know the meaning, but whose purport was evident. This was unfortunate—or otherwise—in more senses than one, as not only am I informed that the Chinese language of expletive is one of the most varied and gorgeous in the world, but I take every opportunity which offers for gaining a further insight into that philosophical temperament of the Chinese which renders them so amenable to the force of reason as apart from the policy of rough and tumble.

"In the midst of the altercation the motor, which had been the primary cause of the trouble, whirled past and diverted my thoughts. It was occupied solely by a Chinese, even the 'Shoover' was a Chinese, even the word Chinaman because that term—contrary to the generally accepted idea of the Occident—is altogether a misnomer, and is derived from that generic appellation evolved from Pinyin English—John Chinaman. As the motor passed me another machine came 'tatt-tatt' along from the opposite direction; it was a motor bicycle, bestridden by another Celestial whose queue streamed out behind him. Now the mere passage of motor cars and motor bikes along a thoroughfare of the international settlement may appear to be a very trifling incident, unworthy of notice. But in my mind the Celestial 'Shoover' and the vibrating rider—who as he whizzed past tucked his flying plait under his belt to prevent it catching in his rear wheel—conveyed a significance which I am earnestly attempting to determine.

"I was already ten minutes behind the time of my appointment with the editor, and on reaching his office I momentarily excused myself for being late by an explanation of the little incident of the collision. Directly I had spoken my punishment came, and I regretted having made use of that excuse. It turned out that he had been one of the occupants of the car, and he began to make the most elaborate apologies for having caused me any inconvenience. I say, 'began' advisedly, because after a few minutes I thought he was never going to stop. However, we at last arrived at a very amicable understanding, and the knot being thoroughly broken in this manner I perhaps learned more than I otherwise might have done.

Rise of Chinese Journalism.

"To anyone who has witnessed or studied the rise of Chinese journalism, the remarkable talent and enterprise displayed by the Chinese in editing and conducting their vernacular press, cannot fail to convey a sense of admiration. Similarly to their general capacity for handling the latest inventions of a mechanical age, such as the motor in all its forms, and emulating many of the methods of modern journalism, they have acquired the art of journalism in the most natural way. With no inherited qualifications or experience to guide them; handicapped as they have been till recently by an ignorant and meager clientele, and by the hostility of the official classes of all degrees, the fact that they have succeeded in producing organs which are having an enormous influence on the evolution of the New China is proof of the untiring patience, perseverance, and industry of the Chinese.

"To me this proof and its consequent admiration is associated with wonder. When one remembers that only ten years ago there were but a Chinese newspaper in China, and that the one or two trumpery sheets which then did exist had a circulation of a few hundred only, it is of a truth wonderful to know that there are now organs whose circulation runs into the tens of thousands and whose status is such that not only do the local foreign newspapers quote largely from them, but foreigners of standing contribute to them and read them.

Government Can't Interfere.

"It is equally of interest to remember that this remarkable progress is in a great measure due to the comprehensive liberty of the subject of individual of any race of nationality whatsoever which is afforded by the treaty ports of China under the aegis of that extra-territoriality which at present forms such a prominent factor in the relations existing between the foreigner and the Chinese. Under the British flag in Canton and Hongkong, in the international settlement of Shanghai, and the cosmopolitan concessions of Tien Tsin, to say nothing of other extra-territorial communities scattered along the seaboard of the Celestial empire, the writ of the Chinese government does not run.

"The Mandarin whose conduct or method of 'squeeze' has been criticised and upheld to the obloquy it oftentimes so justly deserves by his journalist compatriot, cannot send his Yamen runners and summarily arrest and punish his critic as he would do if he resided on actual as well as nominal Chinese soil. He may grill his teeth in order that the editor shall be watched and seized directly he puts foot outside the boundaries of the settlement, but as long as that individual remains within the lines and commits no overt act against the peace he is free from all danger of molestation.

"This liberty has enabled the Chinese to prosecute their propaganda of reform throughout the whole empire outside

the treaty ports by means of the Post. And here again the indebtedness of that press to the foreigner is manifest. The imperial postoffice of China—the customhouse which administered since their reception by Sir Robert Hart and his staff of foreigners and foreign trained natives are models of what such institutions should be, has scattered the various 'paos' (newspapers) throughout the length and breadth of the land, thus enabling the Chinese press—in the words of my courteous informant—"to do more to shape the destiny of China than centuries of unresilient discussion and millions of soldiers could do."

"One of the most significant out of the numberless indications of the great quiescent upheaval and revolution that is going on all around me here in China is furnished by this postoffice. In the year 1901 there were 166 post-offices and agencies scattered throughout the country, and they handled ten and one-half million articles. At the end of 1905 there were 1625 postoffices with their great campaigns open in China and during that year they handled seventy-six million articles. The New China:

"China for Chinese."

"It, therefore, was with some confidence that I broached the vexed question of extra-territoriality which agitates this same press, and whose abolition is unanimously demanded by every newspaper in China in conjunction with their great campaign cry, 'China for the Chinese.' The editor while acknowledging the obligations to the foreigner in the imperio, under which he and his conferees lie, pointed out that the existence of these independent governing communities on Chinese soil could not fail to appear to be an anomaly of a peculiarity galling character to every patriotic Chinese. He asked me to imagine my own feelings if another race had been able by any reason or under any circumstances whatsoever to establish communities on British ground and to set up therein their own flag and forms of government to the latter of which I should be amenable if I resided in either of those particular spots.

"He insisted that although there was a very natural feeling of resentment against this state of affairs, despite the advantages which have been enjoyed under it in the past, the responsible Chinese press unanimously agree that it has been forced upon their country by the pride and ignorance of the foreigner, and that they must rid themselves of the yoke not by violence and savagery but by temperate and lawful means. Further he suggested—with a twinkle in his eye—that although there are some hot-headed scribblers amongst Chinese journalists who advocate a policy of immediate assertion of Chinese rights and consequent violence, the same sort of men are to be found in other countries.

"Taking up one of a file of his 'Daily News' he rapidly scanned the long array of ideographs till he came to what we should call an article containing a profession of the faith or policy of his newspaper. The weird characters of course were indecipherable by me, but with the aid of his sub-a student who has passed some years in America—he translated the script into English.

The Editor's Article.

"Beginning with an animadversion against the anti-Christian lubrications of one of his less responsible contemporaries, and condemning the appearance therein of a scurrilous joke against the Bible—and mind you this scholarly Celestial is a devout follower of Confucius—went on to show that it was contrary to all good taste and morals for anyone making any pretence to guide or lead a people to attempt to bring another's doctrine into contempt.

"I thought of certain publications of Anglo-Saxondom. The New China! The articles which proceeded to attack all those customs which for centuries have marred the happiness and impaired the comfort and health of the Chinese people, amongst others specifically mentioning the limited use of water for ablutionary purposes; the custom of foot-binding amongst women, practiced on female children; the curse of opium and all it brings in its train; the horrors of female infanticide, and called in question those arbitrary maxims of the ancients which lie at the root of nearly all these customs, which have vitiated every department of human life and condemned the nation to untold wretchedness and hopeless squalor.

"Two words will illustrate my policy in the conduct of my paper—Utility and Progress," he concluded, as he folded up the sheet and put it back in its pigeon-hole.

"I then asked a question about the practical medium employed in enunciating this policy, the weird script of characters which gives visual expression to the thoughts of the writer.

"In Kang-hsi's dictionary—the standard authority on the Chinese language—there are some 30,000 characters, each representing a word. Educated men use about 6,000 of these. But in addition to those there are commissions, characters made up of parts of others, and so on."

Type is "Something Fierce."

"I know very little about the duties of my conferees of the pen whose business it is to expurgate and make presentable the effusions I from time to time send home to them from the corners of the earth, and I know less about that art and mystery of the printer who then sets up and renders marketable the product of the pen, but I can imagine the sensations of both if they were confronted with a vocabulary and type of this description.

"Taking the word or sound of 'no,' for instance. Depending on the character which precedes the character representing it that word may have some 300 different meanings. It may mean anything from a river to a glass of beer, from the engines of a steamship to a lady's watch. The tiniest stroke or dot in the wrong place amongst a congerie of strokes and dots that go to make up the character giving expression to a word or sentence may alter its meaning most disastrously.

"And yet there are fewer misprints in a Chinese paper than there are in any foreign newspaper published in any part of China. In this one little thing alone we have evidence of that printer's perseverance, industry and accuracy, which, existing as it does, not only in detail, but in concrete matters also, makes me everlastingly wonder how far these people will go.

Customs Which Are Attacked.

"The customs which the Chinese press is so actively attacking, though notorious in China, will bear some little further explanation and comment to those who may read these lines. The

Chinese regard the use of cold water, both for ablutionary and drinking purposes, with considerable aversion. While they strike me as being in appearance an average cleanly people as regards their persons, and particularly so as regards their hair, their abstention from bathing, both in public and in private, is remarkable. The country is a well watered one, and many millions of them live either on the water or in its immediate vicinity; yet I never see those crowds of bathers which are to be seen under similar conditions in India, Africa and Japan.

"Their penchant for herbiferous drinks can be easily accounted for by the fact that the vast majority of herbs are indigenous to the country, and experience teaches us that the beverage of a country is the one best adapted for use in that country through a long process of natural selection. Under certain circumstances a drink of cold water is supposed to entail speedy death. For instance, if a traveler who has been hospitably entertained over night in the usual manner prevailing throughout China, is surprised by his host of having violated that hospitality in a manner I need not mention, he is tendered—on leaving in the morning—a drink of cold water. He goes upon his way and his host is firmly convinced that if he is guilty he will shortly die. If he is innocent no ill effects will result. This again illustrates a phase of that philosophical temperament peculiar to the Chinese, in that he is satisfied with the idea of a drink of cold water without resorting to personal violence.

"Footbinding among females is gradually dying out under the pressure of the agitator who has been greatly excited. The idea that small feet constitute an attribute of beauty, though common to many races, has been particularly favored among the Chinese, who for centuries have practiced this torture. Now the 'Golden Lily' as it is fancifully termed, is following the 'wasp waist' among the females of other nationalities.

Curse of Opium.

"The curse of opium is too lengthy a subject for me to do more than touch upon. Unfortunately for the knowledge of the world generally, many diatribes written against it have nearly all proceeded from other than lay pens, with the result that the majority of people have come to the conclusion that the evils of opium have been greatly exaggerated. It may be unnecessary for me to say that my walk of life has not been associated with any profession pretending to the possession of a code of ultra-morality, and that I am simply a practical secular observer.

"I say—and I can prove—that opium smoking and all that is associated with it is having a disastrous effect on the Chinese, and through them on the world at large. I say that opium smoking and all that is associated with it even in the smallest degree is a dirty, damnable business, with which no man should be in any way associated, save to do his best to banish it from earth.

"Female infanticide is one of those matters intimately bound up with the social and economic problems of population. The woman has been virtually a slave and plaything. The birth of a son is regarded as a blessing, that of a daughter the reverse. With the rise of that spirit of nationalism embracing a proper comprehension of the rights of existence and the duties of citizenship which the Chinese press is so ably advocating and supporting, this—like other fearful abuses—will ultimately be swept away.

"A little blue-gowned boy came into the office with sheets of 'filmy' in his hands. His coal-black queue had white silk threads running through its extremity and terminating in a tassel. He was in mourning, his beady eyes and round, frank face gave evidence of an intelligence which, extraordinary as it is in its prevalence among the Chinese, always gives me food for reflection. He handed me my hat and stick, and the editor accompanied me to the door, saying: 'I shall do my best to abolish all these bad customs and habits, and to annihilate all those foolish beliefs which lie at their root. Our Confucianism is not a religion, but it is a philosophy which teaches many practical and utilitarian maxims. We believe that there is a spirit of power which will conserve and energize the ethics of Confucius and render them of real benefit to our people. Combining utility with progress, I hope that my paper will contribute in some small degree to the enlightenment and peace of China.'

"With the existence among them of this spirit, even if there be many who do not share it, the influence of my Chinese conferees on the evolution of the new China cannot be overestimated.

WALTER KIRTON.

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