Across China on Foot
During my travels in interior China I once lay at the point of death. For their unremitting kindness during a long illness, I now affectionately inscribe this volume to my friends, Mr. and Mrs. A. Evans, of Tong-Ch’uan-Fu, Yuen-Nan, South West China, to whose devoted nursing and untiring care I owe my life.
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Author's Note

To travel in China is easy. To walk across China, over roads acknowledgedly worse than are met with in any civilized country in the two hemispheres, and having accommodation unequalled for crudeness and insanitation, is not easy. In deciding to travel in China, I determined to cross overland from the head of the Yangtze Gorges to British Burma on foot; and, although the strain nearly cost me my life, no conveyance was used in any part of my journey other than at two points described in the course of the narrative. For several days during my travels I lay at the point of death. The arduousness of constant mountaineering—for such is ordinary travel in most parts of Western China—laid the foundation of a long illness, rendering it impossible for me to continue my walking, and as a consequence I resided in the interior of China during a period of convalescence of several months duration, at the end of which I continued my cross-country tramp. Subsequently I returned into Yuen-nan from Burma, lived again in Tong-ch’uan-fu and Chao-t’ong-fu, and traveled in the wilds.
of the surrounding country. Whilst traveling I lived on Chinese food, and in the Miao country, where rice could not be got, subsisted for many days on maize only.

My sole object in going to China was a personal desire to see China from the inside. My trip was undertaken for no other purpose. I carried no instruments (with the exception of an aneroid), and did not even make a single survey of the untrodden country through which I occasionally passed. So far as I know, I am the only traveler, apart from members of the missionary community, who has ever resided far away in the interior of the Celestial Empire for so long a time.

Most of the manuscript for this book was written as I went along—a good deal of it actually by the roadside in rural China. When my journey was completed, the following news paragraph in the North China Daily News (of Shanghai) was brought to my notice:

“All the Legations (at Peking) have received anonymous letters from alleged revolutionaries in Shanghai, containing the warning that an extensive anti-dynastic uprising is imminent. If they do not assist the Manchus, foreigners will not be harmed; otherwise, they will be destroyed in a general massacre.

“The missives were delivered mysteriously, bearing obliterated postmarks.

“In view of the recent similar warnings received by the Consuls, uneasiness has been created.”

The above appeared in the journal quoted on June 3rd, 1910. The reader, in perusing my previously written remarks on the spirit of reform and how far it has penetrated into the innermost corners of the empire, should bear this paragraph in mind, for there is more Boxerism and unrest in China than we know of. My account of the Hankow riots of January, 1911, through which I myself went, will, with my experience of rebellions in Yuen-nan, justify my assertion.

I should like to thank all those missionaries who entertained me as I proceeded through China, especially Mr. John Graham and Mr. C.A. Fleischmann, of the China Inland Mission, who transacted a good deal of business for me and took all trouble uncomplainingly. I am also indebted to Dr. Clark, of Tali-fu, and to the Revs. H. Parsons and S. Pollard, for several photographs illustrating that section of this book dealing with the tribes of Yuen-nan.

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1 The photographs were included in the original hardcover edition of the book but are not included in this edition—publisher
Book I
Introductory


Through China from end to end. From Shanghai, 1,500 miles by river and 1,600 miles walking overland, from the greatest port of the Chinese Empire to the frontier of British Burma.

That is my scheme.

I am a journalist, one of the army of the hard-worked who go down early to the Valley. I state this because I would that the truth be told; for whilst engaged in the project with which this book has mainly to deal I was subjected to peculiar designations, such as "explorer" and other newspaper extravagances, and it were well, perhaps, for my reader to know once for all that the writer is merely a newspaper man, at the time on holiday.

The rather extreme idea of walking across this Flowery Land came to me early in the year 1909, although for many years I had cherished the hope of seeing Interior China ere modernity had robbed her and her wonderful
people of their isolation and antediluvianism, and ever since childhood my 
interest in China has always been considerable. A little prior to the Chinese 
New Year, a friend of mine dined with me at my rooms in Singapore, in the 
Straits Settlements, and the conversation about China resulted in our deci-

sion then and there to travel through the Empire on holiday. He, because 
at the time he had little else to do; the author, because he thought that a 
few months’ travel in mid-China would, from a journalistic standpoint, be 
passed profitably, the intention being to arrive home in dear old England 
late in the summer of the same year.

We agreed to cross China on foot, and accordingly on February 22, 1909, 
just as the sun was sinking over the beautiful harbor of Singapore—that 
most valuable strategic Gate of the Far East, where Crown Colonial ad-
ministration, however, is allowed by a lethargic British Government to be-
come more and more bungled every year—we settled down on board the 
French mail steamer Nera, bound for Shanghai. My friends, good fellows, 
in reluctantly speeding me on my way, prophesied that this would prove 
to be my last long voyage to a last long rest, that the Chinese would never 
allow me to come out of China alive. Such is the ignorance of the average 
man concerning the conditions of life and travel in the interior of this Land 
of Night.

Here, then, was I on my way to that land towards which all the world 
was straining its eyes, whose nation, above all nations of the earth, was 
altering for better things, and coming out of its historic shell. “Reform, re-
form, reform,” was the echo, and I myself was on the way to hear it.

At the time I started for China the cry of “China for the Chinese” was 
heard in all countries, among all peoples. Statesmen were startled by it, edi-
tors wrote the phrase to death, magazines were filled with copy—good, bad 
and indifferent—mostly written, be it said, by men whose knowledge of the 
question was by no means complete: editorial opinion, and contradiction 
of that opinion, were printed side by side in journals having a good name.
To one who endeavored actually to understand what was being done, and 
whither these broad tendencies and strange cravings of the Chinese were 
leading a people who formerly were so indifferent to progress, it seemed es-
tential that he should go to the country, and there on the spot make a study 
of the problem.

Was the reform, if genuine at all, universal in China? Did it reach to the 
ends of the Empire?

That a New China had come into being, and was working astounding 
results in the enlightened provinces above the Yangtze and those connected 
with the capital by railway, was common knowledge; but one found it hard 
to believe that the west and the south-west of the empire were moved by 
the same spirit of Europeanism, and it will be seen that China in the west 
moves, if at all, but at a snail’s pace: the second part of this volume deals 
with that portion of the subject.

And it may be that the New China, as we know it in the more forward 
spheres of activity, will only take her proper place in the family of nations 
after fresh upheavals. Rivers of blood may yet have to flow as a sickening 
libation to the gods who have guided the nation for forty centuries before 
she will be able to attain her ambition of standing line to line with the other 
powers of the eastern and western worlds. But it seems that no matter what 
the cost, no matter what she may have to suffer financially and nationally, 
no matter how great the obstinacy of the people towards the reform move-
ment, the change is coming, has already come with alarming rapidity, and 
has come to stay. China is changing—let so much be granted; and although 
the movement may be hampered by a thousand general difficulties, present-
ed by the ancient civilization of a people whose customs and manners and 
ideas have stood the test of time since the days contemporary with those of 
Solomon, and at one time bade fair to test eternity, the Government cry of 
“China for the Chinese” is going to win. Chinese civilization has for ages 
been allowed to get into a very bad state of repair, and official corruption 
and deceit have prevented the Government from making an effectual move 
towards present-day aims; but that she is now making an honest endeavor 
to rectify her faults in the face of tremendous odds must, so it appears to the 
writer, be apparent to all beholders. That is the Government view-point. It 
is important to note this.

In China, however, the Government is not the people. It never has 
been. It is not to be expected that great political and social reforms can 
be introduced into such an enormous country as China, and among her 
four hundred and thirty millions of people, merely by the issue of a few 
empire edicts. The masses have to be convinced that any given thing is 
for the public good before they accept, despite the proclamations, and in 
thus convincing her own people China has yet to go through the fire of 
a terrible ordeal. Especially will this be seen in the second part of this 
volume, where in Yuen-nan there are huge areas absolutely untouched 
by the forward movement, and where the people are living the same life 
of disease, distress and dirt, of official, social, and moral degradation as 
they lived when the Westerner remained still in the primeval forest stage. 
But despite the scepticism and the cynicism of certain writers, whose pes-
simism is due to a lack of foresight, and despite the fact that she is being