

EDWARD THOMAS WILLIAMS, 1854–1944

THE passing of Edward Thomas Williams on January 27 at Berkeley, California, where he had long made his home in retirement, removed the last of a full century of Protestant missionary-linguists connected with the China branch of the British and American consular and diplomatic services. One need only recall the significant roles of Rev. Robert Morrison, Dr. Peter Parker, Professor S. Wells Williams and numerous less known clergymen as interpreters, translators and direct negotiators of the China treaties to appreciate the part which Dr. Williams also played for over half a century. Like his distinguished predecessors, Dr. Williams made important early contributions to the translations of Western works into Chinese and Chinese works into English. His books on China enjoyed a wide esteem because of their simple charm of style, their sympathetic portrayal of life and manners in China, and the faithfulness of their descriptions of Chinese institutions. When after a life-time in missionary and official activities in China he accepted the Agassiz professorship of oriental languages and literature at the University of California, he produced his two most notable books, *China yesterday and today* (1923) and *A short history of China* (1928).

Immediately upon landing at Tientsin, North China, in July 1908, the present writer met Dr. Williams, who was serving as U. S. Consul-General at that important port. This began an intimate and highly prized acquaintance for the coming thirty-six years. Born in Columbus, Ohio, October 17, 1854, Williams had prepared for the ministry. He was ordained in the Disciples of Christ Church in 1875, and served in pastorates at Springfield, Illinois (1875–77), Denver (1877–78), Brooklyn (1878–81), and Cincinnati (1881–87). The prevalent missionary urge carried him to China in 1887 in which activities he remained for nine years chiefly at Nanking. Thereafter he served the American government in China in a succession of posts of increasing importance and responsibility, as interpreter to the American Consulate General at Shanghai (1896–98), Chinese Secretary to the American Legation at Peking (1901–08), and Consul-General at Tientsin (1908–09). Williams interrupted this service while employed as translator for the Chinese government at Shanghai from 1898 to 1901, years of extreme political significance as embracing the era of the European aggressions upon Chinese territory, the abortive reform movement of the luckless Emperor known as Kuang Hsü, the resumption of *de facto* rule by the Empress Dowager Tz'u

Hsi, and the Boxer episode. Doubtless his appointment as Chinese Secretary at Peking in 1901 was due to his knowledge of Chinese, a recognized sinologue being needed in the post-Boxer adjustments. In 1909 Williams was called to Washington as Assistant Chief of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs in the Department of State (1909–11), but again returned to Peking as Legation Secretary and twice acted as *chargé d'affaires* August to November 1911 and February to November 1913. In the second of these intervals Dr. Williams represented the United States government on the occasion of the recognition of the Chinese Republic, a matter in which he took a life-long pride.

Again recalled to Washington, Dr. Williams served as the Chief of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs in the Department of State from 1914 to 1918 at the end of which period he accepted the professorship at the University of California. This he held substantively until 1927, thereafter enjoying the title emeritus. His teaching period was again interrupted to serve the United States government as technical delegate to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, and again as special assistant to the Department of State during the Conference on Limitation of Armaments and Pacific and Far Eastern Problems in 1921–22. In his years of retirement after 1927 Edward T. Williams maintained a wide correspondence, a lively and contemporary interest on Far Eastern Affairs, and his home in Berkeley, California, formed a mecca for innumerable friends and former students who continued to hold him in the most affectionate regard. Dr. Williams was an accomplished speaker and lecturer. His interest in scholarship and education was unflagging and his humanity embraced the people of China in a deep affection and insight. No narrow pedant, Edward T. Williams was a sinologue in the truest sense of the word, an authority on the language and literature and people of China.

Besides the two books already noted, Professor Williams published *Recent Chinese legislation* (1904), *The state religion under the Manchus* (1913) as well as many special monographs and reports.* He was a member of

* There follows below a further list of the known publications of Professor Williams supplied me by Mrs. Williams who retains possession of his papers and manuscripts.

"Chinese social institutions as a foundation for Republican government."

Annual Report of American Historical Association for 1916.

"The relations between China, Russia and Mongolia."

American Journal of International Law. 1916.

"The origins of the Chinese."

American Journal of Physical Anthropology. 1918.

"Japan's mandate in the Pacific."

American Journal of International Law. 1933.

numerous societies and received two decorations from the Chinese government (1918 and 1936).

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"Japan and Jehol."

American Journal of International Law. 1933.

"The worship of Lei Tsu, patron saint of silk workers."

Journal, N. China Branch Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. LXVI—1935.

"Agricultural rites in the religion of old China."

Journal, N. China Branch Royal Asiatic Society, Vol. LXVII—1936.

"Chinese conceptions of sovereignty in relation to the practice of extraterritoriality."

Nankai Social and Economic Quarterly. 1936.

"Tibet and Her Neighbors."

U. of C. Publications—Bureau of International Relations. 1937.

"Conflict between autocracy and democracy."

American Journal of International Law. 1938.

"Worshipping Imperial ancestors in Peking."

Journal, N. China Branch Royal Asiatic Society. Vol. LXX. 1939.