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The Valley of the Yang- Tse-Keang, before and since the Inroads of the Rebels, as Far as the Commercial Mart of Hankow: Partly from Personal Observations

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Tuesday, March 29.

Colonel the Hon. J. LINDSAY in the Chair.

**THE VALLEY OF THE YANG-TSE-KEANG, BEFORE AND SINCE
THE INROADS OF THE REBELS, AS FAR AS THE COMMER-
CIAL MART OF HANKOW : Partly from Personal Observations.**

BY SIR JOHN F. DAVIS, BART. K.C.B. Member of the United Service
Institution.

THE Keang, or Great River of China, has been laid open by the Treaty of Tien-tsin up to the central mart of Hankow, a distance of more than 500 miles from its mouth below Nanking. Having myself journeyed along 300 miles of that distance, from the extremity of the Grand Canal to the Poyang Lake, I purpose to state the results of my own observations to that extent, and to supply the rest from the experience of others. The fruits of Lord Elgin's adventurous and most interesting expedition are now before us, and I purpose to introduce these by a condensed summary of what has been known before, and then proceed to institute a comparison between the former and present states of the country (before and since the devastations of the rebels), as the ground of our just anticipations for the future.

The whole tract in question lies, with little exception, between thirty and thirty-two degrees of north latitude, the favoured climate of tea and silk, our principal imports, and including some of the finest portions of China. Commencing by the mouth or delta of the river, we have the long alluvial island of Tsoong-ming, about thirty miles in length, and called from its shape and position *Keang-shě*, the "tongue of the river." A small party landed here during our first war and lost an officer, whence that spot at the west end was called Harvey Point. Its principal town, *Tsoong-ming-Hien*, on the south coast, is only a town of the third class. The canals with which the island abounds have high embankments to preserve the country from floods, especially dangerous from the low, flat, and alluvial formation of the land. The dense population has resulted as the effect of Chinese industry exerted on a naturally fertile soil. The portion least cultivated is the north side, abounding in those coarse high reeds which are found on the low shores or islands of the river higher up, and which serve, in combination with mud, to form embankments and even dwellings, as well as occasionally answering the purposes of fuel. A portion of the soil in the northern part is so saturated with sea salt as to form a fund for the supply of the whole island, with a large surplus

for the main land itself.* The southern portion is the most fertile and cultivated division of the island, producing rice, wheat, barley, and millet.

From the western extremity of Tsoong-ming to Chin-keang on the Grand Canal, which is the first point of much interest on the river, the total distance, with windings, is about 125 miles. That so long a tract should be comparatively destitute of large towns,† is explained by the fact, that the government, aware of the accessibility of Nanking and the Grand Canal from the sea, has always discouraged the navigation below Chin-keang, the canal itself supplying an inland transit independent of the sea-coast. This portion of the river was an unknown mystery until Admiral Sir William Parker in 1842 conducted seventy men-of-war or transports to Nanking without the loss of a vessel, where no European keel had ever ploughed before. This, and the late expedition of five war steamers all the way to Hankow, in spite of difficulties generally deemed insurmountable, are exploits of which our navy may justly be proud. I have known many instances in the far East where they have had the good fortune to succour foreign ships in trouble; and I cannot call to mind any occasion on which they have had to claim foreign aid themselves.

It is at Chin-keang that my own acquaintance with the great river begins, and continues to the Poyang Lake, about 150 miles short of our treaty limit at Hankow. Journeying in the boats of the country, the difficulties of the passage to a large squadron of Chinese vessels, against the stream and a contrary wind, occupied no less a time than from the 9th of October to the 14th of November, or little more than ten miles day, leaving abundance of time for excursions and observation. It conveys some idea of the breadth of the river (when full from two to five miles in breadth) when I state that it frequently afforded a tolerable horizon for ascertaining the latitude.

The neighbourhood of Nanking has become so comparatively familiar to us that we may pass on at once to a higher and less known point, which we reached on the 29th October, namely, Se-leang-Shan, the "western pillar hill," a remarkable high rock, which, with the "eastern pillar hill" on the opposite shore, forms the *Gades* of the Keang, about thirty-five miles above Nanking. From the top of the western rock, a height of 500 feet, we observed the broad channel of the river, as it flows between two lines of mountains to the sea. This is a remarkable spot among the Chinese themselves (in peaceable times); and the well-built town at the foot of the rock seemed to owe its existence to the influx of visitors. On the 30th October, the strength of the stream and the want

* This article is so superabundant as to render its importation from abroad a rather profitless speculation. It was a part of my business in China to decide against its importation, in accordance with the fiscal regulations of the government, with whom it is a very important source of revenue; and I observe that, by the trade regulations appended to Lord Elgin's recent treaty at Tientsin, this decision has been confirmed, by the article of salt being expressly excluded.

† The chief towns which succeed each other on the north bank are Tung-chow, Tsing-keang-Hien, and Tae-yu-Hien; on the south bank are Too-paou-Hien and Yeh-shan-Hien,—all of them towns of the second and third order.

of wind obliged us to stop at Wu-hu, a very considerable town about ten miles above the "pillar rocks," and dependent on Taeping. In proof that the technical classification of Chinese towns does not always indicate their real size and importance, this appeared to be superior to many of their first-class cities; and it is to the great inland commerce carried on by this town that such unusual wealth and prosperity are to be referred. We here first observed bales of cloth with the English mark upon them, about 600 miles from Canton, inland.

Quitting Wu-hu on the 31st October, we started with a north-west wind, and, our course here being sometimes due south, we made more progress than usual, accomplishing a hundred lees, or thirty miles, by the time the boats reached the mouth of a tributary river named *Teih-Keang* on the right bank, in which we anchored, near a small town built at the foot of some low hills. The Emperor's desire to get rid of us by the shortest route was the fortunate occasion of our thus navigating the Keang between the Grand Canal and the Poyang Lake, instead of following the beaten track of low marshes along the remainder of the canal. After travelling through the swamps of Shantung and the north of Keang-nan, we were now in a country that could yield to none in the whole world, and is equalled by very few. It was justly remarked by the late Sir Henry Ellis, one of our party up the Keang, "However absurd the pretensions of the Emperor of China to universal supremacy, it is impossible to travel through his dominions without feeling that he has the finest country within an imperial ring-fence in the world." After the lapse of about a fortnight we were, owing to contrary winds, and the timidity of our boatmen, no advanced one-half of the way to the lake; but this delay only afforded the more time for observation and inland excursions, which met with no opposition from our conductors.

On the 1st November, we advanced only twelve miles, to Tsing-kea-chin, on an island which divides the stream of the Keang, and above which the river spreads to a breadth of nearly five miles, after describing what appeared to us a considerable portion of a circle round two islands. On the 2nd, as early as nine o'clock, we found the whole squadron of boats anchored at the considerable town of *Tung-ling Hien** on the right bank, eighteen miles from Teih-keang. Thinking we were to stop for the day, some of us set out as usual on a ramble through the town into the country beyond, but in the course of an hour the wind became fair and the boats prepared to sail. We had extended our excursion to about two hours, when some Chinese came hallooing and announcing the departure of the fleet, and we did not conclude our chase of the boats on their way, up until four hours after quitting them.

On the morning of the 3rd November we were anchored at a town called *Tatung Chin*, on the right bank, and opposite to those long islands by which the Keang is so often divided. We were detained here by contrary winds for no less than five days, which were spent in exploring those beautiful hills at the foot of which the town lies. Our excursions extended to circuits of fifteen and sixteen miles, when we often came across tea

* The name denotes "copper mountains," and Du Halde speaks of a valuable *green stone* found here, probably malachite, or copper ore

plantations, though here less frequent than in the south-east parts of *Keang-nan*, and in *Chê-keang* and *Fokien*.

On the morning of the 7th of November it blew strong from the north-east, and we made one of our best days' journeys, arriving in the afternoon at *Woosha-kea*, or "Black Sand Fork," *kea* meaning one of those numerous points where the *Keang* forks out into two branches to compass an island in the middle. As we were about to enter again on the main stream, our conductors thought it prudent to remain until the wind moderated. Nothing was more surprising than the difference between the Chinese sailors of Canton and their "long-shore" brethren of the *Keang*. The boats were almost as different as the boatmen; for, while the Canton boats are strongly built and capable of buffeting with the waves, these great square boxes, clamped with iron at the joinings, seemed really to justify the apprehensions of their conductors. This difference may partly be ascribed to the habit of occasionally encountering the sea near Canton, and partly to the long experience and example of Europeans at that place.

On our way to the present anchorage we passed the city of *Chee-chow* on the right bank. *Du Halde* describes this as having six dependent towns, and, though surrounded by the lofty hills which we observed from the boats, rich in territory and trade. The wind on the 8th being too strong for our clumsy craft and lubberly sailors, we remained at anchor, but early on the morning of the 9th started with a fair breeze, and after traversing about one hundred lees, or thirty miles, anchored on the further or western side of *Ganking*, an important first-class city. *Du Halde* describes the position of this large town as very advantageous, and states that a Tartar garrison was kept there for the command of the *Keang* and the neighbouring lake. We must have passed this on approaching the east side of the city, where 500 men in line made a good appearance. Our examination of the interior and suburbs conveyed a favourable impression of the place, where we found very good porcelain shops, indicating our approach to the neighbourhood of *King-te-chin*, the chief place of its production.

We left *Ganking* at an early hour on the morning of the 10th November, and, after the best day's run since entering China, viz., 125 lees, or nearly forty miles, reached a place called *Hiwa-yuen Chin*, or the "flower-garden station," about five miles short of *Wangshan Hien*, on the left bank. On our way here, we passed *Tung-lew Hien*, on the right bank, a walled city of the third class, but containing within its extensive enceinte fewer streets than dwellings and gardens. The most populous part of the place was on the outside of the walls, between them and the river. The houses in this part of the country were white-washed, which gave them an European look. Parts of the river, even as high as this, appeared not less than three miles across, and huge porpoises were rolling along near our boats, as they do at sea.

After being detained at *Hiwa-yuen Chin* for a whole day, we sailed on the 12th November, and soon came to a part of the river where it is again divided by a long island into two streams, and, proceeding along the south or right bank, we passed *Ma-tung-shan*, "Stirrup-iron Hill," a curious bluff point; and towards evening approached a very remarkable

insulated rock, rising precipitously from the stream to the height of 250 feet. This (with another larger one at the entrance of the Poyang Lake) is celebrated in China by the name of *Seao-koo-shan*, "the Little Solitary, or Orphan, Rock." It appeared inaccessible on all points, except one, and here the Buddhist priests had contrived to erect some of their temples on terraces, rising one above the other. But the most remarkable feature was the countless swarm of pelicans, or fishing cormorants, which darkened the face of the rock by their numbers.

We had now entered the limits of the Keangse province, and the first walled town we passed, by name *Peng-tse Hien*, was, in point of position, the most remarkable we had seen. It lay on the right bank, nestled in a romantic valley, or rather amphitheatre, formed by the lofty hills around, but open to the river. Among native drawings of remarkable places, I possess one of these, as well as of the "Orphan Rock"—both of them especially noticed in Lord Elgin's expedition.

The weather became thick and boisterous, but we proceeded, and our boat with some difficulty reached *Kin-kang-leaou*, our destined resting place, being a village of small note at the mouth of a creek on the north or left bank of the river. We passed the 13th also at this anchorage, which the Chinese itinerary stated to be about sixty lees, or some twenty miles, from the mouth of the Poyang Lake. We became naturally anxious to inspect this famous inland sea, which, however, though about seventy miles long, is only the second of the empire in size, and yields greatly to the *Tong-ting Lake*, also fed by the Keang, but considerably above Hankow.

We set sail early on the 14th November towards the Poyang. On the bold and hilly shore to our left (the right bank), we passed *Hu-kow*, at the "Lake's Mouth," as the name implies. Here, after little less than a month's protracted journey over a distance, by the Chinese itinerary, of 950 lees, and our own calculation 280 miles, from the canal, we quitted the magnificent Keang to cross the lake on our way towards the south, already 400 miles from its mouth, but yet 2,000 short of its source. The entrance to the lake was about a mile wide, and after passing this we came upon the *Takoo-shan*, or "Great Solitary Rock," rising out of the waters of the vast lake, and larger than the others, but less picturesque and striking in effect.

For the rest of the route to Hankow, we were indebted (previous to Lord Elgin's Expedition) to *Du Halde* and *M. Huc*. The remaining distance from hence is about 157 miles. The first large city is *Kew-keang*, a few miles past the entrance of the lake, with the lake on its east, and the river on its north side. *Du Halde* states, from the Jesuits' survey, that the tide is apparent here at new and full moon. He speaks of the porpoises, which we had ourselves observed, and states besides that salmon and sturgeon are caught as high up as this point. After averaging a westward course for about twenty miles to the mouth of a river on the right bank, flowing in from *Hing-kwo*, the Keang lies north-west and south-east from Hankow, the first city of consequence being *Hwang-chow* on the left bank. *Du Halde* observes of this, that its neighbourhood to the great centre of commerce, Hankow, and the lakes and rivers in which the vicinity abounds, naturally render it very commercial and opulent. The country is highly

cultivated, and rendered very picturesque by the hills on the north. Under its jurisdiction are eight towns of the third (Hien), and one of the second order (Chow).

Seventy or eighty miles above this city we reach the important central point where the three great towns of Wuchang, Hanyang, and Hankow, lie at the confluence of the Han-keang with the Yang-tse. This affluent of the great river is in itself no inconsiderable stream, running a course of six or seven hundred miles, including windings. The three great cities form a sort of triangle, separated only by the water from each other. Wuchang is the capital of the double province Hu-kwang (north and south) and the residence of the Governor-General. Du Halde observes, "*Voutchang est comme le centre de tout l'empire, et le lieu d'où il est plus aisé de se repandre dans les autres provinces.*" He adds, that it is "*le lieu le plus peuplé, et du plus grand abord de la Chine.*" To any one who has seen Shanghai, this must seem surprising. It is placed opposite to the confluence of the Hankeang with the Yang-tse. "Doubtless," says Du Halde, "in viewing only this forest of masts, which borders that noble river the Keang, about a league in breadth at such a distance from the sea, there is sufficient ground for admiration; but if on mounting some height one comes to discover that vast tract all covered over with buildings, one scarcely believes one's sight, or at least one believes it to be the finest thing in the world of its kind."

Han-yang, the second city of Hu-kwang, is separated from the above only by the Keang, and lies at the western angle made by the confluence of the Hankeang with the Yang-tse. Hankow, on the opposite angle, is the mere growth of this immense commerce, which, in China, seems often to escape from the municipal trammels of the interior of walled cities, and to fix itself on the outside, in order to breathe more freely.

It is some drawback to the splendid prospect held out to our future trade, to consider that the valley of the Keang, from Chin-keang and Nanking to beyond Hankow, either is now, or has been for years, in the power of the rebels; and that, as their occupation and pursuit have been civil war and rapine instead of trade, the baneful effects must be very perceptible. But every one who has only seen how speedily the Chinese repair the disasters of a fire, may feel sanguine as to the healing results of their indomitable industry:

"Mox recitat rates
Quassas, indocilis pauperiem pati."

The adventurous and most interesting visit of Lord Elgin to Hankow now enables us to judge of the existing state of the Keang and its cities. The Retribution, Furious, and Cruiser war-steamers, and Dove and Lee gun-boats, left Shanghai on the 9th of November. The shifting sands and shoals of the river had completely altered its channels as far as Chin-keang since the survey of 1842, and the squadron did not reach that point under a week, when, as an additional delay, the Furious struck on a sunken rock between the south bank and Silver Island. On the 20th of November they reached the head quarters of the rebels at Nanking. Having been fired on pretty sharply in passing, the wise resolution was

formed to drop down next morning with the stream and administer such a lesson as would prevent the Chinese repeating the aggression on the return of the squadron; and this was done in the completest manner. It must be remarked that the Emperor's fleet, close at hand, was encouraged thereby to make an attack on the rebels' position immediately afterwards, though at a safe distance; a style of warfare which accounts for this civil strife having dragged on in a chronic state for so many years. The condition of the rebels, however, is decidedly retrograde. They have been driven from Chin-keang, which they before occupied on the canal; their floating force has been displaced by the Emperor's war-junks along the whole of the Keang; and the expedition observed that the besieging imperial army formed a complete semicircle about Nanking by land.

The lesson at head-quarters was probably the cause of amicable overtures being made from the rebel city of *Tae-ping* on the right bank; and when our squadron reached *Wu-hu* on the 23rd, after serious detentions by shoals, here again their fame had preceded them, and they were civilly received by the insurgents, whose appearance and condition conveyed anything but a favourable impression of their character and resources.

The present expedition was just one month later in the season than that in which I was a traveller, and the fallen condition of the river obliged the Retribution to remain at *Kew-hien*, literally "old town," some twenty-five miles above *Wu-hu*, and almost the only place in possession of the Emperor's forces on the south bank, from Nanking to the highest point of rebel occupation towards the lake. Their chief stations are Nanking and *Wu-hu* on the south, and *Ganking* on the north.

On the 26th November the expedition reached *Ganking*, the last post of the rebels to the westward. Being on the north or left bank, and the insurgents having no means of communication across, while the city was actually beleaguered by the Imperialists, the proceedings at Nanking and elsewhere were probably unknown, and hence a fire was opened on our expedition, which was soon silenced. The Emperor's force again at this place was encouraged by what took place to attack the rebels after the steamers passed on. These indications have an important bearing on what may be anticipated in the future. They indicate a due appreciation of our power by the Imperial government, and must induce them to have us rather as friends than enemies. The sandbanks again impeded the navigation on approaching the *Poyang Lake*; thereabouts a few trading junks were for the first time observed, and the expedition was as much struck by the appearance of the "Orphan" or "Solitary Rock" (before described) as we had been so many years previously. After passing the Lake's mouth on the way to *Hankow*, the city of *Kew-keang*, on the south bank, was found in a state of complete desolation, though for some time abandoned by the rebels. At *Kechow*, further on, was observed the holdest and finest scenery on the river, which is here contracted within a gorge formed by the mountains on both sides.

It was not until the 6th December that the expedition reached *Hankow*, little less than a month after quitting *Shanghai*; but still not much longer than I was myself travelling (under Chinese conduct) only from *Chin-keang* to the *Poyang*, about half the distance.

After previous accounts, the actual condition of *Hankow* was especially

disappointing. Every dwelling and building in the place had been demolished during the previous occupation by the rebels; but still much had been restored. The shops and warehouses in one quarter are stated to have been unusually large and well-furnished, with a surprising supply of English and European goods. The opposite city of Hanyang was still a waste of ruins; but Wuchang, the provincial city on the south shore, appeared in a much better condition, and corresponded more nearly with former accounts, exciting, indeed, considerable admiration in the expedition.

The population had, of course, suffered by the remorseless civil war almost to extinction, and could afford no ground whatever for an estimate of its former numbers. The reception given by the Governor-General of two provinces to Lord Elgin was a very handsome one, promoted to some extent, no doubt, by what had been done to the rebels on the way up; and the people showed the greatest curiosity and desire to trade.

On the 11th December, the expedition quitted Hankow on its return, and, after proceeding about thirty miles, found that the river was rapidly falling. After a week's incessant labour in working the steamers over the shoals, only 180 miles had been accomplished, and, on reaching the bar at the Poyang Lake, not more than eleven feet water remained, the *Furious* drawing fifteen feet. In fact, seven feet of water had fallen since they went up. Here the *Furious* and *Cruiser* were left, while Lord Elgin and suite proceeded in the *Dove* and *Lee* to join the *Retribution* lower down. On the 29th December the three steamers reached Nanking.

The rebels displayed, as might have been expected, a very peaceful disposition after their previous chastisement; and a visit being paid to the rebel chief, the interior of Nanking exhibited the same scene of ruin and desolation as the other places occupied by the rebels, whose sole business seems to be destruction without any reproduction. It was evident they were hard pressed by the Emperor's force, and one of the chiefs made secret proposals to the English party to be allowed to desert his colours. Arrangements were effected for safe communication with the two ships up the river, and the mission reached Shanghae on the 1st January, after more than seven weeks' absence.

It is impossible to anticipate any other than the best results from this well-timed expedition by Lord Elgin. It seems to have tested with success the good intentions of the Peking government, if we may judge from the conduct of their representative, the viceroy of Hu-kwang. But had it produced no other result than to establish a proper understanding with the rebels, and show them the folly of aggressive measures towards our people, this alone was worth having. The court of Peking probably hopes from us something better for itself than perfect neutrality towards the rebels, and may have been confirmed in this hope by what the squadron, in mere self-defence, was compelled to do against them up the river. Should this tend to secure good faith and practical sincerity in the observance of the new Treaty, we may accept the results with satisfaction, without troubling ourselves as to the disinterestedness and purity of the motives. If the authorities are encouraged to strenuous exertion, and put a final end to the rebellion which is desolating the country and paralyzing trade, this will be a great common benefit.