

in it. I should say, too, that their conversation is good ; it is certainly bright, and it is very natural and well sustained. Of course, in conversation with Europeans they do not excel ; they are lamentably ignorant of geography, for instance, and they generally annoy the stranger by asking if his country is tributary to China. But in the conversation carried on amongst themselves there seem to be many topics quite as good as geography and the weather, and one hears long, well-thought-out, and well-expressed arguments on philosophic and moral subjects, freely interspersed with quotations from their classics. A Chinaman is perhaps rather too celestial, rather too much up in the clouds and above ordinary mortals, and certainly shows too little interest in the common everyday affairs of this world ; but he is an interesting man to meet at home, and, mingled with the irritation which his superciliousness so often inspires, I often had a feeling of real regard for a man who can aspire to such a lofty standpoint as the Chinaman does, and in his case I felt that it was not all simple self-conceit, for he had in him the pride of belonging to an empire which has stood intact for thousands of years, and which was approaching civilization when we ourselves were steeped in barbarism.