## XXXVII. The Seventh Day Adventist

W. Somerset Maugham

He was a big man, and his bones were well covered. He gave you the impression that he had put on flesh since he bought his clothes, for they seemed somewhat tight for him. He always wore the same things, a blue suit, evidently bought ready-made in a department store (the lapel decorated with a small American flag) a high starched collar and a white tie on which was a pattern of forget-me-nots. His short nose and pugnacious chin gave his clean-shaven face a determined look; his eyes, behind large, gold-rimmed spectacles, were large and blue; and his hair receding on the temples, lank and dull, was plastered down on his head. But on the crown protruded a rebellious cock’s feather.

He was travelling up the Yangtze for the first time, but he took no interest in his surroundings. He had no eye for the waste of turbulent waters that was spread before him, nor for the colours, tragic or tender, which sunrise and sunset lent the scene. The great junks with their square white sails proceeded stately down the stream. The moon rose, flooding the noble river with silver and giving a strange magic to the temples on the bank,  among a grove of trees. He was frankly bored. During a certain part of the day he studied Chinese, but for the rest of the time he read nothing but a New York Times three months old and the Parliamentary debates of July, 1915, which, heaven knows why, happened to be on board. He took no interest in the religions which flourished in the land he had come to evangelise. He classed them all contemptuously as devil worship. I do not think he had ever read the Analects of Confucius. He was ignorant of the history, art, and literature of China.

I could not make out what had brought him to the country. He spoke of his work as a profession which he had entered as a man might enter the civil service, and which, though it was poorly paid (he complained that he earned less than an artisan) he wanted notwithstanding to make a good job of. He wanted to increase his church membership, he wanted to make his school self-supporting. If ever he had had a serious call to convert the heathen there was in him no trace of it now. He looked upon the whole matter as a business proposition. The secret of success lay in the precious word organization. He was upright, honest, and virtuous, but there was neither passion in him nor enthusiasm. He seemed to be under the impression that the Chinese were very simple people, and because they did not know the same things that he did he thought them ignorant. He could not help showing that he looked upon himself as superior to them. The laws they made  were not applicable to the white man and he resented the fact that they expected him to conform to their customs. But he was not a bad fellow; indeed he was a good-humoured one and so long as you did not attempt to question his authority there is no doubt that he would have done everything in his power to serve you.