

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCERNING THE BLACK STONES THAT ARE DUG IN CATHAY, AND
ARE BURNT FOR FUEL.

IT is a fact that all over the country of Cathay there is a kind of black stones existing in beds in the mountains, which they dig out and burn like firewood. If you supply the fire with them at night, and see that they are well kindled, you will find them still alight in the morning; and they make such capital fuel that no other is used throughout the country. It is true that they have plenty of wood also, but they do not burn it, because those stones burn better and cost less.¹

[Moreover with that vast number of people, and the number of hot baths that they maintain—for every one has such a bath at least three times a week, and in winter if possible every day, whilst every nobleman and man of wealth has a private bath for his own use—the wood would not suffice for the purpose.]

NOTE 1.—There is a great consumption of coal in Northern China, especially in the brick stoves, which are universal, even in poor houses. Coal seems to exist in every one of the eighteen provinces of China, which in this respect is justly pronounced to be one of the most favoured countries in the world. Near the capital coal is mined at Yuen-ming-yuen, and in a variety of isolated deposits among the hills in the direction of the Kalgan road, and in the district round Siuen-hwa-fu. (*Sindachu* of Polo, ante ch. lix.) But the most important coal-fields in relation to the future are those of Shan-tung Hu-nan, Ho-nan, and Shan-si. The last is eminently *the* coal and iron province of China, and its coal-field, as described by Baron Richthofen, combines, in an extraordinary manner, all the advantages that can enhance the value of such a field except (at present) that of facile export; whilst the quantity available is so great that from Southern Shan-si alone he estimates the whole world could be supplied, at the present rate of consumption, for several thousand years. "Adits, miles in length, could be driven within the body of the coal. . . . These extraordinary conditions . . . will eventually give rise to some curious features in mining . . . if a railroad should ever be built from the plain to this region . . . branches of it will be constructed within the body of one or other of these beds of anthracite." Baron Richthofen, in the paper which we quote from, indicates the revolution in the deposit of the world's wealth and power, to which such facts, combined with other characteristics of China, point as probable; a revolution so vast that its contemplation seems like that of a planetary catastrophe.