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ARRIVED IN "CHINESE BOSTON" SEPT. 16

THEY VISIT MRS. McNULTY

Rev. and Mrs. P. C. Wolcott Enjoy Chinese Scenery. To Join Their Son at Hankow

Soochow, China, September 16th, 1921

The Chinese have a saying "Heaven above, Soochow below", by which they express their admiration for this city, which for hundreds of years has been the favorite dwelling place of literati and retired officials and has been regarded as the abode of light and learning, in other words a Chinese Boston. We arrived here from Shanghai after dark night before last in a storm of rain and the friend who was to have come along with us as our guide and host missed the train and we found our selves alone at the station except for a couple of coolies whom our hostess had sent to carry our luggage. They got two chairs for us with two bearers each and presumably gave them directions to carry us to the mission compound, at all events we entrusted our persons to them and started off in the dark, in a pouring rain, through narrow, ill smelling alleys and by devious ways until we began to wonder whether we were not being kidnapped to be held for ransom. After half an hour our little cooped up chairs were set down and there began a loud voiced altercation between our coolies and a quickly growing crowd of seeming bandits and pirates who appeared out of low hovels and pressed upon us. Getting out of my chair I was made to procure a sampan in order to cross a wide canal upon the bank of which we found ourselves. Having come so far we decided to see the thing through and again stepping into our chairs we were carried upon a large boat and ferried across the stream, again we went through devious ways and through two tunnels which we rightly guessed to be gates through the great city wall, which we had seen looming above us, and finally, to make a long story short, we arrived at the gate of the mission compound which we entered and to our great relief found Mrs. McNulty waiting to welcome us to her cheerful and hospitable home.

All day yesterday the rain fell steadily, as it has most of the time in these parts for the past two or three weeks. As we came from Shanghai we saw that the canals were overflowing their banks and that a large part of the country was under water. This whole region is a low alluvial plain elevated only a very few feet above sea level and everywhere intersected by canals and waterways. It is a great rice growing region and most of the fields are flooded so that already a large part of the harvest is ruined and unless the waters quickly subside starvation threatens the population.

Such was our entry into Soochow, and all day yesterday it rained and we were unable to go sight-seeing but today the sun has shone intermittently and this morning we went in rickshaws through the narrow and crowded streets, which are so narrow that in places one can touch both sides with outstretched arms, to the great pagoda, two hundred and fifty feet high and one of the finest in China. We entered through a dark and unsavory passage and climbed the stone steps to one of the upper galleries from which there was an extended view of the city with its encircling walls and high hills beyond. There are several other pagodas, some well preserved, like the one we climbed, and others in ruins, for when a building or monument in China falls in to decay it is seldom repaired and dilapidation everywhere prevails. The city streets of Soochow are very crowded and filthy but we are told that beyond the walls that face the streets there are many houses of the rich with beautiful gardens. We were told of one which has more than a hundred rooms disposed about several courts in which a family of four generations lives and in which there are more than a hundred servants, many of them slaves, for domestic slavery is still practiced in this country. In these squalid streets are some mean looking shops in which there is merchandise of great value. One section is said to be the greatest silk market of China and another the most famous jade market, for these commodities in particular, the city is famous, and yet from the street there is nothing to suggest the wealth within.

Soochow is sometimes called "The Venice of China" because it is intersected by many canals, one of which is the famous Grand Canal. This afternoon we engaged a small houseboat and made a tour of some of these canals and visited a famous Buddhist temple. On our boat a Chinese family lives, the boatman, his wife and three small children, it is all the home they have. There is a small cabin in which four or five can sit and the deck from which it is entered has chairs for four. The boatman stands forward on the blunt prow, with a long boathook to fend off other boats, for the canals are congested with traffic, and to help in taking the sharp turns, and the wife and older children work the great sculling oar at the stern by which the boat is

propelled and guided, it is managed very cleverly and we thread in and out of the traffic and under the bridges at a very fair rate of speed.

I wish that I could describe the things we saw on our canal trip, the intimate life of the people who live in the houses we passed, for in China among the common people there seems to be no privacy and the things which we do behind closed doors are done in public. We saw a boat with many cormorants, solemnly sitting on outrigger perches going out for the fishing, and junks with pater sails, laden with country produce of every sort.

The water in the canals is filthy, for they are the common sewers of the city, nevertheless you see the housewives washing their rice and vegetables in it as well as their clothes and carrying great wooden pails of it into their houses for domestic uses and tea making. How the people escape typhoid and other filthy diseases is hard to understand, I suppose that through the ages they have developed immunity to them and besides they seldom drink raw water but only drink tea for which of course the water is boiled, but no foreigner dare eat native fruits or vegetables unless they have been most carefully cooked and even the purest water to be obtained is boiled before it is drunk.

The temple which we saw this afternoon is a very large and imposing one, but nothing like so beautiful as the great Japanese temples which we have visited. Attached to this temple is a great monastery with many Buddhist monks, who fail to give one an impression either of cleanliness or of godliness, we watched them as they went through one of their temple services, there was much beating of gongs and drums and a rhythmic and monotonous chant as the priests stood before the great altar with clasped hands and frequent prostrations, in spite of the grotesqueness there was something impressive about the ceremony, and those who were engaged in it seemed very intent upon it, although the crowd of onlookers did not appear to be impressed.

Adjoining the temple is a vast building with several halls in which there are five hundred life-sized images of the gods of their pantheon all of them curious and interesting. I cannot undertake to describe them now except to say that there was an image of Marco Polo among them, clearly distinguished by his European features and headgear, and I am told that his image is to be found in many Chinese temples.

This letter is already too long, and I am now writing in Nanking, where we have been for two days and from which we are to take the Yangtze river steamer for Hankow tomorrow morning.

Nanking is an ancient imperial city, and has at six different periods been the capital of China, it is a place of great interest, but I cannot write about it now nor about the mission work which we have seen here and in Soochow and in Wushih which we visited on Saturday.

It is now Tuesday, September 20, and I will write again from Changsha to which we are going and where we should arrive on Saturday evening, we expect to join Roger and his family at Hankow and go on with them to their home.

P. C. WOLCOTT

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