

THE HON. JAMES CAMPBELL, M.L.A. No. II.

FROM "TABLE TALK."

Mr Campbell was always fond of travelling. He loves and appreciates scenery. He has visited pretty well every corner of Victoria, and has learnt the secret of the sombre majesty of the plains, the glorious beauty of the forests, the grandeur of the mountains, and the calm dignity of the lakes. Mr Campbell was the first tourist to go from Sale to the Upper Murray river, a journey performed in 1869, and he says that in all his subsequent travels he has never seen Nature more beautiful than in an Australian forest. The undergrowth of a tropical forest is so dense and massive that even where the trees are large, which is not often the case, they are concealed by creepers and parasites, while, Mr Campbell observes, the great sameness of the trees in a pine forest, prevents any other sensation but that of vastness. A Gippsland forest, on the other hand, is infinite in its variety, and in the fern gullies are vistas of a fairyland for outrivalling the fabled groves of the tropics. It was in 1886 that Mr Campbell commenced his famous journey from east to west. Landing at Bombay, he went to the north of the far-famed valley of Cashmere, then returned to India down all the great historic cities, and penetrating close to Thibet on the northern frontier of Sikkim, a journey involving many hardships and some real danger. When travelling in the Himalayas he made the journey from Darjeeling to Sikkim, obtaining with some difficulty a permit from the English military authorities to make the journey at his own risk. He wished to view the Kinchin Junga glacier, and penetrated in the depth of winter to 50 miles above human habitation in the mountains. The cold was awful, and for 17 days he and his 10 coolies had to camp out in the snow. They were caught in an awful storm, and the guides at last refused to go further, so they turned back after getting within a day's march of the glacier, and well it was that they did turn, for the snow continued to fall, and they would have all been buried alive if they had not hurried down to the habitable regions. As it was they missed the path once and had to retrace their steps for some miles. Travelling all through India right to the far south brought him to Tuticorin, where he embarked for Ceylon, and thence on to Singapore. From this port he went to Java, of which he speaks enthusiastically as to its fertility and beauty. Thence to Hong Kong, Canton, Shanghai, and up the mighty Yang-tse-Kiang 600 miles, and thence to Peking. When in Peking

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the late Marquis Tseng¹, hearing from the British Legation that an Australian ex-Minister of a Government was in the city, sent for Mr Campbell. In the course of the interview, the Marquis told Mr Campbell that he had received complaints from an influential Chinese resident in Sydney, stating that no Chinese could obtain justice in Australia, and that they were persecuted and maltreated. The Marquis spoke English well, and Mr Campbell was able to explain the whole position in a way which convinced the Marquis that he had been previously misinformed. Mr Campbell was a little surprised to find so powerful an official as the Marquis living in a very plainly furnished brick villa, such a one as can be seen by the hundred in the suburbs of Melbourne, and can be bought for about £1500. After visiting the Great Wall, Mr Campbell left China, crossed to Corea, and thence on to Japan. He prophesies that the beauty of Japanese scenery, and the picturesqueness of Japanese towns, will make that ancient land one of the chief resorts of future Australian tourists. But he had now approached the journey on which for long years he had set his heart, and that was to travel right across great unknown, or little known, Siberia. There is not a book on Siberia which he has not read, and for years he had nurtured this project in his mind. There is a general impression that before Mr Campbell undertook his journey across Siberia he secured all sorts of official letters of recommendation. Nothing of the sort. His sole credentials were an ordinary passport and a letter of credit on a banker at Vladivostock. Mr Campbell's journey across Siberia has often been described by himself at various lectures. The wonderfully rich country about the Amoor River, a province which was a great lone land until a few Russian settlers went there in and which is still one of the most fertile and sparsely populated regions in the world. As to the incidents of the journey, Mr Campbell is too modest, a traveller to believe that he has any worth telling. He bought a 'tarantass' in Vladivostock for £9 10s, travelled about 6000 miles in it, and then sold it for £3 10-. During all his many months of journeying through Russian territory he rarely had to show his passport, and his only anxiety was the occasional danger of being attacked by brigands during the long night journeys through the pine forests. Not that Mr Campbell was unappreciative of the scenic wonders through which he passed, but simply because he is too restrained in giving expression to the poetry which fills his mind. He has, however, written fully on his travels in the columns of the defunct Daily Telegraph. 'Wanderings in Asia,' being the title of one series of articles, and 'A journey across Siberia' the title of the other. Of these articles Mr Deakin², who is a very high authority on literary matters, said—"They surprised me as I read them with their vigor of thought and style, and their really admirable combination of breadth and color. They are better than even Arnold or Huebner in their fidelity to facts and their forcible presentment of the scenes of Eastern life. They take large views, and their gifts of style and directness and keenness of observation do honor to the author's adopted country." These are strong words of praise, and they have been endorsed by many leading men in Victoria who have read the articles.

Mr Campbell's personal appearance does not convey the impression of a man fond of travel and delighting in the poetry of Nature. Of average height, spare limbed, plain featured, his close cut hair streaked with grey, he looks every inch a cool, steady going man of business. Slightly reserved in manner, his voice is pleasant, and he has a cheerful laugh which takes the stranger by surprise, for the whole appearance of Mr Campbell is somewhat prosaic, though his bitterest political opponents cannot justly term him prosy. Now Mr Campbell is three times a week seated under the fierce light and lens of Parliament, and the newspaper press and public are able to take as many views as they choose of the representative for Benalla and Yarrawonga, but of one thing they may be certain, his attitude will always be that of a straightforward, well-educated, and intelligent citizen, conscious of the responsibilities of his position, and resolved to do his duty without fear or favor.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeng_Jize

² Alfred Deakin, 2nd Prime Minister of Australia, at the time also a Victorian MLA, and a writer/poet