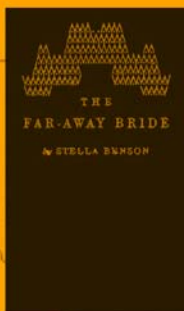


# Women, Writing and Travel

Part 1: The Diaries of Stella Benson, 1902-1933



*From Cambridge University Library*

*Consulant Editor: Marslene Davis, College of William & Mary*



*Adam Matthew Publications*

"Peking must be the most wonderful city in the world and nothing will make me sorry I came. Nobody works awfully hard, it is too hot, and you have a good deal of time to let the wonder of everything sink in. I have made an investment I am glad of in the shape of a halfshare of a horse, and every other day he takes me out, either into the little noisy gaudy streets of the city, or along the cool paved walks that go around the Forbidden City - which is all tiled with gold-coloured porcelain and bristling with yellow dragons and strange curling-upwards roofs, reflected in the moat among the water-lilies."



"Feminist, travel writer, novelist and story writer, Stella Benson left a significant – and often irreverent – record of life in England, the US, Hong Kong and China. Her later works set in China won immediate literary recognition. Even now these more sophisticated works provide an important understanding of the complex cultures who peopled the China Benson knew, one which few other secular Westerners experienced or wrote about.

"Yet her best writing is in her unpublished diaries. In them she records her post-Victorian childhood, her battles against ill-health, her friendships with fellow writers and intellectuals such as Naomi Mitcheson, Virginia Woolf, Sir Reginald Johnston, Eileen Power, and Cornelia Sorabji, her interview with Gandhi, her first-hand accounts of civil war in China and the liberation of travel..

"For scholars in fields from psychoanalysis to women's studies to post-colonialism, and for curious lay people, being able to read these meticulous and often witty accounts of Benson's private and public life from age 10 to her untimely death in Indo-China at age 41 will be an unprecedented feast."

Professor Marlene Davis  
College of William & Mary

Stella Benson was a vibrant writer and diarist whose work and marriage took her all over America, Hong Kong and China. Her eight acclaimed novels include *I Pose*, *This is the End*, *Living Alone* and *Tobit Transplanted*.

We are thrilled to be publishing her complete diaries, 1902-1933. Honest and compelling, Benson's diaries contain her very forthright

opinions on people and events. The diaries are especially rich for 1920-1933: a key period for debates about perceptions of empire, the role of women, and methods of colonial administration.

In April 1920 Stella Benson embarked on an eighteen-month adventure to the Far East, taking work in a mission school and an American hospital in China, and then meeting 'Shaemas' – her future husband, James Anderson. He was an Anglo-Irish officer in the Chinese Customs Service, and they married in London in 1921.

Anderson was then appointed as Assistant Commissioner at the Customs Station at Mengtze in southern China, and the couple were to spend much of the next twenty years in China & Hong Kong.

Benson's troubled health and unsettled life led her to spend hours chronicling her feelings and experiences. In her diaries are detailed accounts of the fascinating people she met on her travels – including friends such as Winifred Holtby, Naomi Mitcheson, Rebecca West, Vita Sackville West and the poet Amy Lowell. The diaries also explore her views on colonial life in Hong Kong, the Treaty Ports, China, America and other political and social issues. In the early 1930s she campaigned vigorously against the brutal and abusive system of licensed brothels in Hong Kong.

This collection contains 42 volumes of diaries plus letters, poems and other loose papers. The final volume concludes shortly before Benson's

sudden illness and death in Indo-China in December 1933. Her unfinished novel, *Mundos*, which she was writing at the time, takes empire, colonialism and nationalism as its central themes.

Part 1: 10 reels plus guide • Spring 2005



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