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Skirting Babuland.

By SAMUEL POLLARD.



THE Chinese have an apt way of giving unpleasant names to the people they despise or fear. "Foreign devil" is only a modern member of a long list of such opprobrious epithets. The original owners of most of the soil in Western Szechuan and Northern Yünnan are sometimes termed *Mantsz* but more frequently *Lolo*. The latter name is widely adopted by Western writers. Both terms are strongly resented by the people to whom they are applied, and justice to a brave, hardy race demands that they be dropped by all Christians influenced by the Golden Rule of the Master and by all Confucianists who remember the maxim of the Sage: "Do not give to others what you do not wish to receive from them." The tribes of North Yünnan and their kinsmen just across the Yangtze prefer to be known as *Yiren* (夷人). There is, however, a name in use which I have retained in the title and this is specially applied to the land and people of the tract of country in Szechuan designated on some maps as "Independent Lololand." Babu has no connection with the effeminate Bengalese but is a corruption of *p'a-p'o* (爬坡) hill-climbing. The country is termed the "Land of the Hill-climbers"—Babu-ti. Mountaineers they are indeed and the way these hardy men and women go up and down steep hills is a sight for a motorman to weep over. Last year I took a long journey on the banks of the Yangtze above the navigable point. For several days our way lay on the borders of Babuland. We hoped to get across the river right among the people but a chieftain who had promised to escort us failed us at the last moment.

The last big town we came to on the navigable Yangtze was Kukwan-ts'uen, about 300 *li* west of Suifu and one hundred *li* west of P'inshan, the farthest point yet visited by a British gunboat. Junk traffic is carried on for sixty *li* above Fukuan and then the rush of the Ox-hide Rapid stops all except very small boats, which ply in reaches of the river where the waters are quieter. The Yangtze above this is deserted. No longer the busy marts on its banks, no longer the stream of traffic with the cheery "Yao-ay, yoh-ay"

of the boatmen. Nothing but a huge rush of mad waters tearing through high hills as if ashamed of the quiet deserted cliffs and striving wildly to reach the scenes of bustling trade. Nothing but an enormous drain to carry off the superfluous rainfall of parts of two provinces and the snows of Eastern Tibet. Poor old Yangtze! Almost forgotten and scarcely explored! A casual look reveals the same muddy countenance, except where the rapids whisk the waters into boiling foam and crown the waves of the still young river with flowing locks of snowy white. A man with a strong arm could throw a stone across the river in many places. How changed the mighty Yangtze!



GARRISON TOWN OF MITIEH WHERE BABU HOSTAGES ARE KEPT.

Three short days' journey across country brought us to the Yangtze again at Hweichee. In these three days we had a taste of the dangerous roads which abound in these districts. My chairmen stopped at a picturesque shrine in which quietly reposed the Goddess of Mercy so much worshipped by Chinese travellers. The road was paved with stone and ran by the side of a steep cliff. In response to a query I found out that the name of the place was "Fairy Bridge" and I then discovered a remarkable piece of engineering. Looking between the flagstones I was surprised to see nothing between the road and the river bed. Large wooden poles had been driven into the side of the cliff and on these the roadway had been built. So like is it to

an ordinary path that many pass that way without knowing they are walking on space and are in the presence of a piece of road building so extraordinary that it is commonly ascribed to the beneficent fairies. Several other places were almost as startling, and by the time we reached Hweichee we felt we had got used to holding our breath and going round corners hugging the cliffs as closely as we could. We were assured that these roads were nothing to those we should meet later on.

A short distance above Hweichee we crossed the river into Szechuan at the foot of a hill called "The General's Hill." The name is given from a large flat piece of rock at the foot covered over with raised figures. In the distance it has the appearance of a battle in bas-relief. There are the men with swords and spears mixing in the heat of conflict. It is not often that the busy Yangtze tries his hand at such sculpture.

The same day we travelled over the Hsias-hsien and the Ta-hsien, "The Little Danger" and "The Great Danger." The road here was by the side of a large rapid whose name of Hsin-t'an, New Rapid, bespoke a comparatively short history. It was formed in the reign of Chia Ch'ing (1796-1821). Right in the cliff steps had been cut for a long distance. Some of them were worn smooth and were consequently very treacherous. A railing had at one time been provided to prevent accidents but it was now in a bad state of repair. The waves below were enormous, curling up around and breaking into great foam, reminding one somewhat of billows dashing on Cape Cornwall when the Atlantic is angry. "White horses" were in great evidence.

Multitudes of mulberry and oil trees abound in this district and often have the appearance of a Somerset orchard. The autumn leaves of green, yellow and bright red, with the setting sun shining through them, made a picture full of charm and peace.

We learnt that Babuland lay back a day's journey from here and that we had still some stages to make before the Yangtze became the boundary between the two peoples.

We spent the night at "Rim of a Frying Pan Rapid," having travelled twenty *li* on the river in a small boat, one of the longest runs made by boats in this deserted part of the Yangtze. Just before we finished the stage we passed a large grotto of young maiden-hair ferns. The grotto is quite covered at high water. I never saw the fern in such profusion before. Such a cave of ferns under the high waters of the Yangtze seems a travesty of Gray's familiar words:

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear."

Somehow things do get reversed in China.

Our next day's journey gave evidence that we were nearing Babuland. There were refuge towers in all directions. On one Szechuan upland, less than two miles in length, I counted eighteen towers; and on a lower level another flat tract of country, separated from the former by a large cliff, showed us eighteen towers also. Most of them were whitewashed and some of them very strongly built. A lot of gypsum is obtained from one of the cliffs here and is exported far and wide in North Yünnan to be used in making beancurd. It acts as rennet does in making junket. The fresh beancurd looks very like junket, but the taste—— ! Ah! all is not gold that glitters. When will China know the exquisite pleasure of junketing!

On the morrow a climb of forty *li* over some wild moors brought us to a point where we had a superb view of Babuland, and the slopes where stands the city of Luipo, an outpost of Chinese civilization. We were 5,000 feet above the river on the Yünnan side. The Yangtze could be seen for seventy *li*, flowing north-east and with very few bends in it. Right away in the far north was a snow ridge, shining brilliantly in the sunshine. This was right in the centre of Babu-land. At the foot of the nearer hills on the Szechuan side, a slope opened out towards the river, in shape like a fan, with Luipo situated on the handle of the fan. Cultivation became scarcer as the hills were approached, and the inevitable towers were everywhere.

Early next morning we came to the scene of a battle, fought only the year before, between Chinese and the dreaded Babumen. Numbers of burnt houses were still evidence of the struggle. The Chinese Government keep a garrison at Mitieh not far from here. Nominally there are 500 soldiers, but really only one-fifth as many. In accordance with a policy carried out in nearly all the frontier towns, numerous well-to-do Babu hostages are kept. They are well paid and fed. They wear the uniform of the Chinese military, and are held responsible for the good behaviour of the tribes. The hostages are changed about every two years. A fresh mandarin came. He was not content with pocketing the pay of the dummy soldiers but refused to be at the expense of the hostages. He cleared them out and dared them to make trouble. They accepted the challenge and in a short time some thousands of the hill-men were across the river and making a grand border raid. The news spread far and wide, causing panic everywhere. Soldiers came pouring in. Big mandarins had a chance of making a great fuss and of reporting bloody battles. The Babumen were defeated but managed to seize a strong position on a hill which we passed, and from here they made good terms for themselves. The system of hostages was resumed and is now in full swing. The Babumen usually twist their hair like a horn in front of the head, but when in Chinese territory they take the hair down and wear it concealed in a cloth turban.



BRIDGE WITH MAGIC SWORD ON YANGTZE BANK AT HWANGKUOSHU.

After passing the garrison town we at last came down to the Yangtze right over against Babuland. It was twenty *li* down the hill to the little town of Hwangkwoshu, "Banyan Tree." Half-way down the hill I stopped and counted all the towers within sight on the Yünnan side. There were sixty-four of them. A haze on the hills hid many and possibly on a clear day one could count a hundred.

There is a great bend in the river at this town caused by a long spur of a hill coming right out from the land of the mountaineers. The river flows first north-east and then rounding the promontory flows almost north-west. There are two large rapids at this point.

What a contrast between the cultivation on the two sides of the river! Miles of sugar-cane, orange groves, and rice fields were flourishing in Yünnan. White-washed houses and baronial-looking towers, nestling among bamboo groves, gave an air of life and prosperity to the scene. On the other side of the river all was desolate. Not an acre cultivated, not a house to be seen. In a few places, near the riverside, trees were growing, but the landscape as a whole gave one a fit of the blues. What a multitude of people these uncultivated lands would support were there a settled government in Babuland!



GROUP OF BABUMEN.

After a night's rest we pushed on again. The first part of the road was through some romantic passes in the rocks near the shore. Huge banyan trees threw out their welcome shade. Over a small stream flowing into the Yangtze a fine bridge had been built. I was attracted by a long sword hanging down under the arch. This is put there to frighten the demons, who control the sudden rushes of water which follow heavy rains. The people consider that the magic sword has so far answered its purpose, for the bridge

has not yet been swept away. As an additional safeguard to such bridges a dragon's head is often carved facing up stream, with his tail on the other side, pointing down stream. Between the dragon's jaws and the long sword the mischievous sprites are supposed to have a bad time. These sudden freshets are a great nuisance to travellers. Almost without warning a small stream a few inches deep will swell to an impassable torrent. On one occasion I crossed over such a stream on my pony and sat down to wait for my men who were a few hundred yards behind. Suddenly a roar attracted my attention and looking up stream I saw a regular bore rushing on. In a moment the torrent became impassable, even to men who stripped and could swim. Loss of life occurs at times. Men get caught in the bed of a stream as they are following the ordinary road and unable to find a way of escape up the banks they are swept away without hope of recovery.

All day long we skirted Babuland. We saw some signs of habitation in the afternoon and learned that a tribal fight had been in progress for days. Only the day before, the war of weapons had been distinctly heard on the Yunnan side. We saw traces of the fight in some burnt dwellings. Near the riverside we saw ruins of many houses and of old rice fields. Formerly Chinese had gone across as tenants of these chiefs, *l'uss*, as they are called, and cultivated much of the land. The light rents attracted many farmers. After awhile, however, they discovered that rent was but one of the many burdens they had to bear. Their crops and flocks were constantly liable to raids and at last the farmers seem to have been driven right away from the place.

The stage after Banyan Tree ends at Hwangp'ing, "Auburn Plain." Years ago this was a busy mart. The government copper took boat here and gave employment to many people. There are remains of one or two very fine temples built in the days of prosperity. Now all is changed. Hwangp'ing has shared the fate of that other Auburn of whom Goldsmith sang so sweetly and pathetically.

It was from here we were to have entered Babuland. The chieftain, An, who had invited us to his home, lived but a few miles away. His secretary met us and told us it was unwise to go across at this time as the tribal war was in An's territory. We looked longingly at the ferry boat and watched the secretary and a few mountaineers go across with more than usual interest. Better luck next time was our thought. The ferry is run by the major of the garrison town. Fifty cash is charged for each person crossing over and 200 for an animal.

Balked in our intention, we resumed our journey the next day, still following the Yangtze. In the early morn we went down a long lane formed

by enormous cacti growing on either side. Two varieties, locally termed "Fairy Hand" (仙人掌) and "Tyrant's Whip" (霸王鞭), abound in North Yunnan. Towards the end of the day we had an exciting experience. All along the journey we had been hearing stories of a road termed *Liu-sha-p'o*, "Hill of the Slippery Sand." Harrowing tales were told of various travellers who had lost their lives at this point. In the afternoon we reached the famous spot and found that Dame Rumour had told the truth for once. A more abominable piece of road I have never travelled over and I have seen some lively ones in different parts of Yunnan. In a recent official report to Sir Robert Hart the main road from Suifu to Chaotong was described as one of the worst roads in the Empire. That maligned road is considered a splendid one by traders here, and though it is execrable from a Western standpoint it is infinitely better than the road by the Yangtze. At the "Hill of the Slippery Sand" there are three bays in the river bounded by almost perpendicular cliffs. A small path has been cut in the rock and some parts of it are very dangerous. There is no protection on the outside and the overhanging cliff seems to press on one and to endeavour to push one over into the boiling rapids below. The names of the various parts of the road are characteristically taken from the Chinese Hades. Here are "The King of Hell's Slide," "The Gate to Hell," "The Last Look at Home," and "The Place Where the Soul is Lost." At the angle where two of the bays meet is a small spur on which a tiny shrine is built. An old woman used to sit here selling oatmeal porridge. She was in harmony dubbed, "the Old Woman of Hell who Sells the Broth of Oblivion" (迷魂湯), the Chinese equivalent of the Waters of Lethe. The dangerous path is about one-third of a mile in length. In one place the ledge narrows until it quite disappears. A couple of planks bridge the gap. Every coolie is reported to make resolutions of reform when he reaches here, to the enormous extent of nine and a-half parts out of ten of his evil habits. This is supposed to ensure the help of the good Kwangyin against the demons, who lay in wait here for all travellers. Some of the stories told are heartrending. Once a whole family were crossing over; the boy of twelve was in front; the mother with baby on her back followed; the husband brought up the rear. The boy slipped and fell over. The mother shrieked in terror, lost her balance and she and baby followed the son. The poor husband gave one look, lost all control of himself, and in a few seconds the hungry, never-satisfied Yangtze swallowed up the travellers and rushed on in his mad race, as if nothing in the world concerned him, except to quickly reach the *dolce far niente* existence of Hankow and the lower river ports.



ROUNDING THE CLIFFS NEAR HWEICHEE.

I have no wish to see "the Hill of the Slippery Sand" again. I was hungry before I started the walk and long before I got across my legs were shaking, my heart was beating loudly, and only by a great strain could I keep my nerves steady. Yet some go over the path as easily as we boys used to race across the tops of railway arches. One of my coolies carried two baskets of bedding over this road as steadily and truly as if the roar of the Yangtze were miles away and as if the road were always eight feet wide, instead of being

sometimes only eight inches.

Yet one more day and we came to the end of our journey skirting Babuland. This was at Patsingta, "Plain of the Great Well." Just outside of this busy market town, noted for its sugar industry, the cliffs of Babuland show signs of great convulsions of nature. The strata are twisted in many ways. I noticed a few places cultivated, but the contrast between the rich vegetation of Tatsingpa and the barrenness of Babuland was most marked. I learnt here that formerly several mines of silver and quicksilver in the Mountaineers' Territory were worked by Chinese, a royalty being paid to the chiefs. Also that a regular horse road of eight stages existed right through

to Ningyuenfu. However, in the 8th year of the Emperor Hsien Feng (1858) troubles broke out and all the Chinese were expelled. Attempts have been made to renew this trade but the two peoples distrust each other too much to promise success. The nominal head-chieftain or king, surnamed Tu, has little control over the twenty-two tribes into which Babuland is divided. A number of these hillmen come across to market. I tried to photograph a group, but when I opened out the camera they fled, thinking it was a gun of some sort. The second time, however, we managed to coax them to "face the music." After the market was over we watched the men return home. Quite a number carried wine in bags of goatskin. Several of the men meeting the ferry were armed and the boatmen carried guns. All are on the *qui vive* against surprise.

Although junk traffic has long ceased between this part of the Yangtze and Suifu, huge rafts of building timber still go down, risking all the dangers of the rapids. Iron rings are fixed on the boards and in the rapids the men cling to these rings and take their plunge as part of their day's work. The great danger they fear is what is euphemistically called "pasting up scrolls." Sometimes in the rapids the head of the raft goes down against a rock and the force of the waves dashes the keel flat up against the side. The poor men are crushed in this performance. The men greatly dread these literary efforts of Father Yangtze, when he takes to writing human scrolls on the cliffs which bound his domain.

After Tatsingpa we turned south-east and climbed up until we were some 8,000 feet above the river. The valley between us and Babuland was covered with white clouds on which the sun shone in all his splendour. The sea of clouds looked like an immense field of snow and was of surpassing beauty. The distant hill peaks standing out above the white sea seemed to invite us across. With this glorious view we said goodbye to Babuland, the home of mystery and mountaineers.