

and folk-lore, and know the conditions and sources of their earliest culture.

Many books have been written on China and its people, and much useful and interesting information concerning both is scattered through them. But the unwritten history of this people, stretching back into centuries of myth and fable, would fill a library. And to many of us, it is this unwritten history, drawn from a very distant, shadowy past, that is of far deeper interest than the story of the life and customs of later times.

European nations have been in more or less intimate commercial relations with China during three hundred years. Yet the knowledge we possess, of Chinese character, of the incentives to action, their course of reasoning or of the motives which control or direct the conduct of a celestial under any given circumstances, is very small indeed. Not only is the Chinese mental constitution entirely different from our own, but the whole Chinese nation is living in precisely the same condition of intellectual advancement that was attained by its philosophers and scholars a thousand years ago.

This may be a rather startling declaration, but it is true. Progress in thought ceased among Chinese scholars about that time, and stagnation has prevailed ever since. Such a lamentable result has followed the teachings of some of China's greatest philosophers, because they unwisely taught a grave reverence for the writings of the ancient sages. It is the study of the Chinese classics which has restrained and dwarfed the great natural abilities of the Chinese student.

If we begin to trace out the earliest history of China, we are carried back to very remote days. If the earliest monuments of ancient Egypt are a few thousand years older than the beginning of the Chinese Empire, the old emperors of the first dynasty of China have still a very respectable antiquity. The records tell us of the days of the first Emperor, B. C., 3300. But even beyond this semi-mythical period, we know that there were many centuries, during which the ancestral Chi-

nese tilled the soil of Northern China, conquered and replaced the savage aborigines, and slowly laid the foundations of an Empire which, through the changing fortunes of strife with enemies without and foes or traitors within, has maintained its integrity and enlarged its boundaries, until the Emperor of China now numbers as his subjects one-fourth the population of the globe.

Thus the unwritten history of China is very long and eventful. Five thousand years have passed since the ancestral Chinese—contemporaries perhaps of the Babylonian Empire, and of those other peoples whose ruined cities and carved inscriptions are buried in the alluvium of the Mesopotamian Valley—began their aimless eastward wanderings, from the country somewhere about the Persian Gulf. We cannot trace their way across the mountains and plateaus of Central Asia, but the clew to their origin and ethnographical relations is found in the old and complex characters of their written language, and there is no period known in Chinese history when those people had not a written language and necessarily an advanced degree of culture. The foundations of the empire were laid in wisdom and a recognized system of moral teaching, which gave them great supremacy over the savage tribes around them; and it is these attainments in an age of very primitive culture, more than any warlike spirit among the Chinese, which has enabled them to maintain the integrity of such a vast Empire through all the vicissitudes of an eventful history.

We will leave the distant past with only one more allusion, which is significant not only of the permanency of all Chinese institutions, but shows how far back we must go to find the basis of the high culture which prevails to-day among the literary classes of China, and also proves how very deep-seated is the popular respect for learning. An author who wrote 2200 years B. C., makes an allusion to "village schools of the ancients." From that remote period the Chinese, with but a brief interval during the Han dynasty, have maintained a system of village schools until the present