

## OBITUARY NOTICE

### WILLIAM WOODVILLE ROCKHILL

By the death of Mr. William Woodville Rockhill, which took place at Honolulu on December 8, 1914, the United States has lost its senior trained diplomat and the world an intrepid explorer, a master of both the written and spoken languages of Tibet, and the greatest authority, in the West, on the modern political history of China.

Mr. Rockhill was the younger son of Thomas Cadwalader and Dorothy Anne (Woodville) Rockhill, being born at Philadelphia in 1854. On the death of her husband Mrs. Rockhill left the United States with her sons to reside in Paris, where the younger, William Woodville, entered the *École Spéciale militaire de St. Cyr*. On graduating from this college, he entered the *Légion Étrangère* in 1873, serving in Algiers till 1876, when he returned to the United States, and married (December 14) Caroline Adams, sole surviving daughter of J. Washington and Marie Louise (Hewling) Tyson, of Philadelphia. Shortly afterwards he took to ranching in New Mexico, but finding the life not to his liking he sold out and went to Switzerland.

The perusal during his St. Cyr days of Abbe Huc's *Souvenirs d'un voyage dans la Tartarie et le Thibet* inspired him with a strong desire—"the hobby of his life"—to explore this latter country, and all his spare hours in Paris had been spent at the National Library, and devoted, under the guidance of M. Léon Féer, to the study of its written language and of the few works written by Europeans concerning it. These studies resulted in the publication by Leroux, in 1884, of a translation (in French) of the *Prátimoksha Sutra*, or *Le traité d'émancipation*, and in the same year of *The Life of the Buddha*, in Trübner's "Oriental Series".

He realized, however, that if success were to crown the explorations he dreamed of, a knowledge of not only the written but also of the spoken language of Tibet was an essential requisite. With a view to gaining it, and, as he hoped, to obtaining access to valuable documents and works on Tibet in the Chinese archives, he applied for and obtained a position on the staff of the Legation at Peking, being appointed Second Secretary there on April 9, 1884. At Peking he gained the friendship of an intelligent priest from Lh'asa in the great lamasery Yung-ho-kung, with whom during the next four years he studied Tibetan, in which he became a proficient speaker. He also acquired during the same time a good knowledge of Chinese, both written and spoken. Meanwhile, he had been promoted Secretary of Legation on July 1, 1885, and had acted as Chargé d'Affaires in Korea from December, 1886, to April, 1887. In the following year he resigned his diplomatic appointment in China, and started from Peking on December 17 on a scientific expedition, under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, into Tibet, his ultimate objective being Lh'asa. On reaching Baron Tsaidam, however, he was informed that the large Russian expedition which had started the previous year under Prjevalsky had succeeded in reaching Lh'asa. As no scientific object was to be gained by going over the same ground, he revised his proposed itinerary, and decided to make his way into Kamdo (Eastern Tibet), and then, if possible, from Jyéundo to Batang. With the assistance of a powerful chief of the Namts'o Tibetans, he succeeded in reaching Jyéundo, after swimming his horses and yaks across the Dréchu (Upper Yangtze) and crossing it himself in a small yak-hide coracle, but the lamas there obdurately refused to give him guides to go south, or to assist him in hiring pack animals. He resolved, therefore, to leave his baggage with two of his followers, and to start at once

with the remaining two and a guide he had managed to engage. After thirteen days' hard riding he reached the large town of Kanzé; but here he encountered even stronger opposition than at Jyécundo, and would probably have lost his life but for his excellent knowledge of the language. He had to abandon all idea of reaching Chamdo and thence Batang, and had to shape his course south-east to Tachien-lu, which place he reached, via Dawo and Gata, on June 24, and Shanghai on August 20, 1889. As the statement that the Russians had penetrated to Lh'asa the previous year ultimately proved to be false, the abandonment of an attempt to reach that town was a bitter disappointment; but, as he wrote in a letter shortly after his return, Mr. Rockhill found consolation in the reflection that "Prjevalsky tried in 1882 to follow the route I took, but was unable to cross the Dréchu. Szechenyi wished to travel it, but was told no route existed through the country, and was refused permission. The French missionaries have been trying for years to get into it, but without success. South from Namts'ò to Tachien-lu I have been the first foreigner who has ever put his foot in this part of Tibet; and the undertaking was specially difficult because the country is comparatively thickly populated". A detailed account of this journey is given in Mr. Rockhill's *The Land of the Lamas*.

The results achieved on this journey encouraged Mr. Rockhill to believe that he could by a second expedition into Tibet add considerably to our knowledge of that remote region. So soon, therefore, as he had worked up the results of the earlier journey, he determined—again under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution—upon once more visiting Mongolia and Tibet, and endeavouring to traverse the latter country from north-east to south-west, or in other words to try and reach Nepaul or Sikkim from the Chinese province of

Kansu. He started from Peking on November 30, 1891, and as he had learned during his first journey that in that portion of Tibet which is under the rule of Lh'asa opposition to foreigners is much more violent than elsewhere, he endeavoured to steer clear of Lh'asa by striking south, instead of north, of Koko-nor (as he did on his earlier journey), and then due west. Circumstances, however, over which he had no control, forced him to diverge from his proposed route; and when he reached the Namru Valley, not over 30' or 40 miles from the Tengri-nor, and less than a month's travel from British India, and when at very nearly the same spot at which Bonvalot and Bower had been stopped in 1889 and 1891 respectively, his further progress southwards was arrested by the Tibetans, and he was forced once more to turn his steps eastwards to Tachien-lu, which he reached on October 2, 1892. Though the remainder of his journey was not through absolutely unknown country, for his route frequently crossed and sometimes coincided with those of Bonvalot and Bower, and from Ch'am-do was identical with that taken in 1861 by Mgr. Thomine Desmazures, his admirable knowledge of the Tibetan and Chinese languages enabled him to collect much new information of great interest and value.

A very full account of this journey was published by the Smithsonian Institution in 1894, under the title *Diary of a Journey through Mongolia and Tibet*. This, and the earlier journey, gained for Mr. Rockhill the Patron's (gold) medal of the Royal Geographical Society.

On his return to America Mr. Rockhill was appointed Chief Clerk (April 14, 1893) in the State Department; a year later, April 14, 1894, he was promoted Third Assistant Secretary of State. He was nominated Delegate from the United States to the International Geographical Congress of London, 1895, and on February 11, 1896,

he became Assistant Secretary of State. On July 8, 1897, he was appointed Minister Plenipotentiary to Greece, Rumania, and Servia, and held this post till May 19, 1899, when, having applied for transfer on the death of his wife at Athens, he was nominated Director of the International Bureau of American Republics in Washington, a department entrusted with the work of fostering trade between the United States and the several Republics of South America, and maintained by them all jointly. In April, 1900, he married Miss Edith Howell Perkins, of Litchfield, Connecticut. On the relief of Peking by the Allied forces in 1900, he was granted leave to proceed to China as Special Commissioner of the United States, being appointed on February 24, 1901, Plenipotentiary on the part of the United States for the settlement of the Boxer troubles. After signing the Peace protocol on September 7 of that year, he returned to Washington, and resumed his duties as the Director of the International Bureau of the American Republics, retaining this post until, on March 8, 1905, he returned to China as Minister Plenipotentiary. While holding this office he was designated Ambassador Extraordinary to represent the United States at the funeral ceremonies of the Emperor of China, April 24, 1909. During this period of residence at Peking, he was able to render real service to the country in which he had been so long interested. When hostilities broke out in 1904 between Tibet and Great Britain, the Dalai Lama fled to Urga in Northern Mongolia, where he remained, changing his residence from one to the other of the three principal monasteries in the neighbourhood, till after the signature by China and Great Britain, in 1906, of the Agreement modifying the Younghusband Convention of 1904. Realizing that this settlement would facilitate his own return to Lh'asa, the Dalai Lama, as a first step, left Urga in the summer of 1907, and, crossing Mongolia, took up his residence

in the Kumbum Monastery, near Koko-nor. There he received an intimation from the Chinese Government to proceed to Peking for audience, and then so soon as possible return to Lh'asa, where his presence was urgently needed owing to the growing unrest that was spreading throughout Tibet. Accordingly, in the spring of the following year the Dalai Lama left Kumbum to take up his residence at the great Buddhist sanctuary of China, the Wu-t'ai-shan, in Shansi province. He lost no time in sending emissaries to Mr. Rockhill with letters and presents, together with an invitation to visit him. Mr. Rockhill accepted the invitation, and spent a week with him at Wu-t'ai-shan, and he saw him frequently during his subsequent stay in Peking. Mr. Rockhill describes him as "a man of undoubted intelligence and ability, of quick understanding and of force of character; broad-minded—possibly as a result of his varied experiences during the last few years—and of great natural dignity; and seeming deeply impressed with the great responsibilities of his office as supreme Pontiff of his faith, more so, perhaps, than by those resulting from his temporal duties". But he was "quick-tempered and impulsive"; and Mr. Rockhill was able to render him signal service by counsel and advice when the Chinese Government seemed intent on humiliating him, and so to smooth out a situation which at one time threatened to result in serious conflict. On May 17, 1909, he was appointed Ambassador to Russia. While at St. Petersburg he brought out, in collaboration with Dr. F. Hirth, Professor of Chinese at Columbia University, New York, a revised and enlarged edition of a translation into English of the *Chu-fan-chi* of Chau Ju-kua, an account of Chinese and Arab trade during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, of which Dr. Hirth had earlier made a translation, published partly in English, but chiefly in German, in various scientific magazines. On April 24,

1911, he was transferred as Ambassador to Constantinople. In compliance with the customary rule that Ambassadors and Ministers of the United States should tender resignation of their posts on a change of President, Mr. Rockhill placed his resignation in the hands of President Wilson on his election. It was accepted, and his successor was appointed in the autumn of 1913.

Having handed over charge of the Embassy, Mr. Rockhill started at the end of November, 1913, on an expedition overland to China, in order to form for himself an impartial opinion of the general condition of that country under the Republic established as the result of the revolution of October, 1911, visiting Uрга *en route* to study the status and conditions of Mongolia, which had declared its independence of China. His interesting reports, embodying the results of the observations and inquiries made by him in the course of this journey, have been published by the American Asiatic Association in their monthly Journals. While on this mission, the President of the Republic, Yuan Shih-k'ai, pressed Mr. Rockhill to accept the post of Adviser to himself on both home and foreign affairs. This he agreed to do, but on the understanding that he need only reside in Peking during the winter months, and be at liberty to work at other seasons through the Chinese legations abroad; and it was on his first trip to China in fulfilment of this arrangement that he met his death. A cold contracted at San Francisco prior to sailing developed on board ship into so serious an attack of pleurisy that on reaching Honolulu he had to be landed for treatment. The pleurisy was conquered, but he succumbed four days later, on December 8, 1914, to heart failure, that had supervened.

An indefatigable and conscientious worker, he was always busy in the study with his pen during such leisure as his diplomatic duties allowed him. His principal works were:—

- Prātimoksha Sutra, or Le traité d'émancipation.* Leroux, 1884.
- The Life of the Buddha.* Trübner's Oriental Series, 1884.
- Tibet, from Chinese Sources.* Royal Asiatic Society's Journal, 1891.
- Udānavarga, the Northern Buddhist Version of Dhammapada.* Trübner's Oriental Series, 1892.
- The Land of the Lamas.* The Century Co., New York, 1892.
- Diary of a Journey in Mongolia and Tibet in 1891-92.* Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 1894.
- Notes on the Ethnology of Tibet.* Smithsonian Institution, Washington, 1895.
- The Journey of Friar William of Rubruck.* Hakluyt Society, 1900.
- The Chu-fan-chi of Chau Ju-kua.* Imperial Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, 1912.
- Conventions and Treaties with or concerning China and Korea.* 2 vols. Department of State, Washington.

At the time of his death, he was publishing in Japan the Chinese text of Chau Ju-kua's *Chu-fan-chi*, with the original Preface, which had been lost, but which Mr. Rockhill discovered by chance preserved in one of the vast encyclopædias for which China is famous, and in the pages of *Young Pao*, to which he had been for years a regular contributor, what may be considered a supplement to Chau Ju-kua's work—an account, gathered from contemporaneous Chinese writers and dynastic histories, of the relations and trade of China with the Eastern archipelago and kingdoms on the Indian Ocean during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Mr. Rockhill was an Honorary Corresponding Member of the Royal Geographical Society, a Corresponding Member of the Institut de France, and of the Gesellschaft für Erdkunde, and had been a Member of the Royal Asiatic Society since 1882.

ALFRED E. HIPPISEY.