

**CHINESE NOVELS, TRANSLATED FROM THE
ORIGINALS; TO WHICH ARE ADDED PROVERBS
AND MORAL MAXIMS, COLLECTED FROM
THEIR CLASSICAL BOOKS AND OTHER
SOURCES. THE WHOLE
PREFACED BY OBSERVATIONS ON THE
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE OF CHINA**

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Chinese Novels, Translated from the Originals; To Which Are Added Proverbs and Moral Maxims, Collected from Their Classical Books and Other Sources. The Whole Prefaced by Observations on the Language and Literature of China by John Francis Davis

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JOHN FRANCIS DAVIS

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*Rev. Canon Mosely,
From the author.*

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&c. &c.

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By JOHN FRANCIS DAVIS, F. R. S.

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OBSERVATIONS
ON THE
LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
OF
CHINA.

AMIDST the general progress which has been made by our countrymen in knowledge, their advancement in subjects connected with the Chinese empire, and its literature, has been very inconsiderable. One is at a loss to account for the almost total ignorance, which previous to the embassy of Lord Macartney prevailed in this country, respecting a people with whom we carried on such large dealings, while the French, for nearly a century before,

had been prosecuting their researches with diligence and success. It is not easy to explain this singular listlessness, by saying that the subject was devoid of interest, for whether we consider the extraordinary nature of the government of China, or the no less extraordinary structure of its language, it would seem that it had been necessary only to know that "such things were," in order to produce much industry in their investigation.

Those of our own nation, from whom the first information on these subjects was to have been expected, were, without doubt, the agents employed by us to superintend our affairs in China. Were it, under no other consideration than that of policy, that these persons had regarded the literature of that empire as deserving of notice, this consideration alone, when we remember the magnitude of the commercial rela-

tions, which as long ago as the middle of the last century subsisted between the two countries, would seem sufficient to have given it an interest, fully adequate to induce research. But either the fancied, or the real difficulties of the language, or both together, effectually prevented its acquisition; besides which, the Chinese themselves were disposed to throw discouragements in the way. As it was necessary, however, that one of the parties at least should understand sufficient of the language of the other, to facilitate their mutual intercourse, the Chinese were content to acquire as many words of English, as would barely serve the purposes of commerce; and thus by degrees arose that base and disgusting jargon, which still continues to be spoken and understood at Canton. This, which was at first a consequence of our general ignorance of their tongue, is now the great

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cause that tends to perpetuate it; for most persons find it more convenient to avail themselves of such an imperfect and confined medium, than put themselves to the trouble of acquiring the language of the country. The natives themselves hand it down from generation to generation in a printed vocabulary, wherein the sounds of our words are imitated, as nearly as they can contrive it, by their own characters.

Thus it was that little or no addition was made for years to our general stock of information regarding China; and until the embassy of Lord Macartney, an imperfect translation of a novel was the only specimen of Chinese literature for which we had to thank our own countrymen. That embassy, however, had its full effect in clearing away much of the obscurity which involved the subject, not only immediately, through the personal observations of those