

**THE GREAT RIVER; THE
STORY OF A VOYAGE
ON THE YANGTZE KIANG**

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The great river; the story of a voyage on the Yangtze Kiang by Gretchen Mae Fitkin

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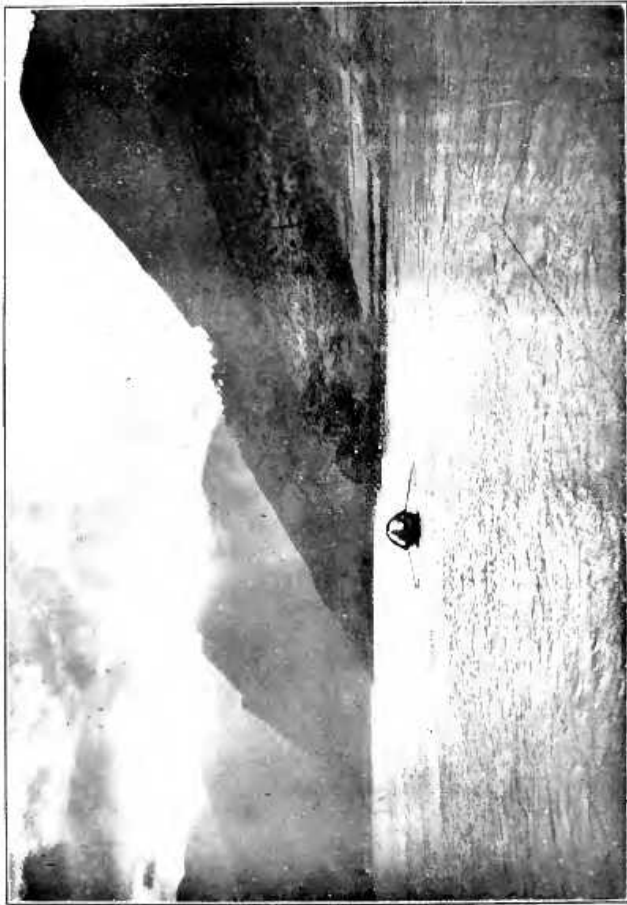
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GRETCHEN MAE FITKIN

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Frontispiece

The Gorges in Sombre Mood

THE GREAT RIVER

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BY

GRETCHEN MAE FITKIN

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With an introduction by Arthur de Carle Sowerby, F.R.G.S.

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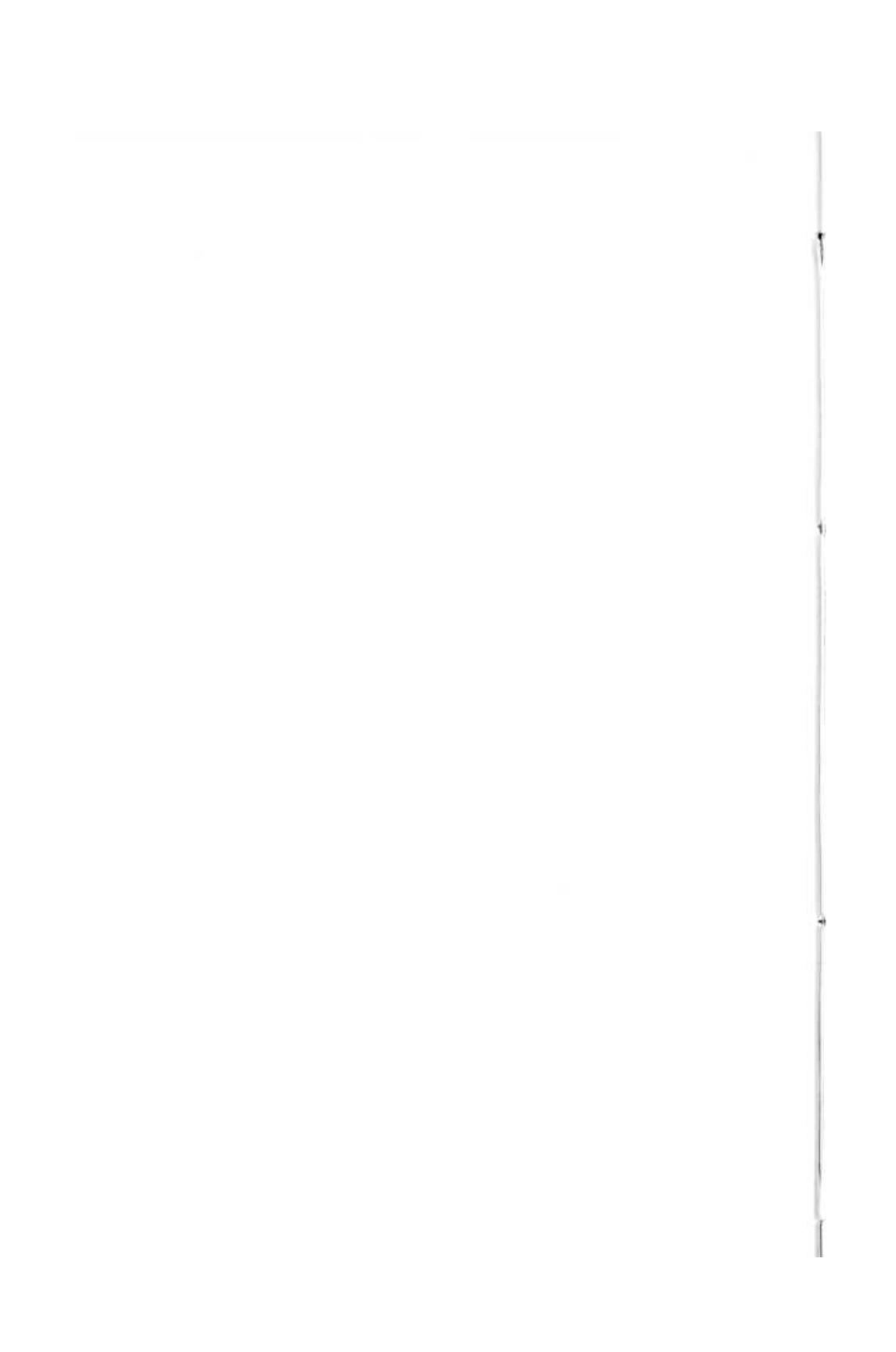
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INTRODUCTION

IN the winter time the Yangtze is a comparatively narrow stream between high banks. In the summer it is miles wide, in places overflowing until it is often impossible to see the limit of its reaching. It is the strangest, most inexplicable river in the world. A river captain who discovers a sand-bar on the up-trip and decides that it is Sunday Island shifting about a bit, returns to find it on the opposite side of the river and all his calculations gone for nought. The same captain anchors his boat in the stream bow-wards against a four-knot current and finds his anchor chains slack because a back-wash holds her static. Thousands of villages are inundated and washed away during flood-time and yet the richness of the Valley makes all losses worth while and the inhabitants come pouring back again as rapidly as the river drops.

The height of the river's mystery is found in the Gorges. One of the greatest naval engineers in the world sat in a junk and watched the current coming down at four knots and the backwash along the bank flowing upwards at the rate of two knots per hour. He shook his head and, "There's nae such river," he said. Other captains after taking ships through the Gorges a few times and watching huge Szechuan junks turning round and round helplessly in the giant whirlpools and again and again seeing their own ships barely miss the rocks of destruction, have decided to seek less strenuous channels of navigation!

There is impressiveness and romance about this wonderful river. The source of it lies in areas marked "uncharted" on the map. A new theory of a late explorer has it that the source is far distant from the spot where it was originally supposed to be and that, perhaps, the Yangtze might finally be found to be the longest river in the world. The great Chengtu plain in Szechuan holds unfathomable and practically untouched wealth. The wealth of priceless articles of trade is there—Oriental silks and tapestries;

minerals of every kind, unexploited; harvest of crops that grow abundantly in the fertile soil; the gifts of animals in hides and furs and bristles, and the rare and costly musk of the musk deer.

The traveller from Shanghai to Chungking who takes time to go southward through Poyang and Tungting Lakes gathers a series of unforgettable pictures of the ports along the river where foreign enterprise is yet new and in its pioneer days—Shanghai, at the gateway; the forts of Kiangyin; Chinkiang, where the Yangtze is crossed by the Grand Canal; Nanking, where ten years ago the Republican guns on Purple Mountain were firing on the last stronghold loyal to the old *régime*; Wuhu, whose new settlement indicates continuing development; Anking, which still surrounds itself with old China's barriers of reserve, and permits no foreign tradesman to enter; Kiukiang, older and disappointed; Nanchang, below Poyang Lake, which is truly old China in all her superstitions and all her laborious hand methods of manufacture.

The Wu-Han cities form the next picture and it is one of bustling action. Wuchang, for many years the nest of political intrigue and the nest of it now; Hankow, so beautiful and restful to the foreigner until the hot days of summer come when the mosquitoes themselves die from the heat; Hanyang, a miniature Pittsburgh with its smoking stacks and busy river-harbour and noise and dirt. This big, triple mart of trade seems to handle every article of trade and thus to form a hub of China—paper mills and cotton mills, the remains of past enterprise in tea, and newer enterprise in all manner of things.

Then the traveller goes aboard another steamer, not so big but twice as friendly, deeper into the country. Around the bend at Yochow where, in the old days, the best bamboo used to grow, but which is now poverty-stricken from frequent raids of lawless bandits and thinks no more of ancient glory. Across huge Tungting Lake and by "the remarkable tree" which grows up out of the surrounding water in defiance of Nature. Then Changsha, which is a vast surprise in its beauty, its distinct character still