

MY
TWENTY-FIVE YEARS
IN CHINA

BY JOHN B. POWELL

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To all those who were instrumental in effecting my release from the Japanese, and to the many others whose active help and sympathy, since my return, have materially aided my recovery: this book is dedicated.

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I

Eastward Ho!

THE SMALL CARGO BOAT upon which I was a passenger edged slowly up to a jetty in the Hongkew section of Shanghai, and I walked ashore carrying my suitcase. It was early in February, 1917. A baggage coolie followed, carrying on his shoulder my old-fashioned tin-covered trunk. It was raining, and the narrow streets between the shipping godowns, or warehouses, which lined the Whangpoo River were running with sloppy mud. Two ricksha coolies dashed up, and while there was sufficient room in the man-drawn vehicles for both passenger and baggage, I chose to walk to the hotel, the Astor House. I had seen rickshas in Japan, had ridden in one in Yokohama, but I was still too new to the Orient to feel at ease in a vehicle drawn by a human being.

My trip to the Orient, destined to develop into active newspaper work for a quarter of a century in one of the most politically turbulent areas on earth, had been inspired by a cable from Thomas Franklin Fairfax Millard, an alumnus of the University of Missouri, who had become widely known as a correspondent in the Far East.

Millard's cable, which was dated at Shanghai and addressed to Dean Walter Williams of the School of Journalism of the university, stated that he wished to employ a graduate of the school to assist him in starting a paper in Shanghai. Dean Williams handed me the cable, the first transoceanic telegram I had ever seen.

For some time I had been trying to make up my mind regarding two offers, one from the publisher of a trade journal in Des Moines, Iowa, and the other from the publisher of a newspaper

in Atlanta, Georgia, who required an assistant. The idea of a trip to the Orient was too much of a temptation, however, and after talking the offer over with my wife and my colleagues, I began to wind up my work at the university.

Unlike the hero in an Upton Sinclair novel, who was "born to the realm of international society and diplomatic intrigue," I was born on a northeast Missouri farm, attended and later taught in a country school, and earned my way through high school and business college in Quincy, Illinois, by carrying two newspaper routes, morning and evening. Later I worked as a cub reporter on the old *Quincy Whig* in order to obtain funds to pay my fare to the University of Missouri, where I enrolled in the new School of Journalism. Four years later, after graduation, I returned to northeast Missouri to work on the *Courier-Post* in Hannibal, a town immortalized as the boyhood residence of Mark Twain. After four years as a circulation solicitor, advertising manager, and city editor, I returned to the university as instructor in journalism.

Like other American youths of the period and locality, my total knowledge of such distant strange lands as China and Japan had been acquired from a few chapters and some misleading maps in the school geographies and history textbooks. Even in the university I remembered only one or two history lecture periods in which the professor in "ancient, mediaeval and modern" history referred to China; and these references were not complimentary to that country.

To be sure, I had known students from both China and Japan who had enrolled in journalism courses at the university. One, a Chinese named Hin Wong, from Honolulu and Canton, cooperated with me in organizing a Cosmopolitan Club which included all of the foreign students in the university. The idea of forming such a club had developed from an article I had written for the college paper about foreign students in the university. Another Chinese who had enrolled in one of my classes was Hollington K. Tong, from Shanghai. Both Wong and Tong were destined later to become prominent in journalism in their home-

land, but on opposite sides of the political fence. Another student from the Orient, a Japanese named Toda, was the shortest in stature, but the best drilled cadet in my company in the student military corps. I didn't know then that he had already served three years as a conscript in the Japanese Army before coming to the United States.

The fact that I was actually going to Shanghai to help start a newspaper caused me to be regarded with much curiosity and some envy on the part of my associates at the university. The fact that I had no advance knowledge whatever regarding the type of paper that was to be started naturally did not help my peace of mind. I was the object of much humorous questioning; could I read "chicken tracks," one friend inquired, and added to my confusion by producing a receipt from the local Chinese laundry and asking me to decipher it. The college barber asked whether I wanted a "queue" haircut.

My apprehension regarding the job in China increased as the scheduled date of my departure neared. I had once written an outline and description of an office system for a small-town newspaper plant, which had been published by a trade journal and had been widely adopted. Would this be of any use in my new job? What kind of paper would the new Shanghai journal be? Would I write editorials, solicit ads and subscribers and do everything else, as in a typical country newspaper office? I was accustomed to this type of journalism, as I had done everything in a small-town daily office except set type. I wondered if the Chinese had printers' unions. Also, I wondered whether Chinese papers had linotype machines capable of setting 5,000 characters or ideographs, which I was told often appeared in a single issue of a Chinese newspaper.

Feeling the need of more information about the lands I was to visit, I went to the university library, where I found only two descriptive books. They were "Chinese Characteristics" and "Village Life in China," both by the same author, Dr. Arthur H. Smith, a veteran of the Gospel, who had spent more than a half century as a missionary in China. He was widely

known for his humorous lectures, and his humor was to some extent evident in his descriptions of China and its people. Chinese students in American universities disliked the books because of the author's bizarre impressions of Chinese life. Once, shortly after my arrival in Shanghai, I heard Dr. Smith deliver a lecture dealing with political conditions in Peking, where the Republican Government had just weathered a crisis in which reactionary interests had plotted to restore the Manchu Dynasty. Dr. Smith was then on his way to the United States to retire. The feelings of everyone, particularly newcomers in the audience, were at a low ebb as Dr. Smith concluded his talk by saying, "China is standing on the brink of a precipice." But the tension was relieved when the speaker, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes, added, as an afterthought, "In fact the country has been on the brink of a precipice ever since I arrived in it a half century ago."

I finally sailed from San Francisco, in January, 1917, on the ancient Japanese passenger steamer *Nippon Maru*. At that time I did not think the United States would be drawn into the war, then in its third year. But there was an ominous happening when our boat reached Nagasaki, last stop in Japan before sailing for China. I went ashore with the other passengers and was exploring the shops of that ancient Nipponese city, the first place in Japan to have contact with Europeans, when a messenger from the ship came running with a note from the captain stating that it was necessary for all passengers scheduled for Shanghai to return to the ship at once and get their baggage. The captain had received instructions from the head office of the steamship company, the old Toyo Kisen Kaisha line in Yokohama, to drop all Shanghai passengers at Nagasaki and proceed directly to Manila. Two or three other passengers and I, who had tickets for Shanghai, thus found ourselves marooned in the strange little Japanese port of Nagasaki.

Inquiry at the Nagasaki steamship offices disclosed that no steamer carrying passengers was scheduled to sail for Shanghai

for three weeks. As my funds were running low, I decided to investigate the possibility of obtaining passage on a cargo boat, several of which were loading in the harbor. After paddling about the harbor in a sampan for some time I finally found a captain who was willing to provide a cabin in exchange for the unused portion of my trans-Pacific ticket, plus \$10 in American money and on condition that I provide my own food. The boat was sailing in a few hours, hence I had time only to get my baggage and purchase a few articles of food for the run across the China Sea. The captain of the cargo boat spoke little English and evinced little interest in his American passenger.

The weather was cold and cloudy, but after the ship had cleared the western cape of Kyushu the sun came out and it became quite warm. I began to notice a disagreeable odor about the ship, which rapidly became nauseating as the weather moderated. I appealed to the captain as to the cause of the odor. The captain pointed to large bales of merchandise wrapped in straw matting which were exposed on the deck and in the open hatches, and said, "Rotten fish—only Chinaman eat." It took me several weeks to get the smell of that cargo out of my clothes, and the memory of it remained with me through the years.

It was fortunate I had embarked on this ship, however, because another ship, the *Poltava*, of Russian Vladivostok registry, upon which some of the passengers sailed about a week later, was caught in a typhoon in the China Sea and driven ashore on the coast south of Shanghai. The passengers were saved with great difficulty.

I had not known until I reached San Francisco on my way to the Orient that the only passenger or cargo ships engaged in trans-Pacific trade at that time were of Japanese registry. Captain Robert Dollar, who later became an extensive operator of steamship lines on the Pacific, had been forced to transfer his cargo ships to Canadian registry, and the Pacific Mail, the only American passenger line, had withdrawn its ships to the South American and Panama Canal routes. The situation which had driven the few American ships from the Pacific at such a crucial

time, when America was on the verge of war, had resulted from the passage by Congress of the original La Follette Act—designed by the liberal Wisconsin Senator to help American seamen. One provision in the act forbade American ship owners to employ Oriental seamen. Since American ships with highly paid American crews had to compete with Japanese and British ships, both of which employed full crews of low-salaried Oriental seamen, it was impossible for the American lines to continue operating. They therefore either withdrew from the field or switched to British registry, which always permitted the employment of Chinese merchant seamen, long considered as efficient and trustworthy as the seamen of any nationality. Since most British-registered ships had been withdrawn to the Atlantic because of the war, the result was that the Japanese were left in complete control of the Pacific. After the war American shipping under Federal assistance, in the form of government-built ships with fantastic mail contracts, returned to the Pacific; but the fact remains that for a considerable period during America's participation in World War I the United States possessed on the broad Pacific no important ships of any kind except a few naval vessels.

II

So This Is Shanghai!

THE ASTOR HOUSE HOTEL, then Shanghai's leading hostelry, had grown from a boarding house established originally by the skipper of some early American clipper, who left his ship at Shanghai. He christened his establishment in honor of the then most famous hotel in the United States, the Astor House in New York; however, he was compelled to add the designation "hotel," as the fame of the New York hostelry had not yet reached the China coast. Aside from the name, the two establishments had little in common, as the Astor House in Shanghai consisted of old three- and four-story brick residences extending around the four sides of a city block and linked together by long corridors. In the center of the compound was a courtyard where an orchestra played in the evenings. Practically everyone dressed for dinner, which never was served before eight o'clock. At one time or another one saw most of the leading residents of the port at dinner parties or in the lobby of the Astor House. An old resident of Shanghai once told me, "If you will sit in the lobby of the Astor House and keep your eyes open you will see all of the crooks who hang out on the China coast."

At the hotel I asked the clerk where I might find my boss-to-be, Mr. Millard, and was relieved to learn that he lived there and would come down to the lobby shortly. What would he be like? Soon a Chinese boy called my attention to a man coming down the stairs. He was a short, slender man weighing perhaps 125 pounds and dressed so perfectly that I wondered how he would be able to sit down without wrinkling his immaculate suit.

I soon learned that my boss, who had served the old *New York Herald* many years, first as dramatic critic and later as international political correspondent, had taken on many of the eccentricities of his employer, the late James Gordon Bennett.

I naturally was anxious to obtain answers to a hundred questions concerning my new job, but Millard appeared in no hurry to enlighten me. In fact we were soon the center of an interesting group of local residents who strolled in for afternoon tea, but the "tea" they consumed consisted chiefly of cocktails and whisky-sodas.

The profusion of drinks aroused my curiosity, because I had grown up in dry local-option territory in the Middle West, and America was within a few years of the "great experiment" of 1920 when I sailed from San Francisco.

The circle about our table expanded and the Chinese boy added a new table to hold the accumulating bottles and glasses. As the newcomers came up and were introduced they usually ordered a new round of drinks, which meant that each finally had several drinks standing on the table. After the boy had brought the drinks he would present the one who placed the order with a little piece of paper called a "chit," which no one ever looked at before signing.

While waiting in the lobby for Mr. Millard, I had seen on a bulletin board a Reuter dispatch from one of the local English newspapers carrying the momentous news that the United States had broken off diplomatic relations with Germany. It was February 3, 1917. But the conversation about the table did not concern America's entrance into the war; on the contrary it was confined to the subject of possible prohibition in the United States and the increasing cost of drinks in Shanghai due to the shortage of shipping from England. Agreement was unanimous that Shanghai would never go dry, and that the British were more intelligent, on the liquor question at least, than were the Americans.

Suddenly the conversation became hushed as a gray-haired man of medium height entered the lobby and approached our table. I was introduced to him, Thomas Sammons, American Consul-General, a likable official, who was constantly obsessed by the fear that something would happen in the community which might involve him in complications with the State Department.

America's entrance into the war later added tremendously to the Consul-General's responsibilities and anxieties, due to the character of the government of the International Settlement. Since China was still neutral, German and Austrian consuls and their nationals went about their affairs practically without restraint, although all Britons and most Americans had ceased speaking to them or doing business with them.

When the group finally broke up, Mr. Millard suggested that I take a room at the Astor House and introduced me to the manager, Captain Harry Morton. Since most of the managers of the Astor House had been sea captains, the hotel had taken on many of the characteristics of a ship. The corridors were painted to resemble the passageways leading to the staterooms of a passenger liner. I was therefore not surprised when the manager told me that he could give me a room in the "steerage" for \$125 a month, including meals and afternoon tea. That figured out at about \$60 in United States currency.

It was not until the next day in his apartment that I had opportunity to discuss my new job with Mr. Millard, and to get some of the background of his own experience in China.

Millard first went to China as a foreign correspondent for the *New York Herald* to cover the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. At this time, and during his later coverage of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905 and 1906, he became acquainted with the Chinese political leaders, including Yuan Shih-kai, Tong Shao-yi, Wu Ting-fang, F. C. Tong, organizer of the first modern bank in Shanghai, and the Kuomintang leader, Dr. Sun Yat-sen. China

at that time was still an empire, but there was plenty of evidence indicating that a revolution was brewing. In 1911 Millard founded the first American newspaper in China, the *China Press* at Shanghai. In this enterprise he was assisted by B. W. Fleisher, who later became publisher of the *Japan Advertiser*, in Tokyo. Most of the money for the purchase of type and mechanical equipment for the *China Press* was supplied by Charles R. Crane, a Chicago manufacturer, who became a stockholder and director in the enterprise. Crane had diplomatic ambitions. In 1909 he was appointed Minister to China, but resigned before assuming his official duties; later he accepted the post after World War I.

A number of well known Chinese in Shanghai, including Tong Shao-yi, and some bankers had also agreed to purchase stock in the new paper, but when Millard arrived in Shanghai with his machinery, he discovered that some of the leading Chinese who had agreed to cooperate with him had developed cold feet. Investigation disclosed that the opposition paper, the long-established British organ, the *North China Daily News*, had been responsible. That paper, known as the N.C.D.N., was the leading British organ outside of Hong Kong, and the proprietors naturally desired no American competition, particularly of the type of the *China Press*, which always had a number of Chinese stockholders and editorially supported Chinese Nationalism and American-Chinese cooperation. The American population of Shanghai, although small, was growing and there was a general feeling that it should have an American paper.

The *North China Daily News* had further reason for opposing the establishment of an American newspaper when the *China Press* by its enterprising methods, comics and other features soon passed the British paper in circulation. But the *China Press* could not exist on circulation revenues alone, and soon was in financial difficulties. Millard was forced to resign the editorship, and the principal interest in the paper was taken over by a local American real estate and insurance

concern, which promptly sold a controlling interest, at a handsome profit, to a local Briton.

This was the newspaper set-up when I arrived in Shanghai, in 1917, to help Mr. Millard establish another paper, this time a weekly, which he had decided to call *Millard's Review of the Far East*. Aside from the purchase of type and a supply of paper, nothing had been done to get the publication started, so that it devolved upon me to officiate at the birth of the new American journal.

Office space adjacent to the printing plant was rented, and we set to work. More questions: "Would we do our own printing or make a contract with a commercial printing house?" "How much circulation did Mr. Millard think we would have?" "Where would we obtain our advertising?" "Would the Chinese read our paper?" Finally I asked one question which brought a quick and unexpected response. The question was, "What will we print in the paper?" Straightening up stiffly in his chair, Millard snapped, "Anything we damn please."

When I repeated this declaration of editorial policy to potential subscribers and advertisers as I made my rounds among the foreign and Chinese merchants, I always got a laugh—for, as I learned later, it was Millard's insistence on printing "anything he damn pleased" which had caused his resignation from the editorship of the *China Press*. Millard never modified his principles on the fundamentals of the Far Eastern situation as so many of his colleagues did—for a quick profit.

Busy days followed. An office was rented and a contract signed with an ancient printing establishment owned by French Jesuit priests, who were happy to have our new American type in their plant. But I was dismayed to learn that neither the Chinese foreman nor any member of the numerous Chinese typesetting staff knew a single word of the English language. When I explained this predicament to the manager of the printing plant, Mr. Cowan, an American printer-manager who had gone to China originally as foreman of a plant owned by Protestant missionaries, he laughed and said it was better for the native

printers not to understand what they were setting up in type, for if they did understand English they would constantly be trying to improve on the reporter's and editor's copy—with disastrous results. I later discovered, however, to my sorrow, that a Chinese printer's inability to understand what he was setting up in type also had its dangers. A reporter sent the office boy with a note to a nearby bar inquiring, "What in 'ell has happened to the beer I ordered?" In some mysterious manner this note got into the personals, and it caused considerable questioning on the part of our missionary subscribers. On another occasion the proprietress of a resort in the "Kiangsi Road" (red light) district sent out an engraved invitation to a selected list of the town's bachelors announcing a reception to meet some new recruits who had recently arrived from San Francisco. The notice fell into the hands of a Chinese reporter, who put it in the society column, causing a commotion among the town's housewives. But this was only part of the education of a new editor.

While getting out sample columns illustrating our different fonts of type for heads, text, and advertisements, I made a survey of our field and tried to pick out a typical reader—obviously a difficult task in Shanghai, where the Anglo-American community at that time numbered probably no more than 8,000 or 10,000 individuals and was about equally divided between business people and missionaries. I soon found that our possible readers were not confined to the American and British communities. There were several thousand other foreign residents in Shanghai—Scandinavians, Frenchmen, Germans, Russians, Portuguese, Dutchmen, and a large population of Oriental Jews, most of them from Iraq, who had come to Shanghai many years previously by way of India. Several were fabulously rich. Many of the foreigners could read English and were anxious to see a paper containing American news and editorial comment. I discovered, however, that the largest English-reading group of all was the younger generation of Chinese, the intellectuals, graduates and undergraduates of mission and municipal schools,

who were just beginning to take an interest in outside world affairs. They were tremendously concerned by the World War, and, like everybody else, were deeply anxious to find out what America was going to do about the war and a number of other things. For the first time I began to realize the importance of America's position in world affairs. All these people were studying the English language, and I soon discovered that hundreds of students were using the *Review* as a textbook. We constantly received letters inquiring about the meaning of words, particularly when we had given them an American twist.

These bright young Chinese college and middle-school graduates, including many young women, were employed in the offices of the large foreign and Chinese trading houses, factories, banks, newspaper offices, on the faculties and staffs of colleges and universities, and in the professions and in government offices. Old-time officials and executives were helpless without these young modern educated assistants.

I always credited myself with being the first foreign editor in China to discover the young English-reading Chinese subscriber. I promoted the organization of study clubs and classes in current events in the colleges and universities, the members of which subscribed for our paper in dozen or even in hundred lots. I taught a course in journalism in one of the colleges myself.

I also discovered another class of reader, most important for any paper in the Far East. He was the "out-port" subscriber who lived in some out-of-the-way place and might be a missionary, a buyer of native products for some coastal import and export house, or a salesman in some interior town for a foreign cigarette house or oil company. Again he might be a British, American, Scandinavian, or what-not customs officer stationed at some frontier point, or he might even be a lighthouse tender "gone native" on some lonely island off the coast. These people were hungry for "something to read," and they lived out of the advertising pages. One not-to-be-forgotten subscriber was an Englishman who was captain of a tramp steamer that touched at