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**A CHINAMAN'S OPINION OF US
AND OF HIS OWN COUNTRY**

A
CHINAMAN'S OPINION OF US
AND OF HIS OWN COUNTRY

Written by
HWUY-UNG
MANDARIN OF THE FOURTH BUTTON

Translated by
J. A. Makepeace, M.A.

'The best part of knowledge is being
aware of one's own ignorance.'

LAO-TSZ

CHATTO & WINDUS

1927

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The letters contained in this volume, translated into English from the original Chinese, were sent to me in 1913, in the form of a bundle of MSS., by my dear friend J. A. Makepeace, for many years a strenuous worker in one of the Missions of Southern China. Accompanying the bundle was a letter to me from which I will quote two paragraphs :—

‘Knowing your taste for exotic literature, also in remembrance of our lifelong friendship, I think I now cannot send these quaint letters to anyone more likely to appreciate the gift than yourself.’ (*This was during my friend’s illness which terminated fatally.*)

‘They represent the prevailing thought of the longest-lived nation in the history of the world, a nation containing one-third of the earth’s population, now awaking from its many ages of somnolence. The power of such a mass of humanity—possessed of indefatigable patience, obstinacy, and endurance, allied with wonderful physical and mental capabilities—their unconcern for death and their hatred of foreigners, should make us eager to know something of them, of their opinion of the white race, and of their probable attitude towards us in the future.’

I now leave the Rev. Jabez Makepeace to give further information.

THEODORE J. TOURRIER,
240 Barker’s Road, Glenferrie,
Victoria.

PREFACE

The following letters were written by Hwuy-ung, one of the class of *litterati* and a social reformer, to his (and my) friend Tseng Ching, between the years 1899 and 1912. They came into my possession through Tseng Ching, a scholar, who urged me (and helped me) to translate them into English, so that the reforms suggested by his enlightened countryman might meet with due recognition and support from abroad. It was also his intention to have the Chinese version published and distributed among his countrymen, in order (under God's gracious will) that their eyes might be opened to their shortcomings, and the race strengthened and rejuvenated.

On my part, I have been encouraged to assist in the arduous task of translation by the conviction that the opinions of a cultured man regarding our own not always irreproachable mode of life—of a man of a race whose characteristics are often the antithesis of our own—cannot fail to be both interesting and instructive.

Of course, much of the beauty of the author's classic style, having no equivalent in our language, has been necessarily sacrificed; while the contrast between the modern language description of everyday life and the archaic character pictures of Confucius and Mencius is also wanting. Translations from them have been borrowed from the version of Dr. James Legge. But I have endeavoured to preserve in a slight measure the ingenuous quaintness that pervaded Hwuy-ung's

original text by a similar association of ideas, when not subversive of lucidity. When at times Hwuy-ung ('the modest one,' so self-styled in accordance with his classical career) more deeply investigates the problems of our social life and his arguments become more involved, I have found it impossible to adhere to the peculiar terminology of the original, and have therefore resorted to paraphrase in order to give a clearer exposition of his meaning.

Also I have thought it advisable to omit the constantly recurring complimentary phraseology, notably of the first letters; subsequently, under the influence of his surroundings, he adopts a less stilted and more natural mode of expression. Matters of family concern and political interest were deemed of small value, likely to obscure more important issues, and therefore were left out. I have endeavoured in the Glossary and in a few notes to assist the reader in understanding certain expressions and new-coined words, and to explain an occasional historical or geographical allusion. Having delivered myself of these preliminary remarks, I shall now proceed to give some information concerning our letter-writer personally.

Hwuy-ung was born some hundred and fifty miles to the north of Canton, in the walled village of Jen Te Chuang, on the Pe-kiang, near Shao-chan, where his father resided as *Tao-tai*. After a youth passed in study, at the age of eighteen he was, in his second examination, successful in winning the degree of *Chu-jin*. His studies, however, were interrupted by his father's death, when the property left was divided

among the family, and he had to give his time and attention exclusively to a large farm. He became one of the headmen of his village, afterwards being promoted to the office of sub-prefect, and created a *kwun* of the blue (fourth) button. While in this capacity, Hwuy-ung became acquainted with the reformer K'ang Yu Wei, from whom he absorbed many liberal notions of Western origin. The Emperor Kuang Hsü hearing of K'ang, granted him an interview, after which he arrived at the conviction that the old-world methods of the Chinese must finally be relinquished, if the nation and his dynasty were to be saved. From that time edicts of reform began to be issued. This advance to modernity was unfortunately checked by the Emperor's deposition and imprisonment, brought about by the unscrupulous and reactionary Empress-Dowager, Tsu Hsi, who suppressed reform, and caused those reformers that could be apprehended to be decapitated. Hwuy-ung escaped to Australia in the beginning of 1899.

It is probable that he was greatly impressed and grieved by the power of foreign arms and the weakness of his country, the aggressive action of the European nations, and the threatened partition of China. The easy victories of the English and French, and later of the Japanese, over his compatriots in 1860 and 1895 had been followed by the general shameful scramble for Chinese territory: Germany 'leasing' Kiao-chao in 1897, Russia following suit with Port Arthur, England with Wei-hai-Wei, France with Kwang-chou-wan in 1898. China, he

perceived, if still to exist as a whole, must radically reform its social and political organisation, and if desirous of attaining independence must conform to modern ways. The cause of his country's weakness—an invitation to the predatory spirit of other nations—must be ascertained, together with the secret of the strength of her despoilers. In the fervour of true patriotism he determined to study this question and make the results known to his countrymen. This led him to consider which land offered most inducements for such a study. The comparative proximity of Australia with its advanced social conditions, and the fact of a cousin of his residing in the capital city of Victoria, soon determined his choice; and before many weeks had passed since the persecution of his fellow-reformers, he escaped to the great island-continent and began the experiences hereinafter set down.

J. A. MAKEPEACE, M.A.,
Methodist Mission,
Lao Kua Chen, Canton,
China, 1913.