The Project Gutenberg eBook of Sidelights on Chinese Life, by J. Macgowan

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Sidelights on Chinese Life

Author: J. Macgowan
Illustrator: Montague Smyth

Release date: April 20, 2012 [EBook #39486]

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SIDELIGHTS ON CHINESE LIFE ***

**E-text prepared by
the Online Distributed Proofreading Team
(http://www.pgdp.net)
from page images generously made available by
Internet Archive
(http://archive.org)**

Note: Images of the original pages are available through Internet Archive. See http://archive.org/details/sidelightsonchin00macgrich

---

SIDELIGHTS ON CHINESE LIFE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

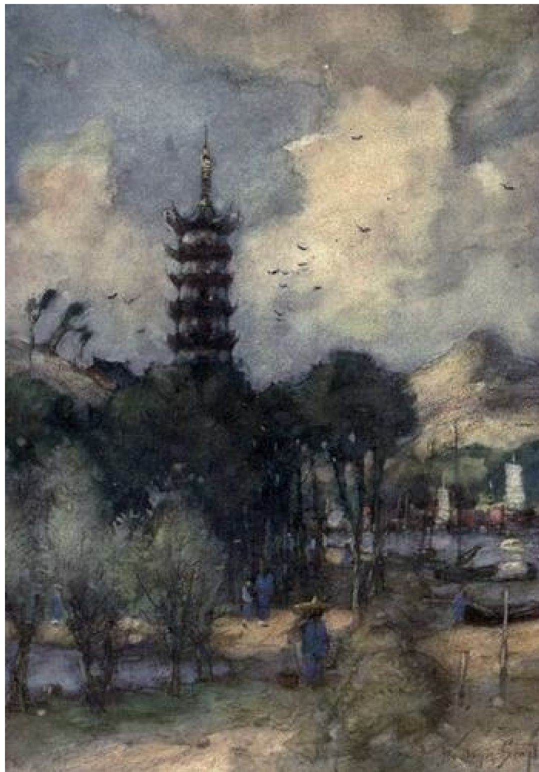
The Imperial History of China

Being the History of the Empire as compiled by the Chinese Historians

SECOND EDITION NOW READY

Enlarged and brought up to date. Royal 8vo, half calf.
£1 1s. net. To be obtained of

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER & Co., Limited,
Dryden House, 43 Gerrard Street, London, W.



GOLDEN ISLAND
(ON THE YANG-TSE).

SIDELIGHTS
ON CHINESE LIFE

BY

REV. J. MACGOWAN

London Missionary Society

AUTHOR OF “THE IMPERIAL HISTORY OF CHINA,”
“A DICTIONARY OF AMOY COLLOQUIAL,”
“PICTURES OF SOUTHERN CHINA,” ETC.

WITH TWELVE ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR

BY

MONTAGUE SMYTH

AND THIRTY-FOUR OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON
KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, TRÜBNER & CO., LIMITED
DRYDEN HOUSE, 43 GERRARD STREET, W.
1907

[*All Rights Reserved*]

RICHARD CLAY AND SONS, LIMITED
BREAD STREET HILL, E.C., AND
BUNGAY, SUFFOLK

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE CHINAMAN	1
II.	FAMILY LIFE	21
III.	CHILD LIFE	43
IV.	RELIGIOUS FORCES IN CHINA	65
V.	SERVANTS	94
VI.	THE ADAPTABILITY AND TENACITY OF PURPOSE OF THE CHINESE	112
VII.	AMUSEMENTS	131
VIII.	THE FARMER	150
IX.	A RAMBLE THROUGH A CHINESE CITY	175
X.	HADES, OR THE LAND OF SHADOWS	201
XI.	A CHAPTER ON SOME OF THE MORE SHADY PROFESSIONS IN CHINESE LIFE	224
XII.	SCHOOLS, SCHOOL-MASTERS, AND SCHOOL-BOOKS	249
XIII.	THE MANDARIN	272
XIV.	PEDDLER LIFE IN CHINA	296
XV.	THE SEAMY SIDE OF CHINESE LIFE	322
XVI.	A TRIP THROUGH THE COUNTRY	346

LIST OF COLOURED PLATES

GOLDEN ISLAND (ON THE YANG-TSE)	*Frontispiece*		
AN IMPERIAL CONFUCIAN TEMPLE	*To face p.*		65
THE WHITE STAR TEMPLE, NANKIN	"	"	89
JUNKS (ON THE YANG-TSE)	"	"	112
NETTING FISH	"	"	129
A FARM HOUSE	"	"	150
A HARBOUR SCENE (HONG KONG)	"	"	158
CHINESE FARMERS	"	"	169
A TEA HOUSE	"	"	225
A TYPICAL VILLAGE	"	"	249
ENTRANCE GATE (NANKIN)	"	"	272
CHINESE LOCOMOTION	"	"	346

UNCOLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS

A CHINESE GENTLEMAN	*To face p.*		1
CHINESE EATING RICE AND DRINKING SAMSHU (WHISKY)	"	"	9
A JOKE	"	"	17
SOME CHINESE BOYS	"	"	21
WOMEN CARRYING BABIES ON THEIR BACKS	"	"	24
AN OLD LADY	"	"	39
LITTLE URCHINS	"	"	46
LITTLE LADS	"	"	46
STUDIES OF CHINESE BOYS	"	"	51
A BOY CARRYING BASKETS	"	"	56
A SEDAN CHAIR	"	"	117
PLOUGHING WITH A WATER BUFFALO	"	"	124
A PASSENGER BOAT	"	"	126
A BOAT CARRYING SEDAN CHAIR	"	"	126
A DRAGON BOAT	"	"	129

A STREET SCENE	"	"	131
ACTORS IN COSTUME	"	"	147
A BARBER AND HIS CUSTOMER	"	"	178
A REFRESHMENT STALL	"	"	184
A STREET SCENE	"	"	194
CARRYING A COFFIN	"	"	201
A BUDDHIST PRIEST	"	"	208
CEMETERIES	"	"	216
A SCHOLAR IN OFFICIAL DRESS	"	"	258
A POLICEMAN	"	"	280
A PEDDLER	"	"	296
A SHOEMAKER AT WORK ON THE STREET	"	"	296
A PEDDLER	"	"	303
A WAYSIDE KITCHEN	"	"	317
FRUIT-SELLERS GAMBLING	"	"	327
A FAMOUS BRIDGE	"	"	361

A CHINESE GENTLEMAN.

To face p. 1.

Sidelights on Chinese Life

CHAPTER I

THE CHINAMAN

The Chinaman a puzzle—Oblique methods—Instances

given—Mind turbid—Shrewd—A bundle of contradictions—No love of truth in the abstract—Hypnotizing power of the Chinese, in business, in foreign official life—Full of human nature—Inability to be thorough.

The Chinaman's mind is a profound and inexplicable puzzle that many have vainly endeavoured to solve. He is a mystery not simply to the foreigner, who has been trained to more open methods of thought, but also to his own countrymen, who are frequently heard to express their astonishment at some exhibition of character, that has never occurred to them during the whole of their oblique life. A Chinese cook who was living in an English family, and who found life so intolerable through some petty devices and schemes of his fellow-servants that he was compelled to resign his situation, was so taken aback at the ingenuity and skill of the manœuvres that had been employed to oust him from his employment that, with flashing eyes and a face flushed with excitement, he said, "I know the Englishman well, I can accurately gauge his mind, and I can tell exactly how he will usually act; but my own countrymen are a mystery to me that I do not profess to be able to comprehend."

This of course was an exaggeration, as there must have been a great deal in his own people that he must have been quite familiar with. He merely meant that there were depths in the Celestial mind that even he had never yet fathomed. Any one who has ever studied the Chinese character must have come to the conclusion that the instincts and aims of the people of the Chinese Empire are distinctly the reverse of those that exist in the minds of the men of the West. An Englishman, for example, prides himself upon being straightforward and of saying exactly what he believes. A Chinaman would never dream of taking that position, simply because it is one that he does not understand, and consequently he could never carry out. A straight line is something that his mind recoils from, and when he desires to effect some purpose that he has before him, he prefers an oblique and winding path by which in a more roundabout manner he hopes to attain his end. [Pg 2]

It may be laid down as a general and axiomatic truth, that it is impossible from hearing what a Chinaman says to be quite certain of what he actually means. The reason for this no doubt arises from the fact that a speaker hardly ever in the first instance touches upon the subject that he has in his mind, but he will dwell upon two or three others that he believes have an intimate relation with it, and he concludes that this subtle line of thought ought to lead the hearer to infer what he has all the time been driving at. One of my servants, for example, had a grievance against another also in my employ. He did not dare to complain of him to me, for he belonged to a powerful clan bordering on his own in the interior, and if anything unpleasant had happened to this particular member through any accusation that might be laid against him, they would have wreaked their vengeance not only upon the man who had troubled him, but also upon the members of the weaker clan who were connected with him.

The direct method that would have been pursued by a foreigner without any regard to consequence, because he has no dread of hostile clans, and because he has the law to protect him in case of need, evidently cannot be adopted by the aggrieved person here, and so he naturally adopts the method that he believes will secure him a redress of his wrongs without any danger to himself or his clan. [Pg 3]

He accordingly appears one morning with that blank expressionless visage with which a Chinaman can conceal his thoughts, and asks permission to return to his home in the country. He had just got news, he says, that a brother of his has suddenly become very ill and is not expected to live, and urgent entreaties have been sent him to come home as speedily as he can. You are rather startled at this sudden demand to be left at a moment's notice without a servant who is necessary to carry on the work of the home; and besides, you have the uncomfortable feeling that this may be one of those obscure but oblique ways by which the Yellow mind is working to secure some end that lies concealed within its fathomless recesses.

You ask particulars, but he has none to give. He simply waves before you a letter covered with strange and weird hieroglyphics, and hands it to you for inspection, though he is aware that you can no more decipher it than you could the wedge-shaped symbols of the Assyrian language, and he declares that he knows no more about the illness of his brother than what is contained in it. As you cannot read the letter, and moreover you would get no light from it even if you could, you look him straight in the face to see if you cannot discover some little ray of light on this perplexing question; but no, it is just as impenetrable as the document he holds in his hands as evidence of the bad news he has received from his home. It is perfectly sphinx-like, and gives no clue to the thoughts that lie behind it. The eyes are liquid and childlike, and just that touch of sadness that harmonizes with his sorrowful feelings has laid its lightest shadow over his features, and you begin to feel that you have been doing the man an injustice by doubting him. [Pg 4]

You have gone through similar processes before, however, and the memory of them inspires you with caution, so you tell him to go away and you will think over the matter. You call another of the servants whom you know to be on good terms with the other, and you ask him if he has heard of the distressing news that has come to his friend. A flash of surprise like a streak of lightning out of a clear sky shoots across his face, which he instantly suppresses, however, and with a calm and unruffled look he says, "I have not heard that any letter has

come, but there may have been one. I have been busy, you know, doing my work, and so have not been told."

This is decidedly suspicious, for if there is one thing that a Chinaman cannot do it is to keep a secret. After a little further conversation with this man he remarks in a very casual off-hand way—

"I have heard that so-and-so had a brother; it is very strange, and I cannot quite understand this business," and after one or two miscellaneous remarks he suddenly looks round, goes to the door, and peers up and down the hall, to assure himself that there is no one looking about. He then walks on tiptoe to the open window, and gives a rapid glance amongst the flowers and shrubs in the garden to see that none of his fellow-servants are there to catch snatches of the conversation, and, still treading like a cat that scents a rat, he comes up close to you, and whispering in your ear he utters just one word, "Examine," and then with a face full of mystery and with the same cat-like motion he vanishes out of the door with a face covered with smiles, and you feel that you are now on a fair way to find out the secret of the hieroglyphic letter and the alarming sickness of the brother.

You "examine" the matter, and you find that the man never had a brother, that the letter was written by a clansman next door, and that the whole plot was devised to get you to rectify wrongs without arousing in the offender a suspicion that he had been informed against. There is consequently no feud and no vendetta, and after a few strong and forceful words as to what may happen if people do not behave themselves, the household returns to its normal state of order and quietness.

In order thoroughly to understand and appreciate the Chinaman, a man must be possessed of large powers of inference, for it is almost certain that what lies apparent in his conduct is not the real thing that he has in view.

One day a Chinaman walked into my study in the free and easy way with which people enter each other's houses in this land, with a basket of eggs in his hand. He was a complete stranger to me, but he talked as glibly to me as though he had been well acquainted with me. He told me that he had brought me a present, that the eggs had been laid by his own fowls, and that though they were too small a present to be accepted by one so much higher than he was, he hoped that I should still condescend to take them from him. "But I do not know who you are, and moreover I do not see why you should make me any present at all." "Oh, I merely wished to do myself the honour of meeting with you, for I have heard others speak with great respect of you, and my wife and I thought that a few eggs from my own farm, though not worthy of your acceptance, would be a little token of the respect in which we hold you."

In spite of all his professions of devotion and esteem for myself, I felt convinced that he had some favour to ask of me; but, true to the peculiarity of the Chinese mind, he kept it at first in the background, and after talking with him for about an hour, and after I had hinted that I had an engagement that would compel me to leave him, he began to stammer out that he was in great trouble with some persons in his village, and as he knew that I had great influence, he had come to me to help him out of his difficulty. The secret was now out, and the basket of eggs and the hour's conversation about everything in the world, except the one subject that he had come miles to discuss with me, were but oblique methods of leading up to the one important thought that was filling his mind.

The Chinese as a rule are a highly shrewd and thoughtful people. They are keen observers of human life as well as of the natural world that lies around them. It is very striking to notice with what intelligence the uneducated countryman, who has never had any education, and whose life has been spent in labours that never call forth any effort of the imagination, will describe the leaves of the different kinds of trees, the habits and lives of a great variety of birds in the region around, and the peculiarities of insect life which they have never studied scientifically, but simply with that keen power of observation which the Chinese seem intuitively to possess.

In spite of all this it is quite safe to say that the Chinese mind is wanting in lucidity, and in the ability of grasping an idea with the same readiness that a Westerner does. This is specially the case with the uneducated, and therefore with the great mass of people. You tell a coolie, for example, to take a letter to the post-office. He has gone there perhaps a dozen times before. He stands and gazes at you with a perplexed look, as though you had told him to go to New Zealand. Knowing this peculiarity of the Chinese mind, you repeat your order, and you ask him if he knows where the post-office is? The blank look becomes more confirmed, and he says, "I'll inquire of some one where it is." As you feel anxious about your letter, you say, "Now tell me what I have asked you to do." "Asked me to do?" he exclaims, and the dense look deepens on his face. "Yes, I have asked you to take this letter to the post- office, the place where you have often gone before. Do you know where it is?" "I'll inquire," he says briskly, as though it was just beginning to dawn upon him that he had some idea where the post-office was. He moves away, and you have doubts in your mind whether your letter may not go astray and never be posted, when the coolie returns with hasty steps and with an anxious look on his yellow face, and inquires of you, "Did you say that I was to take this letter to the post-office?" "I did, and I hope you understand now where it is." "I'll inquire," he says, and vanishes.

This singular feature in an otherwise intelligent mind is a continual source of irritation to a foreigner, who has never had any experience of such turbidity of thought in matters that seem to him to require no exertion to grasp at once. You say to a man, for example, more for the purpose perhaps of having something to say than anything else, “How old are you?” A blank look of amazement comes over his countenance, much as though you had asked him if he had committed murder. “Do you mean me?” he asks. “Yes, I mean you; how old are you?” “How old am I?” and now the idea seems to have filtered into his brain, and the vacant, dazed look is replaced by a slight smile that ripples over his face, and he tells you his age. It is no exaggeration to say that all over this great empire, wherever the above questions have been put, the same comedy has invariably been gone through in getting a reply to them.

This haziness of thought is especially annoying to the medical men who are in charge of general hospitals, where all classes of people come for treatment. One day a woman came to one of these to consult the foreign physician about her health. She was tall and severe-looking, with a face that forbade any attempt to trifle with her. She was evidently a person [Pg 8] that never indulged in a joke, for the lines on her countenance were hard as though they had never been relaxed by any of the pleasantries or humours of life. You could fancy her being a hard-working, industrious housewife, but one that neither husband nor children would ever approach excepting with a certain diffidence and restraint.

Coming to her turn to be treated, the doctor said to her, “What is your name?” This question always seems to paralyze a Chinaman, so that he never answers it at once. The woman’s face was at once convulsed with amazement, and her eyes became staring as she gazed intently on the doctor. “You mean me?” she asked with every line livid with emotion. “Yes, I mean you,” he said; “what is your name?” “You mean my name?” she cried, and she struck her breast with her open hand to make sure that she was the person he meant. “Yes, I mean you; so answer me quickly, as I have no time to waste.” “I have no name,” she answered, with a pathos that seemed to tremble through her voice. “No name!” he said. “What do you mean? You must have a name, everybody has some name or other.” “I have no name,” she answered deliberately, whilst she slowly shook her head as if to give emphasis to her statement. “May I ask,” said the doctor, with a smiling face, “what people generally call you?” “They do not call me anything, for I have no name,” she protested. “Well, when you were a girl what did your mother call you?” “She called me ‘Pearl,’” she said, and now a flash of sunlight came into her face, as no doubt a vision of by-gone days rose before her. “Very well,” said the doctor, “I shall put your name down as ‘Pearl’ in my register,” though if he had only persevered a little longer he would no doubt have got the one by which she was commonly known amongst her neighbours.

[Pg 9] One of the reasons that has led the foreigner to entertain the idea that the Chinaman is incomprehensible arises from the fact that he seems to be an absolute bundle of contradictions. It is the existence of totally diverse qualities in the same person that has made one feel that after an intimate knowledge of him for many years there are still surprises in his character that show the complex nature of his being, and the difficulty of predicting what he will do in the future under any circumstances. He would be a daring man indeed that would take upon himself the *rôle* of prophet about any individual, no matter how well he might be acquainted with him.

CHINESE EATING RICE AND DRINKING SAMSHU (WHISKY).

To face p. 9.

A coolie, for example, is engaged by you to do general household work. He comes to you from an inland country where poverty is the prevailing characteristic of the whole population. Sweet potatoes are the staple food three times a day, year in, year out, helped down perhaps by salted turnip, bean curds and pickled beans—for it is only on special occasions that they have the rare happiness of indulging in the luxury of rice.

He has absolutely nothing excepting what he stands in, and so few cash that no sooner have you agreed to employ him than he at once asks for an advance to buy his next meal. The sum you promised him is princely when compared with what he could earn in his own country, and his mode of living is on a most luxurious scale, when contrasted with the meagre food he had in his native village. Now he has rice every day and fish, and luxuries brought from northern seas, no longer a vision of dreams, but realities that he indulges in every day.

Now, judging from an English standpoint, one would imagine that this poverty-stricken Chinaman, whose experience of want has been so real, would hold on like grim death upon a situation where life has been made so easy for him. But here comes in one of the surprises that often makes the Chinese character so inexplicable. [Pg 10] A month goes by, and one day with the silent tread of his shoeless feet he sidles up to you, and he says he wants to tell you that he is going to leave you. You are astonished, and you ask him, with a look of wonder on your face, what he means and what he intends doing? He is not going to do anything, he declares, and he gives you nine reasons for his conduct, not one of which is the true one, the tenth and real one being hidden away in that mysterious brain of his, and he leaves you. A few days hence you see him loafing about with no apparent means of livelihood, and he is fast reverting to the original potatoes-fed type that he was when he left his country home.

Another point that is inexplicable in the Chinese is his amazing credulity. His character is naturally a strong one, his common-sense of the broad and robust kind. There is hardly any subject in common life where his opinion is not of a healthy, breezy description. It is one of the mysteries of the inscrutable Chinaman that at times he seems to be as credulous as the most unenlightened African that trembles before the decision of the Obi doctor.

In the early years, when the foreigner was an unknown and dreaded character, the wildest and most improbable stories were circulated amongst the common people, and more believed in. A mandarin in a large city in the northern part of the Empire, where the people were inspired with a dread lest they were going to be attacked by the English, took advantage of their credulity by putting out proclamations all over his district, which informed them that they had no reason whatever to fear the foreigners, because, as they had no knee-joints, when they fell down they could not rise up again. This was at once accepted as a truth, and the agitation and alarm from that time passed entirely away.

About the same time, in a very wide and extended district, a rumour arose that the missionaries, when any of their converts died, took out their eyes and made them into [Pg 11] opium. The thing was so utterly absurd and the number of Christians then so very small, that it seemed as though the monstrous report must speedily die a natural death. But this was not the case. It spread with remarkable rapidity through towns and villages and hamlets, and was implicitly believed in not merely by coolies and rough, uncultivated labourers, but also by scholars of high degree and by great mandarins, and for more than twenty years it was a prime article of faith with millions of people.

It is the unexpected that so often happens in Chinese life that has given such an air of mystery to this strange and wonderful people. The very opposite virtues and vices seem to flourish and exist in the same individuals. The Chinese, for example, in ordinary and everyday life have no sense of truth. It is not that they are any worse than other nations of the East. The moment you pass through the Suez Canal and have come upon the confines of the Orient, you realize that truth as it is looked upon in the West does not exist in all the vast and glowing regions beyond.

You are in a new land, and the atmosphere of straightforward honest expression of thought has vanished, and now it seems that, except in the most trivial affairs of life, where concealment is unnecessary, you are in a world where every one has a mask on, and the great aim is to conceal the face that lies behind.

The oblique and angular way by which a Chinese loves to express the intention he has in his mind has no doubt intensified the Oriental disposition to lie, until now he seems to have absolutely no conscience on the subject. A Chinese coolie one day made some statement to me that I knew to be false. I was exceedingly annoyed at this, and so told him, and yet I could not help being amused, for the look of childish simplicity and artlessness that beamed [Pg 12] over his face was so real and natural that I could not but admire the perfect acting of this rough, uncultivated fellow. “You are mistaken,” he said to me, “when you accuse me of telling you a falsehood, for I assure you that I never told a lie in all my life.” I instinctively thought of a picture that appeared in *Punch* many years ago, where two rough miners stood by the roadside, one of them having a kettle in his hand, which was to be given to the one that could tell the greatest lie. A person comes along who asks them what they are talking about? When told, he was shocked, and declared that he had never told a lie in his life, and he was rather taken aback when the kettle was handed to him, and he was told that he rightly earned it. I thought if only I had had a kettle at hand I would have passed it over to

him and told him the legend.

Now the contradictory element in the Chinaman's character comes out particularly strong in connection with this national defect of untruthfulness. A lie to him has no moral side, it is simply a display of cleverness, and the more perfectly it succeeds the greater is the applause it elicits; and yet there are occasions when the Chinaman's word is as good as his bond, and is as much to be relied upon as that of an Englishman who may have gained a reputation for integrity and honour.

A Chinese merchant, for example, makes a contract months before to deliver so many chests of tea at a certain rate. The market in the meanwhile rises, a dearth has suddenly occurred in the foreign trade, and the buyer finds that if he keeps his engagements he will lose thousands of dollars. He never for a moment hesitates as to what he shall do; he does not even attempt to get the purchaser to make an advance upon the terms agreed to. The tea comes down the river from the mountain side on which it is grown, over rapids and down through whirling gorges, and away from the pure breezes of the hillside, and it is brought to the city where the merchant lives, and is handed over to him with as scrupulous a care as though he were being paid the advanced price that the later teas are getting.

It is no uncommon thing for foreign merchants to bear testimony to the perfect honesty of the Chinese with whom they may have large business transactions, and one manager of a banking concern even declared in public that, though business extending over hundreds of millions of taels had been transacted with Chinese, the bank had never suffered by one single defaulter. This is all the more extraordinary, and is one of the startling perplexities in the Chinese character, since we know that in ordinary business life one has to keep one's weather eye open or he will find himself cheated most unmercifully.

In spite of the complex nature of the Chinese, and the veiled way in which that mysterious brain of his works, there is no doubt but that there is a fascination about him to the men of the West such as none of the other nations of the East possesses. It is not because he is handsome, for, taking the ordinary run of Chinese that one sees in the streets, they are entirely wanting in all the elements of beauty that constitute the standard of the West.

The features of the face, with the exception of the eyes, have not a single good one amongst them. The cheek-bones of the typical Chinaman are high and protruding; the nose is flat, as though the original progenitor had had his bruised by falling on a fender and had transmitted it flattened and disfigured through successive generations, and the mouth, too, is large and sensuous looking. In addition to all this there is a yellow strain that lies as a foundation colour through all the others that nature or the burning sun lays on, and the effect is not at all a pleasing one. That there are really handsome women in common life and amongst the more refined classes, and that there are good-looking men in all grades of society is undoubtedly true, but they are by no means common. The great mass of the people are exceedingly plain-featured and unattractive, and they are wanting, too, in those delicate and refined graces that of themselves are sufficient to give a charm even to a personality that is otherwise anything but pleasing.

The attraction lies in the people themselves, and without any effort on their side the foreigner feels himself drawn by a kind of hypnotism towards them. You cannot explain this and you cannot tell the reason why. A rude, rough-looking coolie comes in, and you do not feel repelled by him as you would were the person a countryman of your own who had suddenly appeared out of the slums. A man has cheated you, and you know that he has, and though you may at first feel indignant, it is not long ere you are laughing at the whole affair because of the grotesque side that almost invariably accompanies such a transaction. A person comes to see you about whom you are suspicious. You stand on your guard, and you put on your coldest and most reserved air, as you ask him to be seated. The Chinaman acts as though he were quite oblivious of your state of mind. There is a smile upon his face that travels over the rough hollows of his expansive countenance, and spreads to the back of his neck, and seems in some mysterious way to vanish down his long tail. No amount of coldness can long resist the eyes that are flashing with good humour and the features that are lighted up with such a pleasant look. Insensibly you begin to thaw, and before you are aware of it you are talking with him on the most friendly terms. You laugh and chat with him, and when he leaves, you accompany him to the door, and with the usual polite phrase to the parting guest, you entreat him "to walk slowly, and come again as soon as he can." Ten minutes after he has gone, your old suspicions revive, and you wonder at yourself in being such an egregious fool as to give yourself away as you have done. The fact is, it was the nameless something about the man that worked the miracle, and now that the bright black eyes have gone, and the moorland of smile has vanished, and the hypnotism no longer works, you come back to the old thoughts that you had before, which you are certain after all are right.

Circumstances of this kind are of exceedingly frequent occurrence. You go into a bank that has a large business. The manager is an energetic, shrewd business man. He is full of schemes and plans to promote the interests of the establishment, and people speak of him as being the cause of the prosperity that is now giving it a golden reputation. The real man who lies at the back of all this success is the Chinese compradore. He is a most unpretentious man, and if you visit him in the little room that he uses as an office, you would be anything but struck by him. His clothes are of a very common description, rather slovenly and untidy, and his shoes are slipshod. He is perhaps smoking a long bamboo pipe of vile-smelling native

tobacco, but this quiet, unassuming Chinaman is the force that lies behind the business that brings in such large dividends to the shareholders. He has the whole of the markets in his brain, he knows which of the clients of the bank are prosperous and which are tottering on the brink of bankruptcy. He finds out to whom amongst his countrymen loans may be made with safety, and he will know by a single glance at documents that have been drawn up in the hieroglyphic language of the Chinese of what value they are for the purpose of negotiating large monetary transactions. No bank in China, and no large business firm could exist for a month without its compradore.

The hypnotic influence of the Chinaman is seen in almost any direction in which you like to turn. The mistress of a home is as wax in the hands of her cook, whose words, as far as the table is concerned, are a law that even she would be very chary of opposing. A foreigner engages a Chinese teacher, and ere long he comes so thoroughly under his influence that he will accept every word that he says about Chinese subjects, will repeat his very mistakes, and will refuse to listen to any criticism that outsiders may make either regarding his scholarship or his methods of teaching.

Perhaps the most conspicuous instance of the dominating influence of the Chinaman is seen in the foreign Consulates. In each of these there is a Chinese official employed that is called a writer. He is a gentleman and a member of the literary class. His duties are to write dispatches in Chinese to the mandarins and to be the one connecting link between the native authorities and the particular foreign Consul in whose service he happens to be. All petitions or complaints from the Chinese have to go through his hands, so that his position is one of great responsibility and power.

If the Consul happens to be a man of strong, independent character he will hold his own, and the business of the Consulate will be in a large measure under his own control. If he is, however, easy-going or of average intellectual ability, he comes at once under the hypnotizing influence of the wily self-contained Chinaman, who before long becomes the master spirit in the office. This fact is so far realized by the leading mandarin of the place that he actually subsidizes him to influence the policy of the Consul to be favourable to him. A hostile writer could so easily influence his mind against the former, and cause such strained diplomatic relations, that he would incur the resentment of his superiors and be dismissed from his office.

I have known a case where the whole policy of a Consulate was dictated by the writer, who was a clever, intriguing scamp. All Chinese documents had to pass through his hands, and it depended upon the amount of the bribes received whether any of them got a dispassionate investigation at the hands of the Consul. His reputation became so bad that he was finally asked to resign, but he did so with a very comfortable fortune that enabled him to take a commanding position amongst the leading men in his neighbourhood.

A JOKE.

To face p. 17.

In whatever direction one likes to take the Chinaman, he seems to have an hypnotic power that secures, if not favour, at least attention. An English mother takes her little girl, a delicate, fragile little morsel, with blue eyes and golden hair, and she puts her into the arms of one of her coolies to amuse and care for her. He is about as ugly-looking a specimen as you could pick out. He has large, uncouth features and hair unkempt, and the general air of a rowdy. You would naturally suppose that the refined-looking little mortal would shrink

from him, but nothing of the kind happens. Her eyes glisten, and she jumps into his arms with alacrity, and by and by you will see her with one arm round his neck and looking with pleasure into his face, full of the most perfect content.

There is no doubt but that one secret of the extraordinary power that the Chinese undoubtedly have is the very large amount of genuine human nature with which as a race they are endowed. The Chinaman is a person that is full of fun. It would seem as though a sense of humour lay at the basis of his character and tinged everything with its subtle influence. A joke with the Chinaman is a solvent that disperses anger and drives away passion from the heart, and makes the broad, uncouth faces shine with a light, like sunbeams playing upon the rugged sides of a hill. If the Chinese had been a nation of sombre, gloomy people, without a gleam of humour in their natures, they would have been a positive peril to the world. As it is, the genial strain that is the woof and warp of the Celestial’s being makes him a person that can win his way into the hearts of strangers, and slowly dissipate the prejudice that they at first have, because of his homely and unattractive features, and the yellow hue that tinges his skin with a most inartistic colour. [Pg 18]

He can be very cruel when the passion is upon him, but under ordinary circumstances he is full of kindness and sympathy, and he will exercise these qualities in such a genial way that one’s heart feels drawn out towards him. When one gets beyond the outside formalities and into the inner life of the people, and beyond the crust of selfishness that heathenism has caused to gather round their hearts, one discovers a fund of possible human virtues that under the influence of Christianity will expand and develop so that the nation that the world has been accustomed to look upon with a smile, and as simply an ingenious puzzle that the West has never been able to put together, will turn out to be amongst the most fascinating and most attractive of the peoples of the earth.

There is one feature about the Chinaman that, from a Western point of view, is a most disappointing one, and that is his apparent inability to be thorough. The watchword of the West is “thorough,” and in every department of life the aim is to do everything as perfectly as human hands or brains can make them. Now in China there is no such ideal motive anywhere to be found. A workman, for example, will make some exquisite work of art, and yet he will finish off some part that is not obvious to the eye in the most slovenly and inartistic manner. You order a hardwood table, to be inlaid with pearl, and after weeks of patient toil and most elaborate workmanship, that will bear the keenest investigation, you find the legs, or perhaps the underside of the table, finished off in a slovenly, careless way, more suited to an article that was intended to be used in the kitchen. One is being continually provoked by Chinese workmen bringing in things, that have been ordered, without proper finish. You remonstrate with them, and they look at you with amazement. They are amused at your being annoyed at something which the turbidity of the Yellow brain [Pg 19] never discovers as being at all wrong. A broad smile illumines their faces, and they say, “Oh, well, never mind, for after all it is a matter of no importance; let it go.”

This tendency of the Chinese mind is visible in every direction. You arrange with a builder for some work to be done. You impress upon him that the matter is urgent. You give him your reason for thinking this, and he agrees with you, and you finally settle with him a near day when he will have his workmen assembled and operations will be begun. As the Chinaman’s brain is apt to work slowly, and it is difficult to get him to grasp a consecutive statement of any length, you go over the whole thing to him once more, and finally you make him repeat in his own words the ideas you wish him to carry out. Everything now seems plain, and although doubts will flash through your brain, you dismiss them at once as unreasonable, and you look with certainty to the contract being carried out.

The day arrives and you proceed to the spot, expecting to see a hive of busy workmen, but not a soul turns up. You send for the builder, and you ask him how it is that he has broken his agreement with you. He smiles and looks amused that you should be in such a hurry. He cannot understand it, for the difference of a day or two, or a week even, is such a trivial matter in this land, that the Chinese are constantly wondering why a foreigner gets excited if a thing is not done at the precise time that has been agreed upon.

The fact is the great Eastern Sun is in his eyes, and his rays have entered into his blood, and the languor of the Orient is upon him, so that time marches by and he feels that he dare not attempt to keep step with it. To be efficient and thorough means intensity, but that the Chinese race will not attempt. [Pg 20] Some writers have predicted that a day may come when, inspired by a spirit of war, they will flash their swords in a wild conquest of the West. This is a dream that will never be realized. Both by instinct and by ages of training, the Chinese are essentially a peace-loving people. The glory of war is something that does not appeal to them. Trade, and commerce, and money-making, and peaceful lives are the ideals of the race. No sooner is a clan fight begun, or a war with another nation, than the air at once resounds with the cry, “Mediate,” “Mediate.” Mediation is in the very blood of the nation, and the man who is a successful mediator is one that wins a golden reputation for himself.

What the West has to fear is not the warlike spirit of the Chinese, which has never been a very important factor in their past history, but their numbers. They are a people that multiply rapidly, but through the operation of Fung-Shuy and other endless superstitions, the resources of China have never been allowed to be developed so as to support the huge population. Large numbers of people have consequently been compelled to go abroad to

earn a living.

These, as far as the native populations have been concerned, have rarely been desirable immigrants, but this is especially the case with the great nations of the West. The Chinese are a strong race, and can live in comfort, and even luxury, on incomes that would mean starvation to American or Australian workmen. The battle of the future with the Yellow race will not be fought on any battlefield, but in the labour markets of the nations that they would invade.

SOME CHINESE BOYS.

To face p. 21.

CHAPTER II

FAMILY LIFE

Chinese character studied in the home—How marriages are arranged in China—Love of husband and wife must be concealed—Daughters go out of clan, sons remain—Story of a famous community in former days—Solidarity of family—Story of general accused of treason—Disposal of sons—Occupation of women in homes—Wife-beating—Suicides of wives—Women treated as inferior—Filial piety, views on—The famous book describing the twenty filial sons—Filial piety not extensively carried out by the Chinese.

If one desires to understand the Chinese, he must study the family life, for there we find the secret for much that is amusing and perplexing in their character. In all the long years of Chinese history, the ideal of the family has been an exalted one. Ancient sages have dealt with much eloquence upon it, and it has been made the model upon which the State has been built up. It is declared in books written on China that the Chinese Government is a patriarchal one, the meaning of which, put into simpler language, is that the system by which this vast and ancient Empire is ruled has been borrowed from any one of the countless homes that exist throughout the land. It has been plainly stated by Confucius, more than two thousand years ago, that a man that did not know how to rule his home was quite unfit to govern a kingdom.

That the family ideal is held in the highest honour by every class of society is evident from the fact that every one that can by any possibility scrape together the amount required to be paid to the parents of the young girl, gets married; whilst for every woman, without any regard for her personal appearance or even for her infirmities, when the marriageable age

comes round, a marriage is arranged, and she is carried to her husband's home with as much ceremony as though she were the most beautiful woman in the land. If a woman does not get married it is her own fault or that of her family, who for selfish or other reasons fail to make the necessary arrangements for her, and never because her features are uncomely or her complexion bad, or because she has some bodily infirmity that in England would condemn her to a spinster's life, though she lived to the age of Methuselah.

Let us now take the case of a family, such as one may see anywhere, and look at the peculiar way in which it is built up and developed in accordance with the antique methods that seem dear to the Yellow brain in this land. A young man is going to be married. The parents have decided that question for him, and they have called in a middle-woman, who does all the selecting and all the courting that is possible in China, and by her intrigues and falsehoods, the girl that is to be his bride is settled for him absolutely, without any power of appeal from the sons or the parents should they discover by and by that the young lady would be an undesirable acquisition when she came into their home.

With us it is an accepted axiom that to secure the happiness of the married couple, there must be love and there must be a thorough acquaintance with each other. The Chinese hold that all that is Platonic nonsense, and is the reasoning of a barbaric mind that has never come under the benign influence of the sages and teachers of the Celestial Empire. They declare that neither of those two things are requisite, and they point to China, where marriage is the rule in social life, and where a Divorce Court does not exist in all the length and breadth of the land, as a convincing evidence that love at least is not at all a requisite for marriage. The young man and his wife then begin their married life without any knowledge of each other. They have never seen each other, and they have never dared to inquire from their parents what their future partners were like. To have done so would have filled the hearts of their fathers and mothers with a shame so intense as to be absolutely unspeakable.

Their first look into the faces of each other, after the bride has been carried with noise of music and firing of crackers in the crimson chair into the home of her husband, must be one in which is concentrated the agony and passion of two hearts, trying to read their fate for the years that are to come, from what a bashful glance at each other's faces can tell them. If either of them is disappointed, the wave of despair that flashes through the heart is hidden behind those sphinx-like faces, and no quivering of the lips and no glance of the coal-black eyes betrays the secret that has sprung up within them.

They are both conscious that their marriage is a settled fact and that there is no possibility of its ever being annulled, and so with the heroic patience that the Chinese often show in ordinary life, they both determine to make the best of things, knowing that in time love will grow, and tender affection for each other will ripen amid the trials and disciplines of life through which they will have to pass together.

The years go by, and without daring to show by word or look to the rest of the world that they love each other, the deepest and the purest affection has sprung up in their hearts. The Chinese language is full of tender epithets and phrases full of poetry to express the emotions of love, but the husband and wife may never use any of these excepting behind closed doors where none can hear them but themselves.

In the course of time the family grows in numbers, and three sons and as many daughters are born. There was indeed another girl, but as it was considered that there were enough of them in the family, she was put to death immediately after her birth, so she was never counted. As the years rolled by, the children grew up and the boys were sent to school, whilst the sisters were taught household work, such as cooking, mending and embroidery. At last, when these latter arrived at the age of eighteen, the services of middle-women were called into requisition, and they were severally carried into other clans, for no person may marry a member of his own, even though these may be counted by the thousands.

After a few years more, the same process was pursued with regard to the sons, and three young brides were brought into the family circle to add to its members and to increase its dignity and importance. And here it is that we see the wide difference in the Oriental and Western conception of the family. The latter believes in the hiving off of the children and the formation of new homes, until finally very often only the old father and mother are left solitary and alone in a house that used to resound the livelong day with the sounds of laughter and merry voices.

The ideal of the former is to keep the sons in the home. They seldom if ever leave that to start housekeeping for themselves. The daughters go out and are lost to the clan, and are no longer looked upon as belonging to it; but, on the other hand, their places are taken by the brides that come from other clans, and so the balance is preserved. It is no uncommon thing to meet with homes where fifty to a hundred people are housed in one spacious compound, and where four generations of men, with their sons and grandsons, a motley group where the sires of the home, with their hoary flowing beards, and the infants in arms live in the common home.

It is recorded in Chinese history, that in early days there was a famous branch of a well-known clan that numbered several thousand people, the descendants of nine generations, that were all under the control of the chieftain of the clan, and lived together in a series of

large compounds, that resembled a miniature walled city. The story went abroad that the whole of this community lived in the most complete harmony. The men never had any disagreements and the voices of the women and children were never known to be raised in angry dispute. The very dogs even, touched by the general atmosphere of peace that reigned over the miscellaneous crowds that swarmed in this miniature town, seemed to lay aside their natural ferocity, and all quarrelling and fighting had disappeared, and they lived in the utmost harmony and contentment.

A WOMAN CARRYING BABY ON HER BACK.

A WOMAN CARRYING BABY ON HER BACK.

To face p. 24.

Rumours of this wonderful settlement had spread throughout the province, and had been carried by travellers to the palace of the Emperor. Being somewhat concerned as to the truth of these, he determined to visit the place, and see for himself if the facts were really as they were stated. Accordingly on his next tour to the great mountain Tai-Shan, to worship God from its summit, which the kings in those days were accustomed to do, he called at this famous establishment. Never had such a gorgeous retinue stopped in front of its doors. There was the Emperor in his vermilion chair, carried by bearers dressed in the royal livery of the same colour. In front marched a detachment of the Household Guards, great stalwart men, that had been selected from the bravest that the fighting province of Hunan could supply. Behind, in a long and splendid train, were the highest nobles in the land, who were there to attend to the wants of their Lord and Master, and to see that every strain of anxiety

should be removed from the royal mind. Further in the rear was a small army of servants of every description, and cooks in abundance prepared to serve upon the imperial table every delicacy and luxury that China itself could provide, or that could be procured from other countries.

The prince of the clan received the Emperor on bended knees, and then he was graciously allowed to stand up and conduct him over his little kingdom. His Majesty, who had a keen common-sense mind, examined very minutely into every detail of the life of this unique community.

He was perfectly satisfied with everything that he saw, and just before leaving, whilst he was having some refreshment, he asked the chief what system he employed to ensure such perfect order and harmony in such a large and varied establishment, where even the very dogs seemed to have caught the infection, and to have lost the quarrelsome disposition natural to them.

He at once sat down, and taking up a pen he proceeded to fill a page with Chinese hieroglyphics. Handing it to the Emperor on bended knees, he told him that he would find there the secret of the source from whence the love and unity that prevailed was to be found. With a good deal of curiosity his Majesty glanced over the document. To his astonishment he discovered that the writing was composed of one hundred identical words, whose meaning was “Forbearance.” “It is by forbearance in a hundred different ways that this great company of people have arrived at its present harmony,” explained the prince. “Forbearance has been a mighty force with us, and has helped us all to subdue our passions so that we have been able to bear with the infirmities of one another.”

The Emperor was so pleased that he took his pen and wrote out a sentence expressive of his admiration for the masterly and statesmanlike manner in which so large and varied a community had been ruled with such splendid results to the country, and ordered it to be affixed over the main entrance, so that every one should know that this great and harmonious establishment possessed the royal approbation and protection.

It will be thus seen that a family in China has a much larger meaning than it has with us. It is by no means the narrow thing it is in the West, but spreads beyond the limits that are tolerated there. It in reality includes the members of the collateral branches of either the father or the mother, and these are often spoken of as though they were members of the same home. A young fellow with whom you are acquainted introduces another about the same age. You ask him who he is, and without a moment’s hesitation he says that he is his younger brother. For the moment you feel perplexed, for you know as a fact that he never had a brother. After a little further probing of the matter, you discover that he is the son of his father’s younger brother, in fact his cousin. You ask him why he did not say so at the beginning, and thus save all misunderstanding. “But he is my brother,” the man repeats, with an amused stare on his face at the density of the foreigner.

The intimate union that exists between the family so-called and those nearest of kin makes a perfect tangle in Chinese relationships, and leads to some very amusing and ludicrous developments. This is rendered all the more easy because the Chinese marry young, oftentimes repeatedly, and not uncommonly late in life, and so it happens that one occasionally meets an elderly man who addresses as his grandfather a young fellow who is not half his grandson’s age.

The family basis that is thus broadened to include the nearest collateral branches is real and effective. The tie that binds the various members together is no merely sentimental bond. A particular member of the family, for example, becomes wealthy. He has perhaps gone abroad and amassed a considerable fortune, and he returns to his old home to enjoy it amidst his kindred. In one sense it is his own to dispose of as he thinks best, and yet every member of the extended family feels that he has a proprietary right to the blessings that it brings with it. They gather round him to give him a hearty welcome, and whilst they do so every heart throbs with the expectation that any pecuniary difficulties from which they may have been suffering will be removed as soon as their cases have been made known to their wealthy relative.

But it is not simply in cases of good fortune that the solidarity of the family is proved. It is seen most conspicuously when any misfortune comes on any individual in it. Then all the rest are more or less affected by it. A man, for instance, breaks the law, and in order to avoid being arrested, flies from his home. When the officers come to take him they can find no trace of him. One would naturally suppose that these men would return and report to the mandarin that the criminal had fled, and that the whole process of law would be stayed until the culprit himself could be apprehended, but that is not so. They proceed to arrest any male member of the family that they can lay their hands upon, whether it be a brother or a cousin or a son, and carry him to the mandarin, who keeps him in prison until the real offender has been caught.

An Englishman would say that is unjust, and if he were present when the policeman made his capture he might possibly protest against the illegality of the seizure. They would simply assure him that they were quite within their rights. The man they had arrested, they would say, was a member of the offender’s family, and as they were all in the eye of the Chinese law responsible for each other, they were quite justified in arresting any one in it, and

keeping him in prison until their relative who had broken the law was either captured or had delivered himself up to justice.

The laws of China are all based upon the assumption of the solidarity of the family, and that in its prosperity or adversity all members of it must take their share. Chinese history abounds with the most terrible instances of the operation of this law. [Pg 29]

On one occasion, a general in command of a division of the army, fancying that he had been slighted by the Emperor because he had not been rewarded as he thought his services deserved, began to intrigue against the dynasty and to plot for its overthrow. As he was a famous man and had rendered signal services to the State in many a brilliant campaign, it was some time before any suspicion of his treasonable designs were at all entertained by any one. At length, rumours faint and uncertain began to be whispered about. These grew in intensity, until ere long the proofs of the terrible conspiracy were so clear and definite that there could be no question as to the man's guilt. He had been betrayed by a confederate who was deep in his confidence, and who was terrified at the fearful consequences that would happen to him were his guilt discovered. He consequently determined to save himself by the sacrifice of his friend. In the small hours of a dark and stormy night a small body of chosen troops surrounded the house of the general, who was seized and hurried off to the execution ground, where by torchlight his cries and his sorrows, as far as this world was concerned, were speedily put an end to.

But the tragedy had only begun with the death of the unfortunate conspirator. Revolution is a word of such a dread import in China, that it can be expiated only by the death of the offender and by every member of his family. As the general was a noted man, the Emperor decided that four generations on the father's side and four on the mother's, in all eight generations of absolutely innocent people, should be slaughtered without any trial and without any opportunity of defending themselves.

The murderous edict was at once drawn up and signed by the vermilion pen, and soldiers were sent out post haste to execute the decree, lest any of the unfortunate victims should escape. And so it came to pass that eight generations of people, without distinction of age or sex, were set upon and ruthlessly murdered. The old man whose footsteps were tottering to the grave, and the baby still in its mother's arms; the matron in the midst of her family, and the young girls full of spirits and with the expectation of many happy years before them, without a moment's warning were hacked and stabbed to death, until not a single member of the clan was left alive to tell the tale. [Pg 30]

A Chinese family is in some respects a very interesting sight. The parents in this land are passionately fond of their children, especially the boys, and deny themselves for their sakes, and indulge them to such an extent that many of the lads when they grow up become anything but a credit to their homes. In the well-to-do families, the sons go to school from the time they are seven or eight till they are fifteen or sixteen, when, if they are not planning to be scholars, arrangements are made for them to go into business, and they become clerks or book-keepers or assistants in shops.

When the home is a poor one, the lads begin their life at a very early age; there is no schooling planned for them. As soon as they can handle a rake, they are sent out to collect firewood for the home. By and by, as they grow in strength, a pair of baskets and a bamboo carrying-pole are given them, and their life as coolies may be now said to have begun. The coolie in China may be said to be the unbought slave that does the rough and menial work of the Empire, and in large numbers of cases performs the labours that the beasts of burden do in our home lands.

The girls until they are five or six are allowed to run about the house and amuse themselves with the simple enjoyments that childhood is so ingenious in inventing. After that comes the serious business of foot-binding, when for several years they have to endure the most agonizing pains during the hideous process of maiming and distorting the feet, a procedure that nature never ceases for a single day to protest against. There is no question but that whilst this cruel custom is so dreadful that there is no language strong enough to condemn it, it has undoubtedly had the effect of developing in the woman's character a heroic fortitude, and a power of endurance that enables her to bear up against many of the ills and trials that women are called upon to suffer during the course of their lives. [Pg 31]

From the standpoint of the West, a girl's life in China is a very monotonous one. She has no dolls to while away her idle moments. She never goes out to school, where she might meet other girls and give free play to her exuberant spirits on the playground, or enjoy the fun and jollity that girlhood knows so well how to appreciate. She may never take a walk, or stroll out in the moonlight, or ramble along the seashore, or race up and down the hillside. Her place is in the home, in the stuffy, ill-ventilated rooms, where she eats out her heart in the dreary monotonous life to which custom condemns her, and where her sole view of the great world outside is through the narrow doors through which, when no one is looking, she may catch a glimpse of the moving panorama that passes by them.

No wonder that the one day that to her is full of romance and poetry is that on which the troupe of actors erect their boards right in front of her house, and perform some comedy that fills every one with fits of laughter, and lets her see a phase of life that she never dreamt existed until these merry rogues acted it with such realistic power before her. The

passion for theatricals in China is a symptom of the unrest and absolute weariness at the intolerable sameness that characterizes heathen life in this land.

After a careful study of the family life of this great people, one reluctantly comes to the conclusion that it is anything but a happy one. The main cause for this is the absence of mutual love when the married life begins, and the lower position that the woman occupies in the estimation of the men everywhere. That there are happy homes where hearts are knit to each other by true devotion and affection is undoubtedly the case, but they are the exception and by no means the rule.

One very unpleasant evidence of this is the frequency with which wife-beating is carried on by all classes. The Chinese, who adopt ten when they wish to give any idea of comparative numbers, declare that in six or seven families out of ten the husbands regularly beat their wives. Sixty or seventy per cent of the husbands treating their wives in this rough and brutal manner is a terrible commentary upon the home life of the Chinese, and yet no one, as far as my observation goes, ever expresses any condemnation of the custom. It seems to be considered as an inalienable right that has come down from the ancient past, before the civilization of the sages had begun to touch their forefathers with their humane teachings, and with the intense conservatism of the Chinese, the husbands continue to exercise it, whilst the great public looks on and takes no step to stop the barbarous custom.

That the wives have never consented to this unwomanly and savage treatment is evident from the fact of the large numbers of suicides amongst them that occur annually in any given area that one may select at random. A village is startled with the report that a woman has thrown herself into a well. Some one happening to pass by at the moment observed the poor creature with flushed face and flaming eyes throw herself headlong into it. At once every one is mad with excitement. The women run shouting and screaming to each other, expressing their loud commiseration; the men move along with sphinx-like faces to see if help can be rendered, and the dogs tear about yelping and barking and having free fights with each other.

 The unfortunate woman is hauled out of the well with her long hair dishevelled and streaming with water, and with a look of terror on her face, as though death, when she came face to face with it, had filled her with an unspeakable horror. She is quite dead, and so amid noise and uproar and the wailing of her children, who have heard the terrible news, she is carried to her home. It seems that she had had a few words with her husband, and being high-spirited and independent, she had answered him in a way that had been hurtful to his dignity as a man, and seizing a heavy piece of wood, he had beaten her most unmercifully, without any thought as to where the blows fell. With her body bruised and with her heart breaking, and with her sense of womanhood utterly crushed out of her, she determined that she would hide her disgrace in the well, and in doing so would avenge herself most thoroughly on the man who had so injured her. Her husband in his desolate home, though he might feel no sorrow for the woman he had wronged, would be made to realize what a grievous mistake he had made when he found that he had to attend to the details of the home management that had hitherto been left to her care.

It must not be supposed that the Chinese husbands because they beat their wives do not love them, for that is not the case. Looking at the Chinese home in a rough and general way, one is struck with the fact that there is really a great deal of mutual affection shown both by the husband and the wife for one another. It is less demonstrative than with the peoples of the West. Oriental thought and tradition are against the open demonstration of the love that they feel for each other, still it is unquestionably the fact that the great majority of the homes in this land are bound together by a true and a solid affection.

 The Chinaman, stolid and unemotional looking, has within him a world of passion waiting till something rouses it, and then it breaks forth like one of his own typhoons, reckless of what it may destroy. But beside this fiery volcanic nature, that leads men who are accustomed to beat their wives into the most cruel treatment of them, he is moved by forces that would never influence us; so much so that the forty per cent. that treat their wives with courtesy and respect are occasionally influenced to join the ranks of the wife-beaters, simply to avoid the imputation that they are afraid of them and dare not use the stick to them.

In that most charming and humorous book, *The Chinese Empire*, written by Abbé Huc, he describes a scene that seems incredible, but which is a true portrait of what frequently takes place throughout the country. He tells of a man who was really fond of his wife and who for two or three years lived on the most affectionate terms with her. He noticed that smiles passed over the yellow visages of some of the young fellows that he was acquainted with whenever they passed each other on the street. Flashes of fun, too, made the black eyes of others gleam, as though the laughter within them was too great to be suppressed. Furtive glances, too, were cast upon him by men who seemed anxious not to catch his eye.

He was perplexed at these cryptic signs and tried to get an explanation. At last one day, a kind friend enlightened him, and explained to him the mysterious conduct of his neighbours, who, he said, were exceedingly amused because he had never beaten his wife, and the only reason they could think of was because he was afraid of her.

There is nothing in the world that a Chinaman dreads so much as being laughed at. He can stand a great deal, but that stirs his soul in a way that transforms the solemn, staid-looking

Celestial into a raging wild beast. "If that is all my neighbours have to be amused at," he said, whilst passion was tearing his soul with a perfect storm of fury, "I can soon prove to them that they are utterly mistaken, and I will show them in a most convincing manner that they have been so." [Pg 35]

Without a moment's delay he hastened home, and seizing the first heavy implement that lay handy, he began to belabour his wife with it, with such terrible effect that soon the air resounded with the shrieks and cries of the unhappy woman. When the passion had died down, he confessed that he had done wrong, but nothing could save his wife, for the injuries he had inflicted on her had been so severe that in two or three days she died in the greatest agony.

Chinese law in many respects is as curious as the Chinese mind. In civil offences, it refuses to take the initiative, and if no complaints are put before the mandarin, the most outrageous crimes, that in England would at once set in motion the whole machinery of the law until ample justice had been done upon the criminal, are left without any punishment. In this case there was no one to bring any complaint before the authorities; for what was the crime? A man had beaten his wife, but sixty per cent. of the husbands throughout the Empire do that habitually. Public opinion had nothing to say against him excepting that he had carried his beating a little too far, for which he was a fool, for he would be simply so much out of pocket when he came to purchase another wife.

The poor woman was dead, dead of a broken heart, dead from the awful injuries that she had sustained, simply that her husband's face might be preserved in the estimation of his neighbours; and now not a word of sympathy for her, not a tear was shed, and scarcely a shadow passed over the face of any one, as she travelled through unutterable sorrow into the unknown land.

The inferior position that a woman holds in the estimation of the men is shown in their absolute indifference to her when she happens to fall sick. She is allowed to drag on in pain and weariness for weeks and months, and the expense of a doctor and the medicines he might prescribe are not entertained until she gets so seriously ill that without medical aid she would inevitably die. A doctor is then called in to diagnose her case, but one has a grim suspicion that the main factor in the husband's willingness to sacrifice a few cash for his wife, was not any inordinate love for her, but dread lest she should die and he would have to be out of pocket in providing himself with another. [Pg 36]

A Chinese doctor whose opinion I was one day asking with regard to this very question, assured me that in his medical practice he had found the men invariably opposed to the spending of money on their wives when they were ill. "I was on one occasion," he said, "attending a country-woman for some complaint. It was not a serious case, but it was such that if no remedy had been applied, it might have grown into one that would have caused her considerable inconvenience. I sent in my bill to the husband for my attendance and for the medicines I had supplied, but he refused to pay. It only came to forty cash (about a penny), but he declared that he had not called me in, and therefore he would not accept my account. The woman I knew had no money, and so I told her I would not charge her."

The Chinese family is supposed to be bound together by a virtue that is unique in China, and which has never been looked upon with the same reverence by any other country in the world as in it. I refer to filial piety. There is no question but that this as an ideal virtue has been held up before the nation during the whole length of its existence. Confucius immortalized the subject by writing a book on it, and though it is wanting in the nerve and vigour of his other classical works, because it is from his pen it has through successive generations exercised a marvellous influence in keeping up the national belief in this virtue amongst all classes of society, from the Emperor on the throne down to the poorest beggar that sits with sore legs and tattered garments by the roadside, though his own parents perhaps years ago drove him on to the streets, and because of his badness refused to recognize him as their son. [Pg 37]

The utterance of the word "Hsiau," has an electrical effect upon any Chinaman in whose hearing it is mentioned. The ordinary citizen will discourse with you by the hour upon its beauties, and he will enlarge upon the excellence and nobility of the children that carry it out in ordinary life, especially when great obstacles exist in the performance of it. The man upon whose face profligate is plainly written with the pen of whisky and opium hears the word "Hsiau," and a softened look passes over it, and his eyes lose their hardness, and any goodness that lay in his heart is for the moment supreme. In fact, I have never yet met any one, scoundrel or honest man, who has not been moved more or less by the mention of this universally reverenced virtue.

Next in importance to the brochure of Confucius on filial piety is a book quite as widely known, which is entitled *The Twenty-four Examples of Filial Piety*. A brief account of twenty-four famous instances of devotion to parents under various trying circumstances are given, and these are printed age after age, and read eagerly by the people.

They are certainly most amusing reading, and they give the impression that whatever other qualities the Chinaman may possess, he is endowed with a strain of romance and poetry that explains how popular he can be when he lets himself go. One story tells of a man who was looked upon as a model for filial piety. His family consisted of his mother, himself and wife,

and a little infant son. Quite unexpectedly his mother falls dangerously ill and is unable to eat any food. Distressed beyond measure at this, and fearing lest she should die, he kills his child, and the milk that his wife used to give to the little one is now absorbed by the sick mother.

This deed is evidently so pleasing to Heaven, that whilst he is digging a grave in which to bury his murdered child, he suddenly comes upon a bar of gold, which he at once accepts as a special present to himself for his filial piety. Whilst he is congratulating himself on the good fortune that has befallen him, he hears a cry from the mat in which he had wrapped his son, and to his delight he finds that he has come to life again, without any of the marks upon him to show the brutal treatment he had received from his father. Returning home with the gold and the baby in his arms, a fresh delightful surprise awaits him, for his mother comes to the door to meet him, perfectly restored to health—another special favour from Heaven to reward him for his devotion to her.

Another of these twenty-four is a young lad, who acts in such a way as to excite the admiration of all who read his story. His mother had died and his father married a second wife, who was exceedingly unkind to him. She had a son of her own by a previous marriage, upon whom she lavished all the love of her heart. After years of ill-treatment, his father one day quite unexpectedly discovers the true state of the case, when he is so enraged that he drives his wife and her beloved son from his home, and he declares that he will never have anything more to do with them.

It is at this juncture that the filial piety that has immortalized the young fellow's name is conspicuously manifested. He so pleads with his father to forgive his stepmother that he is permitted to go and bring her home again, though he is quite conscious that her return means sorrow to himself.

AN OLD LADY.

To face p. 39.

He has successfully performed his mission, when lingering on the road he is seized by a band of robbers, who decide, for reasons not stated, to murder him. The stepmother hears of this, and filled with remorse and with gratitude too, she takes her own son to the robbers' camp and offers them him in exchange for the other, to be killed in his stead. The thieves are so impressed with the noble self-denial of both stepmother and stepson, that they all agree to abandon their evil lives and to become honest citizens of the Empire, which they proceed to do at once, and the band is broken up.

One of the most famous amongst the twenty-four heroes, however, is one whose name it would seem to any one but a Chinaman ought to be covered with infamy, instead of being inscribed on the roll of fame, and held up for the admiration of the whole Empire. His name is Ting-lan, and it is told of him that for many years he cruelly beat and ill-treated his mother. One day he happened to be on the hillside caring for his flock of goats, when he saw a young kid kneel down by its mothers side to drink. He was so struck with this beautifully submissive action of the animal, that he was led to think of how different had been his own

conduct to his mother. A wave of repentance swept over his heart, and he determined that his whole future life should be an atonement for the wrongs he had done her.

Just at this moment the old lady appeared coming over the hill towards him, when Ting-lan, his heart filled with his good resolutions, ran eagerly in her direction, to kneel down before her to confess his sins and to tell her how he had determined to be a dutiful son in the future. The mother, knowing nothing of the change of heart that had come over him, and thinking that he was rushing at her to beat her, turned and fled in hot haste, and threw herself into a deep and rapid river that flowed near by.

Her son, terrified and distressed beyond measure, jumped in after her in his endeavour to save her, but all in vain. The fast-flowing stream had claimed her as its victim, and no trace of the unhappy mother could be found in the turbid waters that hid her from the gaze of her weeping son. By and by there seemed to rise from the very spot where his mother had disappeared a flat oblong piece of wood, which he seized upon eagerly as the only memento that remained of her, and on this he had engraved her name and the date of her death. Popular tradition holds that the first use of the Ancestral Tablets, which are believed to contain the spirits of the dead and which are worshipped twice a year by the living descendants, began from this time and from this circumstance. If this is so, which is extremely doubtful, then it may be said that Ting-lan was the originator of a form of worship that is more powerful and more deep-seated than any other in the whole of the Empire.

When the Chinese are asked how it is that such an unworthy character as Ting-lan could be admitted into such a renowned gallery of national worthies, the only reply you get is, “Oh, he repented, you know,” as if that were enough to condone years of cruel treatment of his mother, and quite sufficient to entitle him to a more than common place amongst the great moral teachers of his country. One cannot conceive of any other nation in the world but the Chinese being willing to canonize such a very doubtful character as Ting-lan.

The mere fact that there has been such a high ideal of filial piety maintained from the very earliest days of Chinese history has been of incalculable service to the Empire. It is an ideal that every one accepts, and it must be admitted that but for it society in general and the home in particular would have degenerated more than they have done in the passage of the centuries. That there are as fine examples of filial piety to-day as any of those recorded in the popular book that has been quoted is unquestionable, but they are rare. A boy to be filial must be dutiful and submissive, he must neither gamble nor smoke opium; whatever wages he earns he must hand over to his parents; he must support them in old age, and when they die he must perform the regular services to the spirits in the grave and in the Ancestral Tablet, and in the Ancestral Hall.

From examination that I have made, the prevailing testimony is that not more than one or two per cent, of the sons of the present day are in any true sense filial. You speak to a young man about filial piety. His face is leaden-hued, and has all the marks of the dissipated opium smoker. His face lights up and he becomes eloquent as he expatiates on the virtue. You examine into his home life, and you find that he is leaving his old parents upon the very verge of destitution. He has borrowed money on the farm, and he has carried off the best of the goods in the home and pawned them. This man represents a large class who are all enthusiastic, in the abstract, about filial piety, but who look on whilst the old father is slaving himself to death, but who will not lift a finger to keep the wolf away from the door.

You meet another young fellow who is not an opium smoker. He has the appearance of robust health. He lives well and generously, for his salary is an ample one. The ruddy hue on his face becomes tinged with a brighter colour, as you talk with him about the duty of sons towards their parents, and you feel now that you have a genuine case of filial piety such as might be enrolled amongst the famous twenty-four. You ask him casually how much he sends home regularly to the old folks in their country home. A shadow falls over his face, he stammers and hesitates, and mumbles out something about his expenses being so heavy that he has not been able to spare anything out of his salary; but he says, and his face brightens up as he does so, “I am going to send some as soon as I draw my next money.” For the moment he means to do this, but he never does.

That filial piety exists in China, in the books of its sages, in its light literature, and in a deep sentiment imbedded in the hearts of all classes of society, is a fact that no one who knows anything of this strange and perplexing land can dispute. It is just as true, however, that in actual practice it is no more prevalent here than it is in England or America, if quite so much, and that the reputation that China has obtained for the carrying out of this virtue is one that she does not deserve.

CHAPTER III

CHILD LIFE

Passion amongst the Chinese for sons—Rejoicings at the birth of a son—Sorrow at the birth of a girl—Birth of an heir to the throne—The Great Forgiveness—Polite phrase for a girl—Amusements of childhood—Home training to lie and swear—Going to school of the boys—Books they read—Binding of girls' feet—Origin of this custom—Evils connected with it—Chinese love for home.

There is no nation that is fonder of children than the Chinese. They have a perfect passion for them, and it is, very rarely that a family can be found without one or more of them in it. If there are none born into it, arrangements are made to supply that deficiency by buying some, for the Chinese seem to have a perfect dread of a childless home. If a man has the means, he will buy several sons, who are treated as though they were his own, and, when they grow up, they will inherit his property, and have all the privileges that are given to those that were born in the family.

It is this passion for children that makes a man marry more than one wife. He desires to surround himself with those who will perpetuate his name, and who when he is dead will come to the tomb and make offerings to his spirit, that shall in some mysterious way reach him in the dark world, and which shall be a source of comfort to him in the gloom and shadow that surround him there.

A childless wife in China is a person to be profoundly pitied. She is looked down upon by her mother-in-law, who is anxious to have the dignity and the reputation of the home maintained by the birth of a grandson, who some day in the future, dressed in sackcloth, will act as chief mourner, when his father shall be carried to his long home and laid to rest amongst the hills. The neighbours, too, have an undisguised contempt for her, which they show in only too brutal a manner, when some row takes place and they have a chance of telling each other what their private opinion is with regard to one another.

The worst is, her own husband begins to treat her with coldness and neglect, when the time goes by and the home still remains without a son. If he is very sympathetic he will buy one and make her a present of him, though she will never occupy the place in his affections that she would if the child were her own. If his nature is of a coarser grain, he will bring in a second wife, who will usurp her position in the home, and make her life one long-continued misery.

When a son is born into the family there are great rejoicings amongst every member of it. The one most concerned in the matter, the mother, has had her fears and anxieties for many a day, and her heart has throbbed with doubt and fear as she has asked whether the little one is a boy or a girl, and when she has been told it is a son, the terror has gone out of her heart, and a sense of supreme joy has filled her with immense content. Her position in the home and in the street or village in which she lives is now an established one. Her husband's affections are bound to her, the hectoring, domineering tone of the mother-in-law is softened down, and she has a recognized place in the home that will never be questioned, whilst she can now look into the faces of the wives and mothers of the neighbourhood with a consciousness that no thrill of contempt will ever taint their thought of her.

As for the father, he walks about as proud as a turkey-cock, although according to Chinese etiquette he assumes an air of indifference as though nothing special had happened, whilst all the time under those stolid features that are as undemonstrative as a tombstone, a world of passion and joyous feeling and romantic thoughts are playing their sweet music around his heart.

And now, congratulations pour in from every quarter upon this most happy event of the arrival of a son. It would indeed for the moment appear as though such a thing had not happened for years, and that the coming of a baby boy was something so rare as to transport the family and all the numerous relatives, and even the nearest neighbours, with such feelings of gladness, that these could only be expressed by the most exaggerated expressions of joy at the wonderful event.

The little mite is but a speck in the great ocean of babyhood that fills this land with its swarms of children, and yet, happily for it, it is welcomed as though it were the only one in the Empire, and faces are wreathed in smiles, and the choicest phrases are culled out of the language of poetry, and minds are set to work to invent new phrases by which to express the gladness of soul that men feel at the coming of the little one into the world.

Let us peep for a moment into the home; it is a middle-class one, and presents the usual untidy, slovenly and unswept appearance that is characteristic of every such one in the country. But to-day an air of peculiar happiness seems to pervade the house that makes one forget the dust, and the litter, and the atmosphere of discomfort that makes a foreigner feel as though he dare not sit down, whenever he enters any ordinary dwelling-house. The faces are all lighted up with smiles, and every one is prepared to say something pleasant. By and by an elderly woman comes in with a strapping black-haired girl, her daughter, by her side.

They have come to see the baby, and they have brought with them a fowl, a special gift for the young mother, who for the next month will need some nourishing food. Shortly after two or three more drop in with presents of pigs' feet, and vermicelli, and hemp oil in which the dainties are to be fried. All these articles are supposed to be exceedingly nutritious and exactly suited to one in the condition of the mother.

It is a pleasant picture to look upon. The great Eastern sun outside is doing his best to flood the world with his beams, and he sends his rays flashing into the home, and he lights the faces of the women as with animated conversation they discuss how babies should be treated and how the mother should be nursed to keep off the evil spirits that at this particular crisis are roaming out seeking to find a chance of bringing disaster upon the family, and of carrying off the infant son that has brought happiness to the parents.

The scene presented to us on a similar occasion in the homes of the very poor is of a very different character from the one just described. Whilst the father and the mother have a joy as deep and as profound as that experienced by those who are better off, they have no visits from friends that troop in with presents and with loving greetings, and no anxiety is shown as to whether the baby shall ever grow up to be a great man, or whether the mother shall be so cared for that no mishap may befall her. The poor have no time for such luxuries, and so the arrival of a son and heir to the toils and sorrows of his parents usually makes little difference in the daily routine of the home. A tiny stranger has arrived with his pathetic appeal for the loving care and support of his mother, but the poor mother has to carry on her daily duties just the same as before, and no surprise is excited when she appears in the fields on the very same day and performs some of the heavy duties connected with the cultivation of their little farm.

LITTLE LADS.

LITTLE URCHINS.

To face p. 46.

The birth of a son is hailed with delight in every home in China, from the highest to the lowest. In the palace of the Emperor, when the heir to the throne is born, there are rejoicings that extend from the capital to the furthest extent of the Empire, and every mother's heart goes out in sympathy and gladness for the queen who has given a ruler to sit on the Dragon Throne. The birth of this Royal Son has brought such happiness to the Imperial Home that it is felt that it ought to be commemorated by a special act of grace that would bring freedom and deliverance to large numbers of the most unhappy of the Emperor's subjects.

This is called the "Great Forgiveness," because no sooner is it known that the Empress has borne a son, than an edict is issued, stamped with the vermilion seal, and dispatched to the viceroys and great mandarins in every province and department of the Empire, ordering them to at once release certain classes of prisoners who are confined in prison, and who without this royal clemency might lie confined within their dingy cells for years to come without any hope of release. This is a noble act, and all connected with the coming of a little son, who has only just opened his eyes to the light of heaven, and who yet has had the happiness of flinging wide the prison doors and of setting free countless numbers of men and women, who otherwise would have pined and fretted within their dungeons till hope had died out of their hearts, and, filled with despair, they had closed their eyes upon life.

Let us now try and picture another scene. The little one, long expected and long speculated about, that has filled the fancy of the mother, and that has helped to weave a story of romance in the mind of the father, turns out after all to be not a boy, but a girl—only a girl. The visions die away, and the poetry loses its romance, and becomes the commonest prose, when it is found that the stranger is a girl. It is quite safe to make the assertion that in all the countless homes that exist in the huge population of China not one of them is prepared to welcome a girl or to feel that she could ever take the place of a boy.

We become convinced of this when we look upon the scene that I am endeavouring to picture, for it is a typical one, and the ages have stereotyped it, as one of the correct photographs of social life in this land.

No sooner is it announced that the child is a girl than a kind of dismay falls upon the household. The father's face becomes darkened with a scowl that shows the passion that is raging in his heart. His very love for his wife is for the moment turned into bitterness, for he considers that she has wronged him and brought disgrace upon the home.

The mother, instead of being loyal to her sex and gathering the little one to her bosom, as she would have done had it been a boy, thrusts it indignantly from her and refuses even to look at it. She now begins to weep and sob out her sorrow in tears and bitter expressions at the bad fate that is clouding her life. The baby has been wrapped up hastily and thrown with contempt upon a bench in the room, where, uncared for and despised, as something that has brought bad luck into the home, she sends forth her wailing cry without its once touching the mother near by.

It is at this particular period in the little girl's history that the greatest peril to her life arises, for it is just at this point that so many take their last look at the world and vanish into darkness. With a mad passion of disappointment in the hearts of both parents, it is so easy to snap the thread of the little life, and sweep away the sorrow and the shame from their home.

On one occasion we had a nurse in our family. She was a woman of a great deal of character, modest in her demeanour and a willing and untiring worker. Her name was the one thing about her that was peculiar, and that in Chinese meant "Picked up." It was a most unusual one, and I felt that there was a history connected with it that would reveal some incident in her early life. Anxious to learn what that was, I said to her one day, "What an extraordinary name you have. How did it come about that your mother gave it you?"

A smile lighted up her plain features, whilst she exclaimed, "I can easily explain that. The name was given me very soon after my birth, in remembrance of a rather tragic affair in which, as my mother believed, Heaven interfered to preserve my life. The evening I was born, both my father and mother were so distressed at my being a girl, that in a fit of anger the former seized hold upon me and threw me out into the open courtyard in front of our house. Fortunately it was the height of summer, and the night air was hot and scorching, and so as I lay there all night long, I received no injury from the wind that blew over me.

"At dawn next morning, my father came out for something, and was astonished to find that I was still alive. He had expected that the fall on the hard stone slabs that paved the courtyard and the long exposure would have killed me. He was a very superstitious man, and so he believed that my escape from death had been due to the intervention of Heaven, and that it was designed by it that my life should be preserved. Impressed with this idea, he picked me up and carried me to my mother, who took me to her heart and decided that I should not be destroyed. In memory of that eventful night, and my father's rescue of me next morning, I was called, 'Picked up.'"

There is no doubt but that countless baby girls have thus disappeared within the first two or

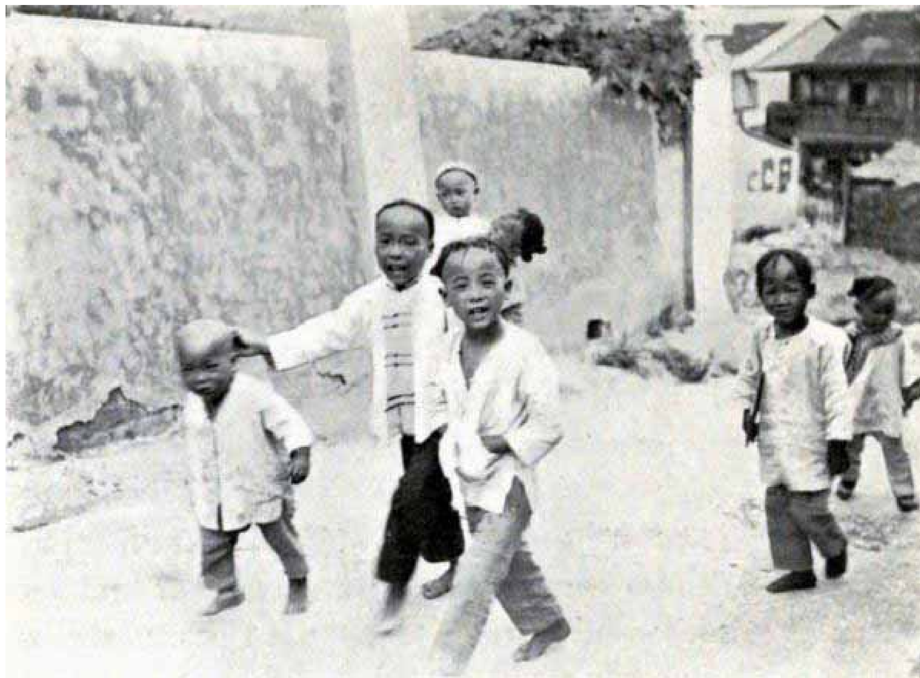
three hours of their birth, when the unnatural passion of the parents has been excited by anger and disappointment. If they are spared long enough to let that cool down, and the child still lives, the voice of nature begins to be heard, and the mother will ask for the little one to be given her, and from that moment there will be no more talk of putting it to death.

Under the most favourable circumstances, and where it has been decided to rear the child, no congratulations are ever uttered by any one on her birth. To do so would be considered so grim a joke that it would be looked upon as an insult so marked and so offensive that a perpetual feud would be engendered that would never be dissolved as long as life lasted.

The neighbours who have been on the alert with their congratulations all ready to offer to the happy parents in the event of a son being born, are placed in the most awkward position, and they get out of it as deftly as they can by the use of polite phrases and airy nothings of which the Chinese language has such an abundance. In these attempts no one would ever dream of using the common word “Girl.” That would grate harshly on the ears of those whose sensitive feelings are only too ready to think that some reflection is intended by a reference to their daughter. A polite phrase is used instead, which means “A thousand pieces of gold,” a title which by a subtle species of legerdemain lifts the poor forlorn little mite, who has barely escaped drowning or suffocating, into the region of an heiress with a large fortune with which to begin her life.

The early years of a child seem on the whole to be happy ones. In the swarms of children that one sees almost anywhere, one gets the impression that on the whole they thoroughly enjoy themselves. They run about and romp and dance and gambol very much as a similar number of English children would do on the village green, or in the streets and lanes of a home city.

The Chinese are far from being a gloomy race of people. Their hearts are full of fun and vigorous life, and this is seen in the sturdy urchins that race about with each other and that fill the air with their merry sounds of childish laughter.



STUDIES OF CHINESE BOYS.

To face p. 51.

With very young children this is all the more remarkable since so little is provided for their amusement. Such things as pictures or story-books or toys in the large and profuse sense with which our nurseries are supplied in England, do not exist in this land. Childhood is left very much to its own resources to find out the means of passing the time pleasantly. It is pathetic to watch how, with the fewest and simplest materials, the little ones will pass the day, with apparently perfect contentment. The method most popular, because it involves no expense, is the making of mud pies, and the building of miniature houses with broken pieces of tiles that can be picked up from the streets.

The parents never seem to consider it a part of their duty to suggest means of recreation for their children. The mothers are intensely ignorant and slovenly, and are too occupied with their household duties to have any time to devote to the education or amusement of their little ones, and so they are allowed to grow up very much as nature or their surroundings mould them, until the time has arrived, for the boys at least, when they must enter school, and come under the discipline of a school-master.

It is interesting at this point to consider what are the moral restraints that are at the command of the parents to train up their children to be good and honest citizens of the Empire. Apart from the natural conscience which no amount of heathenism can entirely eradicate, and the lofty ideals which their sages and teachers in olden times sent forth as beautiful spirits to permeate and wander through succeeding generations, the family has no influence whatsoever in guiding the little ones into a noble and virtuous life.

How could one expect that it should? There is absolutely no religion in it, for the occasional worship of the idols, when some favour is requested from them or some sorrow to be averted, has no moral effect upon a single member of the home. The idols are supposed to be mysterious forces that have great power in the supernatural world, who have to be bribed and coaxed not to send down evil upon men, for whom in their inmost hearts it is believed that they have a natural antipathy. They are never appealed to as loving or caring for men. There is nothing that will bring a smile over the yellow face sooner than to ask a man if the idols love men. It is a question that is so brimming over with fun to a Chinaman that it is irresistible in its effects, and the soberest face will be wreathed with smiles whenever it is put.

There is no Bible, of course, and not a single book in the home, and if there were the mothers could not read them. It will be seen, then, that the machinery in the West for the training of the children does not exist out here. There is no God, no churches, no Sunday or Sunday schools, no pictures, and no special literature to influence the minds of the young to withstand the evil forces that grow rank and wild all around them in whatever grade of society they may happen to be.

It may be said without any exaggeration that it is in the home that the children learn the evils that cling to them all their lives, and that it is the mothers that are the principal teachers of them. Lying, for example, as a fine art is one that is indoctrinated by the mothers’ example. It is upon it that they mainly depend for the governing of their children. As a rule there is no proper discipline in the home, and no attempt made to make the children obey promptly any order that is given. The result is that the mother, who has most to do with them, depends largely upon loud-voiced threatenings and an occasional beating

when her passion gets the control over her, though this latter is rare, since the Chinese parents really love their children, and seldom resort to this severe method of curbing the unruly or high spirits of their offspring.

[Pg 53] The great weapon in her armoury in the earlier days of her children's lives is a technical expression that is known in every family of "Deceiving the Children." One day a visitor called upon a family with which he was acquainted. The lady of the house was in and so also was her little son of four or five years of age, a bright, interesting child, with snapping black eyes, and as full of life as a healthy child could be.

During the conversation the child got restless and was inclined to get into mischief. He was approaching a corner of the room, when his mother called out in a loud, excited voice, "Don't go there, there is a huge rat waiting for you, that will pounce out upon you, and tear out your eyes." The little fellow, with terror depicted upon his face and with an agonized cry, made a bee-line to the opposite side of the room, and crouched near his mother in the most abject terror.

After a while, having nothing to do, he began to move about in what his mother considered forbidden paths, when once more, with a shriek that had assumed a natural look of alarm, she shouted in her loudest tones, "Come away quickly, don't go there; there is a black snake hiding in the corner. It will bite you, and you will die in a few minutes." Again a wild look of horror on the little fellow's face, and a sudden rush to his mother's side to escape the deadly serpent that was lying in wait for him, and sobs of agony broke from him as he clung to her for protection.

After a while he once more, with the restlessness of childhood, began to move about in search of something to amuse himself with, and was once more getting on ground that his mother considered unsafe, when again, with red, excited face and shrill tones she yelled out, "Why do you go there? Don't you know there is a devil hiding round the corner that has a great love for the flesh of a young boy, and he will seize you and devour you, and crunch your bones with his great teeth?"

[Pg 54] At this juncture the gentleman said to the mother, "How is it that you have in a very short time deceived your son three times by telling him that something will happen that you know cannot possibly occur? Are you not afraid of teaching him to be a liar? He will find out in time that what you say cannot be relied upon, and then he will lose faith in you and learn to regard lying as a thing of no importance."

The woman's face became suffused with smiles, and then she broke out into laughter, which for some time she could not suppress. "Oh," she said, "I did not think of all the terrible things that you talk of so seriously. I merely wanted to keep the little fellow quiet. I knew that he would not obey me if I simply asked him to be a good boy, and so I thought I would frighten him. Everybody uses this plan in China, and I don't see that there is any harm in it."

Another exceedingly injurious habit that is learned in the home is swearing. It seems an incredible thing, but it is no doubt a fact that every one swears in China, without distinction of sex or position in society. The rough coolies that one meets with on the roads interlard their ordinary conversation with the foulest expressions, but only let two of them fall out with each other, and there will be such a torrent of obscenity and such a bombardment of one another by filthy epithets that one recoils with disgust at the degrading terms that flow from their lips.

You are standing talking to a fine, scholarly gentleman. His home near by is a perfect mansion as compared with the hovels that press up against the wall that surrounds his property. You are charmed with his manner, so elegant and refined is he in his conversation with you. His talk, too, is high toned, and shows that he has been imbued with the ethics of the great sage Confucius, who drew a wonderful picture of the ideal man, that he called "The son of a King," and that he has been studying his lineaments so that he might copy him [Pg 55] in his own life.

All at once two coolies come along with a steady run, bearing between them a great heavy pig, that squeals and grunts with pain from the ropes that cut into its feet. The road is rough and uneven, and they make a false step and bump heavily against the scholar, who falls to the ground. The transformation that takes place in this refined and gentlemanly person is instantaneous and amazing. His company manners have fled, the picture of the ideal man has vanished from his brain, and he now stands on the level of the most profane coolie, that has never read Confucius, and has never studied etiquette of any kind. The language that flows from him is obscene and so filthy, and of such a Sodom and Gomorrah character that you turn away from him in absolute loathing as a man that would pollute and contaminate you by his very presence.

Two women have a difference, and, like all Chinese quarrels, it has to be fought out in the open street, where every one can hear and decide for himself the merits of the case. They begin with a few desultory remarks, not very highly complimentary, and with just sufficient edge in them to show that each of them means war to the knife, and that they are now fleshing their swords for the real encounter that is imminent. By and by a single word is shot like a poisoned arrow by one of them that inflames the other to madness. The flood-gates are now open, and there pour from the lips of each a perfect cataract of foul and obscene

language, that makes many of the bystanders, whose minds are stored with these very terms, actually shudder with a vague sense of abhorrence.

Now all this is learned in the home. The first notes of this terrible language were first heard from father and mother, but mainly from the latter. In her anger and passion she will hurl epithets at her daughter that will describe her as one of the vilest of her sex, whilst the boys, from the awful terms she uses about them, might be the very refuse and offscourings of the earth. The little ones can say nothing, but they store up in the innermost recesses of their minds these awful phrases, to be used as the years go by when passion stirs up the fiercest elements of the heart into wild bursts of fury.

And thus the years go by for both boys and girls, with nothing very eventful in the lives of either, until they are about eight. The Chinese are not an idle race of people, and as soon as the little ones can put their hands to anything, their small services are utilized for the general benefit of the home. If they are poor, the boys go out and gather grass and fallen twigs to be used as firewood, whilst the girls help as far as they can in the ordinary duties of the household.

Their main occupation, however, is play, and the most of their hours are devoted to that. Chinese children develop slowly. Neither in intelligence nor in physical development are they at all equal to the boys and girls in England, so up till they are ten years of age it is considered that their services are of no material value to the family, and that their time is best spent by doing nothing but running wild.

At about eight preparations are made for the lad to go to school. Terms are made with the school-master of the nearest school, a certain number of books splashed and dotted over with mysterious-looking hieroglyphics are bought, and one morning at early dawn, just as the pale grey light begins to colour the landscape, the little fellow finds his way along the silent road to the school-house. Here for six or seven years he will spend the best part of his days in the study of books that contain the ideals of the nation.

A BOY CARRYING BASKETS.

To face p. 56.

They are the driest of dry books, and were really written for scholarly men, and for men of thought, whose thinking powers were considerably developed. There is not a single story in their pages. No child or woman’s voice is heard from beginning to end, and no laughter, and no sob of pain, or any touch of the finer qualities of the human heart.

The boy begins at eight not with “Jack and Jill,” or the “House that Jack built,” or with any nursery rhyme that would appeal to a child’s imagination, but with the solemn statements on high ethical questions that some of the greatest thinkers and teachers of China have produced. Some idea of the style of the books that these little urchins have to grind at, may be gathered from the fact that the first book that is put into the hands of that eight-year-old scholar is called *The Three Words Classic*, from the fact that each sentence is made up of three words rhythmically set. It is about as crabbed and as profound a piece of writing as exists in the whole language. Its first sentence makes a dogmatic statement which has not been generally accepted in China, viz. “Man by nature is originally good.” Just imagine a boy of ten, accustomed till to-day to run as wild as a climbing plant, that creeps up trees, or over ruined walls, or down the side of a precipice, brought face to face with a statement like this, instead of the conventional one, “My dog,” or “His cat,” that confronts the English lad as he

first enters the domain of learning.

Try and conceive the wear and tear upon a child's spirit in having for years to shout and scream out at the top of his voice, as Chinese scholars do, such profound teaching as the above, and you will then have caught a glimpse of the steep and precipitous way along which these eight-year scholars have to travel in their pursuit after knowledge. A more dreary system of education, where imagination and humour, and poetry and romance, and all the finer emotions of the soul are rigorously excluded, it would be impossible to conceive than that which every Chinese scholar has to go through in every school throughout the Empire to-day. [Pg 58]

And so the years go by, childhood is being slowly left behind, and young manhood comes with its own responsibilities and its own ambitions. It is a dreary road along which the young scholar travels. He gets no knowledge of life that will make him tender and sympathetic with his fellow-men in their sins or their sorrows. He acquires a profound contempt for every other country but his own. His natural hardness and selfishness of heart are intensified by a pride that nothing can soften, whilst his antipathy to any change or progress either in his own village or in his country is deeply rooted and the adoption of new ideas or liberal thoughts is considered a heresy so abominable as to brand any one that adopts it with the terrible name of "Barbarian," a term from which every self-respecting Chinaman shrinks as from a plague.

With the leaving of school, childhood has passed away, and now the lads will have to select the occupations they are going to pursue in the future. Some elect to be scholars, especially if they have shown proficiency in their studies, and they finally join the great army of school-masters that are required for the countless schools throughout the country. Others become clerks in business houses, but as arithmetic is not a branch of school education, they are obliged to pay a small premium and learn the use of the abacus or counting boards, in one of the cash shops in the town. Others, again, engage themselves as book-keepers or shop assistants, or in some of the many employments that are open to young men who can read and write.

Not a few of them drift into evil habits and finally become opium-smokers and gamblers. If they are clever scamps, which this class usually are, they turn their attention to medicine, and gathering together a few herbs they travel through the country as strolling doctors, professing to cure every disease to which the human frame is heir, and living a most precarious and, on the whole, a very wretched life. [Pg 59]

About the same time that the great change takes place in the experience of the boy, the girl too comes to a point where the easy conditions under which she has hitherto lived suddenly stop and the great trial of her life begins. I refer to foot-binding.

In every home that professes to any respectability, foot-binding is an absolutely essential thing for the girls in it. To neglect this would be to confound them with slave girls, whose feet are never bound, and with the children of the very lowest classes whose poverty would not admit of their adopting this polite custom. It has been found by a very large experience that a girl must be eight years old before her feet will bear the tremendous strain that is put upon them, in the effort to destroy the handiwork of nature.

It is true that in some of the more wealthy homes, where a very small foot is a sign of blue blood, they begin as soon as the girl is six to put her to the torture, but this is not the general rule. By the time the girl is eight, the bones of the feet have become sufficiently hardened to bear the incessant pressure that is put upon them to contract the feet into such a small compass that they will go into a shoe of two or three inches in length.

The process begins by turning all the toes, except the large one, on to the sole of the foot. This of course is a slow but an exceedingly painful one. It is continued week after week and month after month for several years until the toes have been thrown back, at the expense of the instep, which is made to bulge out by the pressure of the bandages; until finally the "Golden lilies," as these unsightly objects are called, are complete, and the poor girl is a veritable cripple for life.

The cruelty that is practised upon these poor children during the initial operation of binding is very severe. The first few weeks are so very trying that attempts are made by the girls to tear the bandages from their aching, tortured feet. This is resisted by their mothers, who have to resort to brutal methods to keep the little hands from endeavouring to relieve themselves of the pain that has become intolerable. [Pg 60]

Tears and shrieks and groans that last all day long, and are heard through the sobs of the poor things, as sleep, restless and disturbed, comes to try and make them forget the agony they are enduring, are the constant experiences in that unhappy home.

The girl begs and entreats the mother to loosen the bandages a little so that the agonizing pain may be diminished, and life may become somewhat more tolerable. The only reply is a tighter wrench upon them, and a strain, that were not nature so elastic, would send the poor thing mad. The morrow comes and the rebandaging takes place. For an instant, as the feet are relieved of the old bandages, and they are shown inflamed and discoloured, a momentary relief is felt by the poor girl who has slept in fitful dozes during the past night, but the moment they are rebound by the new ones, a cry of horror proceeds from her as

though a raw sore had been touched, and the house resounds with her screams, whilst the mother, apparently untouched by the agony of her daughter, proceeds with her revolting task, as though she had no heart and no feeling left in her heathen soul.

This terrible martyrdom goes on with scarcely any alleviation for three or four years, the poor victim to fashion suffering acutely all the time. There are moments often repeated when the poor child actually quivers all over from excruciating pain, and it would seem as though flesh and blood could no longer endure the frightful strain put upon her, but must dissolve in tears and groans and unutterable agony.

Foot-binding is one of the most senseless and cruel customs it is possible to imagine. Its origin is dimly hidden in the maze and mist of the past, and no one can say positively how it originated. Tradition holds that it arose in the palace of an Emperor, who had a most beautiful concubine, but whose feet were deformed. To hide their defect they were so manipulated that their glaring deformity was concealed, and the ladies of the court in order to gain her favour bandaged their own in such a manner as to be an exact imitation of those of the royal favourite. From that time, it is said, the insane and hideous custom began to spread from the court into the capital, and from there it began to be copied by the women of the Empire.

The popular legend makes this woman to be T’a Ki, the famous concubine of Show Sin, the last ruler of the famous Chow Dynasty (B.C. 1146). She is said to have been the most beautiful woman that ever lived, but to have been inhuman and vicious beyond anything that human language can express. She was the cause of the fall of the dynasty, a dynasty in which was enshrined the great names of Confucius, Mencius, Tau-tze the founder of Tauism, and Wu Wang.

To account for the fatal influence of this famous beauty, it is declared that she was a fox fairy, who had assumed the form of a woman in order to be able to hurry on the ruin of China. In the transformation everything was changed but her feet, and in order to disguise these she had to resort to the most ingenious methods. To curry favour with her the ladies-in-waiting in the palace bound theirs to imitate the appearance of hers, and so the custom of foot-binding was commenced that has lasted all these ages.

This legend has become part of the national faith and is firmly believed in by every one. Of course it is absurd, and one that originated in an after age, but with the innate love of the Chinese for the mysterious and the supernatural, it is transmitted age after age as though it were part of authentic history.[1]

Foot-binding is a lifelong misery even after the first few years during which the feet are being tortured into such a hideous mass of deformity that no women will willingly show them to any one. Nature never becomes reconciled to the cruel caricature they present. She continues to make a vigorous protest by pains and suffering that more or less last as long as life itself. The bandages may never be loosed even for a single day, for nature, as if on the eternal watch, would at once begin to revert to the original size and shape with which she was born, and the feet would gradually return to their original shape, though with marks of the cruel treatment to which they have been exposed, and which can never be entirely effaced, no matter how long the owner may live.

The girls are employed in household duties, in learning to embroider, to weave cotton cloth, to make their own shoes, and to learn all kinds of sewing. The years pass on, and when they reach the age of sixteen their childhood begins to vanish, and womanhood, with its responsibilities and its stern demand that the girls shall leave their own clan and become members of others, looms up before them. The transition stage may be delayed for a year or two, but when a girl gets to be eighteen it is considered ample time for her to open her wings and to fly for ever from the parent home.

We have thus taken a very rough and bird’s-eye view of Child Life in China. There are countless details that might have been gone into, but they would have required an entire book for themselves. The main outline that has been given will suffice to convey a very general idea of the kind of life that the black-eyed children of the Empire have to go through.

There is one thing about which there can be no manner of doubt, and that is that the children never forget the home in which they were reared. The home is to the Chinese what the country is to the most devoted patriot of other nationalities. The home is larger and dearer than the nation. It is the one thought that is always enshrined in his inmost heart, and which never dies out. A Chinaman went abroad and lived for a quarter of a century in Australia. He married an Irish woman, had several almond-eyed daughters, who had caught the brogue of their mother and might have been emigrants from Cork or Kerry. He had a thriving money-making business, he possessed a vote, and he was a man of substance in the community.

One day the home hunger came upon him. He handed over his business to his wife and daughters, took his balance out of the bank and returned to his home in China. This was situated by the edge of the sea on a sand dune, the most forlorn and mouldy-looking place one could possibly imagine. He regained his spirits as soon as his feet touched the desolate spot that lay within a few yards of the home where his childhood was spent, and nothing

could induce him ever to think of returning to the far-off land where the family he had left behind him were living.

A strong and vigorous coolie showed symptoms of being far from well. Physically there seemed nothing the matter with him. Gradually he lost his appetite and his spirits. He occasionally acted as though his mind was affected. One day he said to his master, “I must go home. I feel very ill, but I am convinced that no medicine that I can take will cure me. Let me go home.” The *mal du pays* of the Switzer was upon him, and when permission was given him, his eye brightened and his step became elastic, and by the time he reached the old homestead every trace of disease had entirely vanished.

A man becomes a mandarin and is sent to another part of the Empire. He is gradually advanced in rank until he becomes a Viceroy of two Provinces, and rules over thirty millions of people. He marries, and has sons and daughters, and he amasses property in the place where his greatest honours have come to him.

He never has time to get away to his ancestral home, which is more than a thousand miles distant, but it is never out of his thoughts, and when he dies full of honours and wealth, his coffin is carried to his far-off village where he was born, and he is laid to his final rest almost in sight of the house in which his boyhood was passed.

The Americans are greatly distressed because when the Chinese come to their country they do not bring their wives and families with them. The fact is to do so would be opposed to the spirit and genius of their race. It would tend to alienate them from their home, which they intend to revisit as soon as ever they can, and to finally lay their bones amongst their kindred there. Every merchant and scholar, every coolie that lands with but the clothes he has on his back, every spendthrift and opium-smoker and gambler, and every millionaire of the Yellow race in the United States has one dream that never dies out of his brain, and that is the picture of his home, which either in life or in death it is his unalterable purpose to visit. To move their families and become denizens of their adopted country would be to run counter to one of the strongest instincts of their race.

AN IMPERIAL CONFUCIAN TEMPLE.

CHAPTER IV

RELIGIOUS FORCES IN CHINA

Chinese efforts to propitiate their gods—Figures of men on roofs of houses—Stone tiger—Fung-Shuy—The “Mountain City”—The county of “Peaceful

Streams”—Density of population—The “dead hand”—Ancestral worship—Idolatry—Koan-Yin—Heaven—Description of a scene in a popular temple.

The Chinese are an exceedingly superstitious people, but they are capable of being intelligently religious when they become acquainted with the truths of the Gospel. Until then all their offerings and ceremonies and ritual are performed, either to avert the sorrows that the supernatural beings might bring upon them, or for the purpose of putting the minds of their gods into such a pleasing state of satisfaction that they will be ready to send sons into the family and prosperity into the business, and riches and honour and a continued stream of blessings upon the home. The spirits and the gods of all denominations are credited with having unlimited wealth at their command, which they can dispose of to any one who has gained their favour, without in the least degree impoverishing themselves. They are also believed to be high-spirited, easily offended and vindictive, and careless as to the moral qualities of those who worship them. The great thing is to keep these capricious beings in a good humour by making them constant offerings, which though comparatively valueless in themselves, by some sort of a hocus-pocus during the process of reaching the idols, become worth large sums of money to them.

Evidences of superstition abound in almost any direction in which one may turn. Looking at the roofs of the houses, one is struck with the large numbers of miniature figures of men, in all kinds of fantastic shapes and attitudes, armed with bows with which they seem to be shooting at the sky. These are supposed to be fighting with the invisible forces that are flying through the air, seeking for opportunities to descend into the houses and to bring plague or pestilence upon the people residing within them. Were it not for these little warriors it is believed that human life could not exist, and the homes that are now happy and prosperous would be filled with mourning and lamentation.

Walking along a straight street that terminates in another that is at right angles to it, one is surprised at seeing in the wall of the house at the extreme end of this road a rough slab of stone about three feet high and one in breadth, with the three words cut into it, “I dare defy.” Where the road is winding, or deviates from the straight, no such stone is ever found.

The reason for its existence at all is simply a superstitious belief that everywhere prevails that evil spirits who are at war with mankind have special power to work mischief along roads that have no turnings in them. Mad with glee, they fly swifter than the wind along them, and woe betide anything that lies in their course whilst they are careering along. It is for this reason that the owners of the house that abuts on this racecourse of the gods hasten to put up the stone with its three-worded inscription in order to avoid the baleful effects of their coming full tilt against it. Some calamity, they believe, would certainly be the result, but no sooner do the spirits see the words “I dare defy,” than, paralyzed with fear, and trembling at the mystic words that have struck terror into them, they fly in disorder from the scene.

The Chinese on the whole are endowed with broad common-sense, and in anything that has to do with money-making or with commercial matters they are as wideawake and as shrewd as a canny Scotsman or a Yorkshireman. They are gifted, too, with a keen sense of humour, and yet when they come to deal with the question of spirits and ghosts and ogres, they seem to lose their reasoning faculties, and to believe in the most outrageous things that a mind with an ordinary power of perception of the ludicrous would shrink from admitting.

Quietly sauntering along by a road that skirts a hill, a rock is pointed out that plays an important part in the fortunes of the town that may be seen stretching away over the plain in front of us. Looked at from a certain angle it certainly conveys to one the impression that it is a huge crouching tiger. It has a defiant look about it, and an air of alertness, as though some enemy were about, that it must be on its guard against. Its gaze is fixed on the smokeless city, from which no sound can be heard and which would seem to be a veritable abode of the dead.

It turns out that this great stone brute that nature has so deftly chiselled is the presiding genius of the city that lies so silently in front. The Chinese believe that objects in natural life which, by a freak of fortune, have any resemblance to bird or beast are inhabited by the spirits of that animal, and have all the natural powers of such, only in a greatly intensified degree. The physical strength of the tiger and its naturally ferocious character make it an object of dread, and so when a district is found to possess the figure of such, only in an immensely exaggerated size, then it is seized upon as the embodiment of physical and supernatural forces that can be used for the protection of a city or sometimes of a whole region many miles square.

In this particular instance, the stone tiger, with its massive jaws and huge body that seems to be vibrating with nervous energy, is looked upon as the real protector of the town and region which it overlooks. Through its mysterious influence plague and pestilence are kept away, and trade prospers, and twin sons appear in certain families, and boys are born and the ratio of girls is kept down, whilst a general air of prosperity pervades the city and the villages and hamlets on the plain beyond. This is not the casual belief of a few cranks. It is the profound conviction of the scholars and literary men, who are the leaders of thought. It is also one of the articles in the creed of the working men, and of the coolies and labourers,

and it is tenaciously held by every woman in all the region. If any one should have the daring to suggest that this impostor of a tiger should be blown up by dynamite to see what it was made of, he would be looked upon as a dangerous heretic who ought to be put into a lunatic asylum, only there does not happen to be such a thing in the whole of China.

This form of superstition meets one in every direction, and is popularly called “Fung-Shuy,” which means “Wind and water,” chiefly, I presume, because in the province of the natural world these are the two agencies that seem to have a tremendous power in producing changes on the earth’s surface.

We have another instance of its dominating influence in this beautiful valley before us. More exquisite scenery one could hardly find in the whole of China than that which has been grouped here by Nature’s artistic hand. A mountain stream runs right through the centre of it, and night and day the sounds of its music break upon the air. The hamlets and villages scattered over it add to the beauty of the scene, for they give the charm of life to the silent forces that lie around.

The most beautiful feature about the whole, however, is the hills, which group themselves so artistically around this charming valley. They seem like colossal walls that mighty heroes built in ancient days to turn it into a city of which they should form the battlements. So obviously does this seem to have been the purpose, that the place has been called the “Mountain City.” Now the stone of which these hills are composed is a beautiful granite, that is specially adapted for house-building, and one would naturally imagine that the houses in the valley and in the city which lies just over the hills would all be built of the stone that is found in such abundance around. [Pg 69]

But such was not the case. A tradition has come down from the past that underneath these hills are mighty spirits who would never tolerate that the granite they contained should ever be quarried, and that should any one dare to lay a chisel upon these rocks they would send disease and death upon the valley and exterminate every human being in it.

The result was that all the stone that was used in this region had to be carried up the river from some place fifty or sixty miles distant, where the geomancers had declared that no spirits were to be found. Such is the force of superstition that all the rocks and boulders and stones of this region are absolutely safe from the chisel of the mason, and the people prefer to go to the expense of importing the material for their homes and bridges, rather than incur the anger of the spirits, who would use all the terrible power they possess to avenge themselves upon them.

Superstition has been a most potent force during the whole course of Chinese history in preventing the development of the nation. The mineral resources of the country are exceedingly abundant, and if they had been rightly exploited, would have been the means of enriching great masses of people who are now in extreme poverty. To understand this let us come in imagination to one district in the county of “The Peaceful Streams.” As we stand gazing upon the scene before us, we are struck with the grandeur and magnificence of its scenery. In the far-off distance the mountains are piled up, one range higher than another, till the last with its lofty peaks seems to be resting against the sky. [Pg 70]

In the foreground are countless hills along whose sides the tea plants flourish, and there are undulating plains, and miniature valleys, and gently flowing streams that have come from the distant mountains, and which have lost a good deal of their passion as they have travelled away from them. The soil is poor, and the farmers have to expend the severest toil upon it to be able to extract out of it enough to keep their families from starvation. The struggle for existence is so severe that large numbers every year have to leave their homes and their farms and emigrate to other countries, where they hope to make sufficient money to be able in the course of a few years to return to the old homesteads and start a new life of independence and comfort.

Now, but for a wretched superstition, this region ought to be one of the richest in China, and its people should be living in affluence; and instead of having to desert the land and being scattered in Singapore, and Penang and the Malay Peninsula, toiling to save their ancestral homes from perishing through poverty, every man would be called back in hot haste to share in the wealth that would be enough to enrich ten times the number of people that now exist on the land struggling to make ends meet.

The land that stretches before us is rich in coal, and one hill at least contains such a large percentage of the finest iron, that one engineer who examined it reported that there was enough of the ore in it to “supply the whole world for a thousand years,” and still it would remain unexhausted. Expert after expert has visited this region, and with unvarying unanimity they have declared that seams of coal abound throughout it that if worked would turn this poverty-stricken district into one of the great workshops of the South of China, and would give employment not only to its own population, but also to large numbers from the adjoining counties. [Pg 71]

Now the one controlling reason why this great natural wealth, that God has put into the soil of this beautiful county for the service of man, is left untouched is because it is believed that there are huge slimy dragons who lie age after age guarding the treasures of coal and iron, and that any attempt to take them from them would end in the destruction of the people of

the whole region. The pickaxe and the shovel and the dynamite would disturb their slumbers, and, filled with passion and mad with anger, they would hurl plague and sickness and calamities upon the unfortunate dwellers on the land. These unseen terrors, more potent than hunger and poverty and famine, have kept the mines unopened and the iron from being smelted, and have driven thousands of people into exile, very few comparatively of whom have ever come back to look upon the land of great mountains and peaceful streams, where untold riches lay ready for the gathering.

China is a country that is distinguished for its dense population. Wherever you travel you never seem to be able to get away from the human Celestial. The great cities and market towns and public thoroughfares present a never-ending succession of Chinese forms and faces that becomes absolutely monotonous. It is natural to expect them in these great centres of population, but you go into the most out-of-the-way places, and even there you are confronted with the same perplexing problem.

You wish, for example, to be alone, absolutely alone for a time, where no Mongolian visage with its acres of features and its yellow bilious-looking smile shall gaze upon you. There is a hill near by that you believe to be entirely deserted, and you think if you could only get up there, the desire of your heart would be gratified.

You walk briskly down the street, as though you were projecting a good long constitutional, in order that no one may be mad enough to think of following you. By and by you make a sudden flank movement that takes you into a lane leading off from the main road. Casting hurried glances back on the way you have just travelled to see that no one is watching you, you make rapid strategic doubles in the direction of the hill, till you find yourself calmly and with a contented mind slowly rising higher and higher, until at last you have fairly left all traces of human life behind you, and you are actually alone.

Seating yourself on a grassy mound, you look out on the broad expanse before you, and you breathe a sigh of content. No mechanical sounds of voices, as though they were being ground out by some creaking machinery, fall upon your ears. You hear the sighing of the wind and you see the grasses waving their heads as though they would talk in dumb show with you. You look down at the river, that winds like a silver thread along the plain, and you feel that this contact with nature is a most delightful break on the eternal monotony of faces that may suggest humour and pathos and lurking fun behind a yellow exterior, but never beauty.

All at once you receive a shock. You catch the gleam of an eye through an opening in two or three bushes that you never dreamed of concealing anything human behind them. You are startled, for you feel that the Chinaman has outwitted you. You turn round and cast suspicious glances towards a hedge, where wild flowers are growing and that you thought to be the very picture of sylvan solitude, and you see several figures dodging behind it.

The delightful sense of being alone vanishes, and you realize that that is an impossibility in China. You stand up disgusted, but with the feeling of amusement predominant, and one after another comes out of his hiding-place, where the black, piercing eyes have been scanning your every movement for the last ten minutes, and at least a dozen ungainly forms creep up to you and with smiling faces try to make friends with you.

Now, mighty and overwhelming though the living force of Chinese life may be, it is an undoubted fact that the dead and sleeping nation, as a religious factor, in many respects controls and dominates the living tides of men that impress us so vividly with their vast numbers. Even the casual traveller in China cannot help but be impressed with the way in which the graves of the dead thrust themselves upon the attention of the living. There is no getting away from them. The mountain sides very often are so thickly covered with them that one has to tread upon them if one would pass from one part to another. Every uncultivated spot on the lower levels has been eagerly seized upon as spaces where to bury the dead. Even the cultivated fields have been invaded by them, and mounds right in the centre of some diminutive rice or potato patches show how the little farm has been narrowed down in order to make room for some members of the family that have passed away. These graves thrust themselves up to the edge of the great roads, and seem to be prevented from grasping even them only by the incessant march of the countless feet that hurry along them from dawn till dark. The clearings and little hills outside the cities that cannot be used for cultivation are all seized upon as unprotected cemeteries for the dead, and the little mounds like tidal waves advance up to the very edge of the walls of the town, and are stayed in their progress only by these huge bulwarks.

But it is not simply by the signs that appeal to the eye that one gets an idea which is apt to appal one of the vast problem of the dead in China. In countless houses throughout the land, and more especially in those of the rich, one is astonished to find how many lie in their coffins, hermetically sealed, for weeks and months, without being buried. It is a most gruesome sight, and would give an Englishman the shivers to have the dead in the next room for many months and sometimes for years.

Now, it is an unquestionable fact that the “dead hand” is a most mighty and a most potent factor in the religious life of the people of China. All the gods and goddesses that are worshipped throughout the Empire are not believed to have the same influence over human life in sending misery or in bestowing happiness as the dead members of a family have in

regard to their relatives that are still alive on the earth. A man, for example, dies. He was a poor worthless fellow when he left the earth, and his life was a constant record of failure and incapacity. He never accomplished anything, and he was a mere nonentity not only in society but also in his own home till the very last. All that is changed now, and as he lies in his tomb he has acquired a new power that, in conjunction with the unseen forces that are supposed to gather round the grave, will enable him to pour riches and power upon the home he has left.

The dead to-day all over China hold the living within their grip. They are believed in some mysterious way of having the ability to change the destinies of a family. They can raise it from poverty and meanness to wealth and to the most exalted position, but if they are neglected and offerings are not made to them at the regular seasons, they will take away houses and lands from it, and turn the members of it into beggars.

A man died in a certain village. He was so poor that a grave was dug for him by the roadside and he was buried with but the scantiest of ceremony. He had never shown any ability in the whole course of his life, and he seemed in no way different from the ordinary commonplace looking men that one meets in shoals anywhere.

The eldest son who buried him was a young man of exceptional ability. He was rough and overbearing in his manners and a very unpleasant man to have to oppose, but he had the keen passion of the trader, and seemed to know by instinct every phase of the market, and what it was safe for him to speculate in. As he had no capital of his own, he was compelled to begin his life at the very bottom and to work his way up. This he did with great success, so that in the course of time he amassed a considerable fortune, and his name was known as that of one of the merchant princes in the region in which he lived.

Now, this man’s steady rise from poverty to wealth was not put down to his own ability or to any skill that he had shown in the management of his business affairs, but almost entirely to the old father who lay buried at the crossroads. It was he, the son believed, that guided the golden stream that flowed into his life, and it was his mysterious hand that had so prospered the combinations which the son had made, that the firm was built up till it was distinguished for the magnitude of its transactions. So convinced was he of this that he would never allow the grave to be touched, and he would never have a stone put up to show to whom this common-looking, neglected mound of earth belonged. He was afraid lest careless hands should break the spell that hung around it, and perhaps annoy the old man so that the run of prosperity should be broken, and in anger he should send misfortune instead.

Countless instances could be given similar to the above, all illustrating the profound faith that the Chinese have in the power of the dead to influence the fortunes of the living either for weal or for woe. From this has arisen the most powerful cult, ancestor worship, that at present exists in China. Its root lies neither in reverence nor in affection for the dead, but in selfishness and in dread. The kindly ties and the tender affection that used to bind men together when they were in the world and to knit their hearts in a loving union seem to vanish, and the living are only oppressed with a sense of the mystery of the dead, and a fear lest they should do anything that might incur their displeasure and so bring misery upon the home.

Looked at from a sentimental point of view, ancestor worship seems to be very beautiful and very attractive, but it is not really so. The unselfish love that is the charm that binds the members of a family to each other, and the willingness to endure and suffer for each other, are entirely absent in the worship that the living offer to their dead friends. The bond that binds them now is a vague and a misty one, and exists solely because there are hopes that lands and houses and wealth may come in some mysterious way from the unseen land, and sorrow and pain and disaster may be driven from the home. It is no wonder that this worship has such a powerful hold on the faith and practice of the Chinese, when it is considered how much that men hold dear is involved in it. It is the greatest religious force in the land, and will survive in some form or other even when all the others that are at present recognized have passed away from the hearts of the people.

We now turn to what to a casual onlooker might naturally seem to be the dominant and most powerful factor in the religious life of the people of this Empire of China, and that is idolatry. This popular and universal form of worship meets one everywhere and is practised by every class and condition of people throughout the country. The rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, the common coolie who earns his living in the streets and the most learned scholar who has risen to the highest rank in his profession, men and women of all grades, good, bad, and indifferent, all more or less believe in the idols and worship them.

That this is so, is evident from the almost universal presence of the idols. Every house has at least one, which is the household god of the family, whilst the more religious and devout will have several others as well. Then the cities abound with temples dedicated to certain well-known gods that have been built, some of them at great expense, and are kept in constant repair by the free-will offerings of the people. The villages, too, not to be outdone by the towns, have each of them at least one public temple where the people can make their offerings to their patron god, and where on the birthday of the idol the whole population gather to witness the play which is performed in honour of it.

Then, again, there are monasteries scattered very liberally through the provinces, some of

them so large that they will have over a hundred resident priests, all engaged in the one duty of chanting the praises of the various gods in them, and in superintending the worship of the throngs of people who crowd to such places to make their offerings to the different idols. There are also numerous nunneries where women devote their lives exclusively to the service of the Goddess of Mercy, and spend their years in trying to get from her the peace of mind they have not been able to obtain in their own homes. The inhabitants of these establishments are nearly always widows whose homes are unhappy, or married women who, dissatisfied with life, and with the consent of their husbands, have retired to the quiet and solitude of these retreats, in the hope that by prayer and meditation the unrest of spirit that has made life intolerable may be exchanged for one of calmness and contentment.

In addition to the above, there are mountain temples that abound in all the hilly regions, and little shrines built by the roadsides, where passing travellers may offer up their devotions to the gods enshrined within them, and a multitude of devices for drawing the attention of men and women to the duty of remembering the services they ought to pay to the gods of the land they live in. The more one studies this question, the more one is impressed with the fact that idolatry is a huge system that completely covers the whole of the Empire with its ramifications. If the faith of the Chinese is to be measured by the money that they are willing to put out for its support, then it must be profound indeed. When one considers the innumerable number of temples of all sizes and description that meet one in every direction, and that the expense of building them and keeping them in repair falls entirely upon the people, one cannot but be struck with the sacrifices they are willing to make for the sake of their gods. But when one considers further that the huge armies of Buddhist and Tauist priests who are connected with these religious establishments are all supported by voluntary gifts freely bestowed upon them, one stands amazed at the amount of money that must be annually expended throughout the Empire upon a system that has no State endowment, but which depends entirely upon the spontaneous offerings of the people at large for its very existence.

But it is now time to go into detail with regard to the working of idolatry in order to understand what is its exact effect on the masses who practise it, and in order to make the picture as vivid as possible, I shall first describe how the home is affected by this form of religion. Any house taken at random will do equally well for our purpose, for, like the Chinese themselves, they are all built on the same general model, and a description of one would do for all the rest.

As we pass through the courtyard and enter in at the front door which stands open all day long, no matter what the weather may be, the first thing that we catch sight of is an oblong table on which is seated the family idol. The most popular and the most generally worshipped is Kwan-Yin, or the Goddess of Mercy. Her face is placid, and there is a look of tenderness about it that has won the hearts of the millions of China so that in nearly every home in the land her image is found as the one conspicuous object towards which all hearts are drawn.

Her whole attitude and the air of benevolence that sits so naturally upon her agree well with the beautiful story we have of her life, and the reason why she, an Indian woman, should have become almost the national goddess of the Chinese nation.

Kwan-Yin was the daughter of an Indian prince, and as a child she showed herself to be possessed of a most loving heart. As a girl she used to run in and out of the houses of the common people that stood near her father's palace, and she was so distressed at the sights of poverty and sorrow that she constantly witnessed that she made a vow that when she became a woman she would never marry, but would devote her life to alleviate the miseries that the women of India were compelled to endure.

This vow she carried out to the very letter, and her days were spent in ministering to the wants and ailments of women, no matter how low in society they happened to be. Her fame spread far and near, and the story of her devotion and self-denial touched every one that heard it. With true Oriental imagination people declared that she was a fairy that had been born into the world in human shape, for never had such tenderness and compassion been shown by any human being, and therefore her home must originally have been amongst the gods and the goddesses that lived in the land of eternal sunshine, where no shadow ever fell upon their hearts to dim the happiness that perpetually filled their lives.

When she died it was felt that such a woman should be deified, and that her name and image should be added to the list of those that were worshipped by the nation. The story of this beautiful life somehow or other travelled over the mountains and plains and deserts that divide India from China, and the "Black-haired race" became so enamoured with it, that those who heard it declared that she was worthy, even though she were a foreigner, of being placed amongst the gods that they trusted in. With wonderful rapidity her cult was adopted by all classes, but especially by the women, till to-day her image is found in nearly every home in the Middle Kingdom.

The recognized place where the idol is enshrined is in the living-room of the family. It thus becomes a silent member of the home and a witness of the daily life of its worshippers. It seems to be treated with but scant courtesy, however, for no care whatever is bestowed upon it, and the dust that comes in at the doors, and that rises from the earthen floors, falls thickly on its head and makes it have a grimy, disreputable appearance. The furniture in the

room and the table on which the idol rests may be cleaned and dusted, but no damp cloth may ever be used to relieve it of the dust that has accumulated upon it, lest it should consider itself insulted by such familiarity and express its resentment by sending down some calamity upon the family. The gods are believed to be very human, and to be liable to fits of passion, and to be very anxious to maintain their dignity, and to be cruel and merciless with those that offend against them.

A general theory with regard to the idols is that they have to be propitiated in order that they may exercise their power in the protection of the home. For this reason they are never formally approached on any occasion without at the very least an offering of incense or of paper money burned in front of the idol, which it is believed find their way to the spirit of the god, who can appropriate and use them for his own benefit. It is customary on the days of the new and full moon to burn a number of sticks of incense, just to keep the idol in a good humour, on the principle that a man makes a present to another, in the hope that should circumstances demand it, he will show himself friendly when he is appealed to.

The one great occasion in the year when the idol is worshipped with great ceremony is its birthday. Then special preparations are made to do it honour, and offerings of roast fowl and duck and boiled ducks' eggs, and certain vegetables, are placed in front of it, and it is called upon to partake of the good things that its worshippers present to it. In the more wealthy homes, where money is plentiful, in addition to the usual offerings of food, the head of the house will engage a band of play-actors, and selecting some popular piece, he will have it performed in the courtyard right in front of the idol, so that it can be amused by the merry performers and be made to remember its birthday with feelings of pleasure and satisfaction.

There is one feature about idolatry that is very striking, and that is that it never proposes to have any effect on character. The theory seems to be that its help is only available when men are in trouble or want to get rich, or when they wish to be avenged on an enemy, or the business is failing and they desire that it should prosper, and so be relieved from the dread of poverty in the future. There may be a thousand things in the same line as these, and it is believed that the idols have resources at their command that enables them to meet all such contingencies in human life and to fill men's hearts with content.

The idols, however, are never supposed to have any influence for good on the characters of those that worship them. A man never feels that as he has just been making an offering to the household god, he must therefore be a better man. Such a thought never occurs to a Chinaman. The connection between a lavish service to the idols and a life altered for the better is never dreamed of in this land. A man, for example, is an opium-smoker, and every day the habit grows upon him till at last he is perfectly powerless under its grip. He becomes indisposed to work and gradually the home becomes impoverished. The opium craving that comes over a man when the hour for smoking arrives is so intolerable that at all hazards it must be satisfied, but this man has stripped his home of everything he can pawn, and now only a bare and desolate house is left, and his wife is almost starving. Driven almost to despair by the awful pains that fill every joint and muscle of his body with the most exquisite agonies, he sells his wife, and she, only too glad to escape her wretched life, willingly consents.

Now, during the whole time that this gradual descent in the man's character has been going on, the idol has been a daily witness of his conduct, but it has never entered the thoughts of the opium-smoker that the god that sits on the oblong table and gazes calmly upon him without a wink cares anything at all whether he smokes or not, or is concerned in the slightest degree whether he lives a moral life, or whether he wrecks it by the grossest iniquities.

I once said to a man who looked like an animated skeleton, though not half so cheerful, "Are you not afraid that the idol that is so close to you, and that sees how wretchedly you are living, may punish you for the great wrongs you are committing?" He smiled a grim and sickly smile, as though I was perpetrating a huge joke, and he was vastly amused at it. The idol had no concern with human character, and it was only a barbarian that would ever dream in his unsophisticated nature that such a thing was possible.

Again, a mistress of a home, who was a devout and earnest believer in the Goddess of Mercy, had a young slave girl about fourteen years of age. Whilst drawn by the beautiful and benevolent-looking face of Kwan-Yin to a keener belief and worship of her, she was daily treating this poor child in the most savage and brutal manner. Her body and her legs were all covered with scars caused by the beatings she had received. One of her eyes was nearly torn out of the socket, and she was brought to the hospital, so maimed and wounded that the doctor feared she could never be cured.

It never occurred to this cruel woman that the savage way in which she was murdering her slave girl, in the very presence of an idol who owed her power to the reputation she had universally gained for mercy and compassion, would so set the goddess against her that her prayers and her offerings would be rejected. What had her conduct got to do with the favour of the goddess? Absolutely nothing. The gods have no concern about human motives and mundane morality. They have other things to attend to, and certainly no time to give to such complex questions, and so men and women are left very much to themselves, and if in the cycles of time retribution comes upon men for their evil lives, it is not the gods and the goddesses that men worship that will see to the ordering of that.

That the Chinese have profound faith in their idols is a fact that cannot for a moment be questioned. China is a nation of idolaters, and neither learning nor intelligence nor high birth tends to quench the belief that has come down from the past that these wooden gods have a power of interfering in human life, and of being able to bestow blessings or to send down curses upon men.

There are times, however, in the life of the people when the gods seem to vanish out of their sight, and they turn to a great power which they call Heaven for deliverance or protection. In the very earliest days of Chinese history, ages before idolatry was introduced into China from India (A.D. 61), there is no doubt but that the people worshipped the true God. In the course of time the word for God became mixed up with certain heroes that were deified by successive emperors, and so the monotheistic craving of the nation took refuge in the word Heaven. The Chinese character for that is composed of two words, "one" and "great." The combination then means, "The One Great," which truly expresses the thought that men have of the Great and the Mighty One whose power is absolute and whose decisions are final throughout the whole of creation.

That this belief is no mere abstract one is seen in many instances in ordinary life where men appeal directly to Heaven instead of to the idols. The country, for example, is suffering from the want of rain. Months have gone by and the rainy season has come and passed away without the usual rainfall, the crops are withering in the fields, and there is a prospect of hunger and famine unless the clouds send down of their richness and revive the drooping forces of nature.

The priests of a certain temple notify that on a certain day a procession will be formed to march through the city to beseech Heaven to pour down the much-needed rain upon the land. The people gladly respond to this appeal, and on the day appointed, scholars dressed in their long robes, and priests in their yellow dresses, and the common people in the clothes that they wear only on special occasions, all turn out and join in the long line that winds its way along the narrow unsavoury streets to intercede with Heaven, that it will send down copious showers on the thirsty earth.

One singular feature in this public demonstration is the attendance of the idols. They are brought out from their temples and carried in the solemn procession to join with the people in the universal prayer for rain. Every ten yards or so the slowly-moving line makes a halt, and every one kneels down and a piteous cry is raised to Heaven, that it would have pity upon the land, so that the crops may not perish and the poor may not die of hunger and starvation. It is intensely interesting to watch the long line of suppliants at this stage in their supplications. Many of them, in order to show the intensity of their purpose, have come dressed in sackcloth; others who are musical have brought their instruments with them, and as they walk with a solemn step they play a sombre funereal air that is intended to show to Heaven with what sorrow their hearts are filled at the calamity that threatens to overwhelm the people if the rain is withheld.

Now the music is stopped and the whole procession is on its knees, and even the idols, as it were, with silent supplications join in the mournful confession of sin and in the agonized entreaties to Heaven to have pity upon the people.

Heaven is recognized as being supreme in power. In the mottoes that the Chinese paste on their doorposts and lintels at the beginning of the year are several that show the popular thought on this great subject. "May Heaven send down upon our home peace and happiness": "Life and Death, adversity and happiness are all decided by Heaven": "Honour and wealth as well as poverty and lowly station are in the hands of Heaven": "Men may plan, but it is Heaven that decides what the result shall be."

There is no reference to the idols here. In fact, when Heaven is mentioned they are never referred to as having any authority in the great movements and principles by which human life is controlled and influenced. Heaven to the Chinese is a great impersonal power, so far exalted and so mysterious that in despair they have adopted the idols as a means by which they can communicate with the unseen. And yet there are occasions when men seem to lose their dread of Heaven, and they appeal to it, as Christians do to God. Heaven, for instance, is believed to have a stern sense of justice and of righteousness. It is also the redresser of wrongs, which it invariably puts right, upholding the innocent and bringing swift judgment on the guilty. Its government is one that is founded on great principles of right, that work automatically in the destruction of all that is evil and in the furtherance of all that is good.

There are many times in the life of this people when Heaven becomes to them a veritable Person, who can hear their cry when they are in distress and who, they believe, is ready to vindicate their character when it has been unjustly assailed.

One day, in passing through one of the side streets of a great town, a crowd was observed standing with a kind of shocked look upon their faces gazing upon a woman that seemed to be raving mad. It turned out that she was a poor woman living down the street, who had gone to assist in the household work of the family opposite to where she was now standing. Some trifling thing had been missed in the house, and she had been accused of stealing it. She defended herself passionately and with all the eloquence at her command, but without avail. Being originally of a high temper and of a hasty, fiery disposition, she was enraged

beyond measure not only at the false accusation that had been levelled against her, but also because the woman refused to accept her defence of herself, and still reiterated her firm conviction that it was she that had stolen the missing articles.

Feeling that there was no other way of clearing her character except by appealing to Heaven, she rushed out into the street, and letting down her long hair till it fell in thick tresses over her shoulders, she looked up at the sky where the Power she called Heaven was, and she poured out the grievance that was filling her heart almost to bursting. She told how she had been falsely accused, and how every attempt to right herself had been listened to with scorn and contempt. Then with tears streaming down her face, she called upon Heaven to avenge her and show to the neighbourhood that she was guiltless of the charges that had been made against her. With a rush and a torrent of imprecations that positively [Pg 87] made one shudder she then prayed “The Great One” to hurl down upon the woman that had injured her all the miseries and woes that poor human nature has ever been called upon to endure. Her vocabulary of evils was amazing in its luxuriance, and as each was shot forth from her passionate lips, some of the onlookers actually shuddered with horror at the awful sorrows that she wished her enemy to have to suffer.

In studying the religious forces that are in operation amongst the Chinese, one is deeply impressed with the illogical position that is maintained in regard to each of them. “Fung-Shuy,” for example, especially when it is acting in conjunction with the graves of the dead, is declared to be able to fill a home with boundless wealth, and to secure that sons shall be born into the family and the highest honours of the State be bestowed upon the sons and grandsons. The idols again are credited with the most marvellous powers. They can get men out of scrapes, and they can build up businesses so that colossal fortunes shall be made. They can fill the desolate homes with troops of children. They have the power, when they are enraged at the neglect of the people of any particular district in paying them proper honour, of sending cholera and deadly fevers that shall carry them off by the hundreds. All these are firmly believed in by priests and gentle-faced looking nuns, and fortune-tellers will all prove to you that the popular faith is founded in philosophy and experience. You retort to all the laboured arguments of these various interested parties by asking them whether it is not a fact that life and death, and prosperity and adversity, and kingly honours as well as the meanest station in society, are all decided by Heaven, and that they are its special gift. There never is any other answer to that question but one, and yet five minutes after the same person will be as enthusiastic as ever in his glorification of the idols, and in his profound belief that some favourite god has the power of bestowing every blessing that the [Pg 88] heart longs to possess.

I have described the idol in the home, and I will conclude now by giving a description of a temple scene such as may be witnessed on the birthday of the chief idol or on the first or the fifteenth of the moon, which days are supposed to be specially lucky for those who wish to make their offerings to the gods.

The temple I am about to describe is situated on a rising hill that has an outlook of great natural beauty. Immediately below it and stretching considerably in the distance is a large city containing over one hundred thousand inhabitants, that live in the confined streets that look from the temple like narrow arteries along which the human tide ebbs and flows without cessation. Beyond the town there runs an arm of the sea, dotted with numerous islets and sparkling with the rays of the great Eastern sun, which he flashes on islands and capes, and the sails of the junks that are passing up and down from the inland waters to the coast. Further on and completely filling up the background are ranges of mountains with the great shadows resting on them and their lofty peaks bathed in sunlight, whilst here and there the floating clouds rest like beautiful crowns upon the summits of some that tower the highest amongst them towards the blue sky.

The scene in the temple and its surroundings was very charming and attractive, for the sun shone upon the temple, and played amongst the solemn-looking pine-trees, and sent his rays down courtyards that seemed to delight in shadow, till everything appeared to be laughing for very joy. Even the idols looked as though they had caught the spirit of the day, and the “God of War” appeared to be less stern and bloodthirsty than was his wont, and the “God of Literature” had put on a light and jaunty air, hardly in keeping with the profound subjects that ever claim his attention.

THE WHITE STAR TEMPLE
(NANKIN).

But see! here come the people from the great city below, slowly winding their way up the stone steps that the feet of countless worshippers in the years gone by have worn smooth and thin. Some few are coming with purposes intent upon appealing to the "Goddess of Mercy," for their faces are sombre, and the shadows of troubles from which they hope the idol may deliver them, cover them with a sad and sorrowful aspect. Others, again, have come for an outing and to get out of their monotonous surroundings, to catch a glimpse of the far-off hills, and to see the sun as he puts forth his powers to turn the world into a thing of beauty. [Pg 89]

Here is a jolly little party that has almost reached the top. It consists of an old lady whose hair is completely grey, but whose face is made beautiful by as sunny a smile as ever lighted up a human face. With her are two lads, evidently her grandsons, full of life and fun, and wild with the excitement that the mountain air has put into their blood. They race and chase each other up and down the steps, and round the huge boulders that lie on the roadside, and they dodge behind the old granny, who seems as if she would like to be a girl again and join them in their mad romps.

Whilst she is standing taking breath, and gazing with rapture upon the distant hills flooded with great waves of light, and upon the waters of the sea that are sparkling with sunbeams, a woman of about forty with slow and sorrowful motion climbs up the steep ascent. She has a slave girl with her, and she leans one hand upon her shoulder to support her as she walks. She is a widow, and evidently has some sorrowful story that she is going to tell the goddess. One is struck with the pallor of her face, and the utterly hopeless air that rests on every feature in it. She hardly looks at the pleasant-looking old lady, but passes up with downcast eyes till she reaches the open space that is in front of the temple.

Immediately behind these people I have been describing, there appears a party of young fellows of the better class. They are well dressed, and have an air of refinement about them. There is no sign of trouble or sorrow among them, for they laugh and chat and joke with each other, whilst the road resounds with the echo of their merry voices. Their visit to the temple to-day is merely one of pleasure. The streets below are grimy and evil smelling, and in order to have some object in view they have determined to spend the afternoon in a picnic to the well-known temple on the mountain side. [Pg 90]

The temple as a whole consists not simply of one large room where the image of the goddess is enshrined, but is made up of a number of smaller buildings connected with each other in a cunning and artistic fashion by winding ways that nature seems to have devised in order to add to the attractions of the place. In each of these lesser temples there are placed images of some of the more commonly worshipped idols, a veritable kind of Pantheon where each visitor can find the particular god that he deems the most suitable for his individual requirements. Leading to these various buildings, there are little grottoes, and covered pathways, and natural adjustments of rocks, in which stone seats and granite tables have been arranged, and where the crowds of worshippers, tired with their climb up the mountain path and anxious to get out of the glare of the great sun, can sit and enjoy the refreshing coolness that these recesses in the hillside naturally give.

But let us take our stand a little to the side of the goddess and watch the worshippers as they come in turn and take their position in front of her to offer their petitions to her. The widow with the sorrowful face, whom we saw climbing the hill, without one thought of the glorious scenery that filled the landscape with its beauty, comes in with the shadow

deepening on her face, and lifting up her folded hands in the attitude of devotion to the goddess begins to mutter to her the story of the trouble that is weighing on her heart. The sight is truly a most pathetic one. The face is in agony, and the eyes are turned with an intensity of gaze upon the calm face of the wooden image before her. The faith expressed in the impassioned look is profound, for it would seem as though her whole soul was absorbed in the telling of her story and in her wish to touch the heart of the placid image of the goddess.

After a few minutes, anxious to know what the answer of the idol is going to be, she takes up two pieces of bamboo that are lying on the table in front of it, and throws them up in the air. With a clatter they fall on to the tiled floor, and by the way they lie she learns that her prayer has been granted, and that the goddess will give her the desire of her heart. A smile like a flash of sunlight in a winter sky fleets across her pale thin face, and one can see what a sweet one it might be, were her heart relieved of the sorrow that has painted it with such sombre colours.

Her place is taken by another who has been standing by waiting her turn. Evidently her business is not a very pressing one, or such as to cause her much trouble at heart, for after a few seconds of muttering she tosses up with almost an irreverent fling the two divining bits of bamboo, and looks with a casual air at the position they take on the floor. The answer they give is No—her prayer is not granted—so with a bow to the goddess, and a kind of pout upon her lips, she passes out into the open air. Her matter could not have been of any importance whatever, for in a moment she is laughing and gossiping with her friends, as though her visit to the goddess had been a joke that was now ended.

And so one after another come and take their stand before the idol. Some have a free-and-easy air about them, whilst others are intense and impassioned. Some accept at once the answer of the goddess as final, whilst others again continue to fling up the two coarse pieces of bamboo until they give the reply that they wish to have. One young lad about eighteen attracts my attention. For fully a minute, with calm and untroubled face, his lips keep moving and his gaze is concentrated on Kwan-Yin. I ask him when he is finished what he has been asking of her. “I have been out of employment for some time,” he replies, “and I have been round to several temples and entreated the gods there to find me a place; but they have done nothing for me, so I thought I would come here and see if I should be more successful with the idol of this temple.”

As the evening sun began to set behind the mass of clouds that seemed to gather on the Western mountains to catch the last glimpse of him before he disappeared, we began to descend the hill. Numbers of those that I had seen standing with devout faces and uplifted hands before the idol were fellow-travellers. Others, again, who had ascended the hill for an outing, and whom I had watched sitting in the grottoes, eating peanuts, and deftly cracking dried melon seeds, and sipping tea, moved down at the same time. The wooden gods were left behind in the gathering gloom of their shrines, and the only figures they saw were the opium-visaged priests that flitted about like ghosts. The people at any rate had had a pleasant day, and a breath of pure air, and a vision of nature in her most beautiful aspect, but nothing more. “What have you gained to-day in your appeal to the goddess?” I asked of a man that I had seen very devout in his prayers. He looked at me with a quick and searching glance. “You ask me what answer I have got to my petition to the goddess?” he said. “Yes,” I replied, “that is what I want to know from you.” “Well, you have asked me more than I can tell you. The whole question of the idols is a profoundly mysterious one that no one can fathom. Whether they do or can help people is something I cannot tell. I worship them because my fathers did so before me, and if they were satisfied, so must I be. The whole thing is a mystery,” and he passed on with the look of a man who was puzzled with a problem that he could not solve, and that look is a permanent one on the face of the nation to-day.

CHAPTER V

SERVANTS

General character of servants—The duties and perquisites of the cook—Taking account with cook—His oblique ideas of morality—The boy, his duties, etc.—The way that small things mysteriously disappear in a house—Percentages—The servant question.

The general experience of Englishmen in China with regard to the servants is, taking it all in all, a pleasant one. The average intelligence of the class of men and women that are employed is a fairly good one. They consequently learn their work easily, and as they are

industrious and moved by a sense of fidelity they render such very pleasant services that when families have to return to England, they think with regret of the home life they have left behind them in that far-off land, which owed a good deal of its charm to the cheerful and willing service rendered by the servants in it.

It must not be inferred that there never is any friction. That would be to assume a state of things that could be found nowhere in the wide world. Disagreements do happen and collisions do take place, but these are but as it were the occasional clouds in a sky that is usually sunny, and besides there is so much of the grotesque mingled with the unpleasant, that after the affair is over and the irritation has subsided one is more inclined to laugh at the whole affair than to be angry.

If there is a family, the servants usually required are a cook, a table boy, a water coolie to carry water, and an amah or nurse, who will help with the children, if there are any, look after the bedrooms, and do any mending that may be needed. The most important amongst them all is the cook, for the comfort of a home depends in a very large measure upon him, so [Pg 95] the great aim of every housewife is to secure a man who knows his work well, is clean, and is fairly honest. If such a one as this can be secured, there will never be any disposition to get rid of him, even though he may have serious faults that it requires considerable patience to endure.

As soon as it is known that you wish to engage a cook, you have almost an immediate application for the situation. You gaze upon the applicant with a good deal of anxiety, and if it were possible you would like to read into his very heart to know what kind of a character he is. Is he good-tempered, or is he touchy and masterful, and, like most Chinese, does he want his own way? You scan his face to see if you can catch a glimpse of the soul within, but it is as expressionless as a statue. The control that a Chinaman has over his features is one of the mysteries of this wonderful people. He has so schooled them, that when he likes they will show no trace of what is going on in his mind.

You inquire of him if he knows how to cook. If he is a really clever artist, he will reply, “A little.” There is a double motive in saying this. It is a sign of pride, and it also secures him in the future from any very serious criticism of the mistress, for if he should fail to please her in any particular dish, he will remind her that he warned her when she was engaging him that he did not profess to be an adept in cooking.

All the time you have been questioning him he has been looking at you with those black, piercing eyes of his and trying to read you. Are you shrewd and wideawake, or are you so green that you can be cheated with your eyes open? Are you acquainted with the wiles of the Chinese mind, or will you accept everything you are told as though it were gospel truth? Will you watch everything that is going on in your kitchen, or will you leave the full control in his [Pg 96] hands? These are some of the questions that flash through the Yellow brain, and before he quits you he will have formed a very accurate idea of the kind of mistress you are to whom he has engaged himself.

There is one thing that is quite settled, and that is from the moment of his engagement the one great aim of his life is to make as much money as he can out of the situation he has just gained. His facilities for doing so are very great, for the custom in the East is for the cook to purchase all the daily food that is used in the family. The mistress never does this. It would be impossible for her to rise every morning by daylight and go into the narrow ill-smelling streets and buy from the farmers as they bring in their produce from the country in the early dawn. There are months in the year, besides, when the heat is so intense and the rays of the sun are so scorching that she would not dare to venture out to make her purchases. The result is, the duty of buying is left to the cook, and as his conscience is an exceedingly elastic one, it may easily be conceived what an opportunity this gives him of making money.

In the art of doing this every Chinaman is an adept. He begins to learn it when he is a boy. His mother sends him out when he is a small lad to buy some simple thing for the home. He returns with the article minus ten per cent., which he considers his lawful commission, though he is careful not to let his mother know, and with this he plays pitch-and-toss with other youthful gamblers in the street. As he grows in years, he becomes more expert in the art of extracting commissions from every sum entrusted to his care, and now that he has become a cook a golden field is opened up before him, where his gains are only bounded by the ignorance or carelessness of his employer.

[Pg 97] As it is impossible for his mistress to follow him down the narrow, crowded streets where the provisions for the day are to be bought, he has a wide field for the exercise of his ingenuity as to how much extra he is to charge for everything he buys. She does not know the market rates, and therefore within certain very undefined limits she is at his mercy.

It is as good as a play to watch the progress of the taking an account of the purchases for any particular day, and to see how the wily Chinaman, with his childlike, innocent-looking face, and the Englishwoman with her open-hearted, guileless disposition, settle such a difficult financial problem.

The latter seats herself at the table with her account-book open and with pen in hand. She is restless and uneasy, for she is conscious that she is going to be cheated, and that she herself will have to register the figures that will ensure her own defeat. The Oriental stands some

way off, with head slightly drooping and with a face that might have been that of a saint. With a calmness and simplicity of manner, as though he were stating one of Heaven's eternal principles, he mentions the first item of his account. There is no faltering or hesitation in his accent, or any sign of guile, though it is precisely fifty per cent. more than he actually paid for the article he has mentioned.

The lady moves restlessly in her seat. Her heart is beginning to swell with indignation, for she is positive that she is being overcharged. She has no proof, however, and with her Occidental training that it is not right to bring an accusation unless supported by some evidence, she puts down the lying figures. The Oriental looks on without the shadow of a smile, though with his sense of humour bubbling up within him, he is conscious of the huge comedy that is being played. He has scored his first success, but to let his face show that would be to throw victory from him when it was just within his grasp.

Another and another item is given, as though they were quotations from his own sacred classics, each one as mendacious as the first, and the scribe, conscious that with every additional figure sums are being stolen from her own pocket and transferred to the cook's, nervously writes them down, though her heart is vigorously protesting all the time. The only protest she can make is an indignant "Too dear, too dear by far," which the Oriental listens to unmoved, and as though they were eulogies upon his honesty.

At length one sum, that she has certain information about, that is a hundred per cent. over the market price is given her, without a quaver in his voice. She at once asks him, with a ring of passion that up to this time she has managed to suppress, how it is that he dares to charge her just double of what he gave. The Chinaman is equal to the occasion. No man, indeed, in this great Empire is ever at a loss for an answer on the spot to the most awkward question that may be put to him. An Occidental will stammer and hesitate when a difficulty of this kind occurs, and the scarlet flush that will flash over his face will announce his confusion. An Oriental will instantly become more calm. His eyes will melt into gentleness, and his face assume the appearance of one that is absorbed in some great moral problem that he is endeavouring to solve.

The cook looks at the lady in gentle wonder. The charge has steadied him, and made him more tranquil and composed. "What does the mistress mean?" he asks. His face is childlike in its assumption of innocence. "Do you really think I would cheat you? I may be poor," he continues, "but I am honest, and if you only go to the market and inquire the price of goods, you will find that I am charging exactly what I paid." "Well," she triumphantly replies, "I have been there already, and I find you have charged me just double the market rate."

This seems to be a crushing answer, but it only serves to bring out the true resources of the Chinese mind. Instead of being flustered with this decided evidence of his guilt, he becomes more self-possessed. "It is quite true," he says, "that such goods can be bought at the price you name, but they are inferior articles, and such as would not be accepted by you, were I to buy them for you. You always want the best, and I would never dream of purchasing such things. I can get them for you at the price you mention, but you must not complain if they are not as good as you are used to."

The lady is determined not to be beaten, so she puts down the price at half that he has named, the cook meanwhile protesting that he is a loser, and that himself and family will have to suffer.

But it is not simply in the matter of overcharges that the cook finds a large field open to him for successful financial operations. Overweights are also a fruitful source of revenue to him. When he goes to market he always carries with him his steelyard, and every purchase that is made is weighed with it.

Chinese law has never legislated with regard to weights and measures, and no inspector ever goes round to see that the public is not cheated when they make their purchases. The consequence is that every man that can possibly afford it carries his own steelyard, in order to check the tradesmen who might be inclined to give them short measure. The cook would no more dream of going out to market without his steelyard than he would think of going without his fan in the dog days. It is his *vade mecum* by which he can measure his gains, for when he returns home he reports to the mistress that he has bought so many ounces more than he really has, and the money she pays him for these mythical weights is so much pure gain that he pockets.

If the lady, however, takes a pride in the management of her household and is anxious to keep down expenses, she will insist that every article that the cook buys shall be brought and weighed in her presence before she pays for it. This home is not an ideal one for a cook. He has, however, to submit to the inevitable, but he at once sets his wits to work to circumvent her by ingenious ways and dogged perseverance in his plans, such as no watchfulness on her part will ever enable her entirely to frustrate. There is no profession in China like a cook's for developing the inventive faculties or for stimulating the imagination.

The mistress in self-defence gets a steelyard. Without that she would be at the mercy of the man whose whole aim in life is now to circumvent her, and circumvent her he will, or the Yellow brain will have lost its cunning. Some of his schemes are most ingenious. For example, he is told one day to go out and buy a fowl. He goes to the market, and secures one

after an immense amount of haggling and carries it home.

After he has got there he proceeds to cram down its throat some very common stuff, till its crop is as full as it can contain. This is to increase its weight and consequently his gains, for the animal is sold at so much an ounce.

The cook brings the fowl to be weighed, with a look of the sweetest simplicity on his face. Such a thing as guile could never exist behind such a bland and childlike countenance as his. The mistress, who is up to all his dodges, is unmoved by the seraphic air his face wears. She feels the fowl that is hanging by its legs from the hook on the steelyard, and she remarks how thin it is, and then points to the distended crop, and asks him what he means by such cruelty, and how he dares to try and cheat her by such a transparent device. The cook at once assumes an air of surprise, and looks at the swollen crop with the utmost indignation. "Oh!" he exclaims in a truly theatrical tone, "I have been cheated. This was done in the shop, and, as it was dimly lighted, I did not perceive how I was being taken in. I shall give that man that sold me the fowl a piece of my mind when I next see him." [Pg 101]

The lady is accustomed to such tricks as this, and she says, "I shall deduct two ounces from the weight you have given me." The man puts on an injured air and in a plaintive voice says, "You surely do not wish me to be a loser by my purchase, I am a poor man and I cannot afford that." The lady, however, is firm, and by and by his usually placid look once more overspreads his sphinx-like countenance, whilst his admiration for his mistress' ability is vastly increased.

One day a cook brought in a round of beef to his mistress to be weighed. There was an ingenuous look about him that disarmed suspicion. There was evidently no deception there, and she was just about to accept it, when the instinct of suspicion that lingers in the mind whenever you have to do with the Chinese about money prompted her to say, "Undo the string that ties this beef and let me see inside." A sudden flush ran through the man's face, and he hesitated for a moment to carry out her orders, but knowing that any delay would only excite her anger, he cut the string, when out rolled a stone of fully half-a-pound in weight. A look of surprise and indignation swept across the face of his mistress, for even she, with all her knowledge of the fertility of the Chinese brain, had never dreamed of such a cunning device to cheat her.

She looked at the cook with flashing eyes, but he was apparently unmoved. No flush of shame mantled his cheeks. Instead of that an innocent air crept over his countenance, and a look of wonder stole into his eyes, as he exclaimed, "Dear me, however did that stone get there? The people of the shop must have put it in whilst my head was turned. How dishonest of them! I really must give up dealing with them. The principles of Heaven are evidently unknown to them." The withering tones of indignation uttered by his mistress seemed to make no impression upon him, and he left her presence, muttering to himself, "How wrong of that butcher to cheat me as he has done to-day, and to cause me to lose face, and to make me a laughing-stock to every one that may hear this story." [Pg 102]

The steelyard is an invention that is intended to promote honest dealing. It is sometimes, however, the unconscious instrument of a systematic deceit, which is all the more effective because it is so entirely unsuspected. On one occasion a young fellow had been engaged as cook. He was a man of engaging manners, with a pleasant open face, and a winning disposition that made one unconsciously have great faith in him. He was consequently greatly trusted by his employers, though they never forgot the terrible temptations to which as a cook he was exposed.

It seemed that after a while the spell of money spun its subtle web over him, and he succumbed to its fatal fascination. With the implicit faith that his mistress had in him, the opportunity for making money on all his purchases became enlarged. This led him into gambling, and as the gambler nearly always loses, he had to look around for some method that would give him a larger revenue than could be secured by his squeezes on the articles he bought every day for the use of the home.

In this dilemma, a bright idea occurred to him; he would so manipulate the steelyard that it should serve his purpose, and enable him to pay his gambling debts, and still give him funds to pursue his favourite vice. He accordingly filed off two ounces from the iron weight attached to it, and which acted as a counterpoise to the goods that were being weighed at the other end of the yard, and by a single stroke he secured to himself twelve and a half per cent. on every purchase that he made.

[Pg 103] The mistress had no suspicion of this deep-laid scheme, for she never dreamed of testing the iron weight, and the cook with guileless looks and childlike smiles gathered in his gains, feeling confident that he had now struck a mine that would never be exhausted. But a Nemesis was at hand, and one day his treachery was revealed by a person with whom he had quarrelled, when he was instantly dismissed as a man with a mind too original and too dangerous to be allowed to hold any position in the household for the future.

From the above it will have been inferred that the difficulty of controlling a cook in China is one that no foreigner ever hopes to cope with successfully, and the same thing only in a milder form exists with regard to all the other servants that are employed in the running of a home in this land. If the Chinaman was less expert in disguising his thoughts, the matter

would be simpler. Ages of practice, however, have taught them to conceal their feelings from the keenest scrutiny to which they may be subjected. Looks and language, which in other peoples are usually an index to the condition of the mind, are in their case no guide whatsoever.

The boy, for example, who really is a full-grown man, comes to you one morning, and in a low, melodious voice informs you that he wishes you to engage another servant, as he is compelled to leave you. You are surprised, for no intimation of anything of the kind has come to you till the present moment. You ask him why this sudden decision, and if there is anything in the home with which he is dissatisfied. He says, "No, you have been very kind to me, and I am exceedingly unwilling to leave you, but I have had a letter from my father, and he is very urgent that I should go home as quickly as I can. The fact is," he continues, "he is getting old, and he needs my help on the farm, and I must ask you to let me go."

He tells his story in such an easy, natural manner, that you are inclined to believe him, though lingering doubts will run through your mind. You remember that his family is desperately poor, and depend very largely upon this son for the wages he earns to keep them from starvation. You are perplexed to know what to do, but finally you pay him the wages due to him, and with many bows and a genial smile lighting up his yellow features, he bids you good-bye.

Not long after he has gone, the true secret of his desire to leave his employ comes out. The letter from his father, and the need of his help on the farm, are myths that his fertile imagination conjured up, and never had any existence in fact. The real truth is he had a row with the water coolie, who comes from a village in the country contiguous to his own, and who belongs to a more powerful clan than his. He dreads any further collision with this man, who might send word to his relatives there, who would speedily take measures to avenge their wrongs on their weaker neighbours, and so, to save himself and the family, he resigns.

Chinese servants, taking them all in all, may be considered to be honest. It is true that from a ten commandments point of view, and the higher morality we have been accustomed to in England, they cannot in a strict sense be said to be so. Of course they have never heard of the Decalogue, and therefore they cannot be blamed for not knowing what it demands. The training they have been subjected to during the past two thousand years has taught them to look with very different eyes upon certain subjects from what ours do.

Overcharges, for example, and skilful manipulations of the steelyard to make it lie, are not considered so much moral defects as tokens of an unusually active brain. A man who does not know how to do such things is not looked upon as one who has a higher standard of life, but one who is, in the expressive language of the vernacular, "idiotically honest." It is not a question of conscience with such a man, but rather a lack of brain power, which has made him less mentally fit for those keen and rapid movements of thought that are essential in the conflict of mind with mind.

It is not simply, however, in the question of overcharges and the manipulating the steelyard that the servants' ideas of morality differ materially from our own. There are a good many other points where they certainly look with leniency upon certain questionable actions that we should never dream of doing. Small things, for example, of comparatively little value, will mysteriously disappear. The Chinese would repudiate the idea that they were stolen. They simply vanished, and no trace is left of them. A kerosine tin, for example, has been emptied and placed in the yard for a short time. The mistress is aware of the peculiar idiosyncrasies of the Chinese with regard to articles of the kind, and she keeps a sharp look out upon it. She happens to have to go to another part of the house for a few minutes, and when she returns it is gone. She calls each of the servants, and asks them all where is it. They all feign surprise, and remark to each other about the daring of the man that had carried it off. "Very remarkable," says one. "Why, I saw it myself only a moment ago! Where can it have got to?" "The men of the present day are not to be compared with those of ancient times," remarks another sententiously, as though he were one of the sages of China. They gather round the spot where the tin stood and peer into the ground, as though some sprite had bewitched it into the earth.

The acting of the servants on this occasion is inimitable. Not only is the one that absorbed it present, but each of the others knows that he is the culprit; yet not a twinkle of the eye, nor a movement in the muscles of the face of any one of them can be discerned to show that they are either moved by the absurdity of the matter, or indignant that the honesty of the whole should be called in question by the act of one of them.

Again, a half-dozen empty bottles are left on a table. One by one they slowly disappear, and nobody knows where they have gone, though the itinerant rag merchant who makes his daily rounds could tell you exactly how much he gave for them, and from whom he bought them. If there is one thing, however, more than another that has a fascination for the Chinese, it is a pocket-handkerchief.

The nation as a whole knows nothing of this useful article. The ancient worthies that founded the Empire never dreamt of such luxuries. Their descendants, however, have taken to it with an avidity that is perfectly amazing, and whenever they can get a chance they quietly absorb them. You buy a dozen and have them marked with the blackest of indelible ink. The identity of those handkerchiefs can never be disputed, so you feel satisfied that you

will have a fair service out of them.

A week passes by, and you suddenly find two of them have vanished. You are staggered, for you remember that handkerchiefs have a fatal facility for disappearing. You put off the decision of the question by assuming they have gone to the wash, or they are hidden away in some of your pockets, and they will turn up by and by. Another week goes by, and others vanish, till in the course of no very long period only one is left. You question the servants, but blank and child-looking faces meet you at every inquiry that you make.

It is never suggested that the cat has walked off with them, as might be in England, where all kinds of unspeakable immoralities are put down to that animal. Chinese civilization has never yet produced a cat that has got the reputation of the same species in the West. Everybody simply denies that he ever saw the handkerchiefs, or knew indeed that they existed; and yet it is quite probable that if you were to visit their homes, you would find the lady members of their families sporting them on all public occasions, and making their female members green with envy because they could not have the same.

Now, it must not be inferred that the Chinese servants are systematic thieves, because they are not. With regard to the more valuable things in a house, they may be said to be strictly honest. Articles of considerable value, such as clocks, opera-glasses, and ornaments for the mantelpiece, one need never have any anxiety about. They would fetch much more than some of the other things that are bound, by a law as unvarying as that of the Medes and Persians, to disappear, but they are as safe in the rooms as though a policeman's eye was constantly upon them. What are the mental processes a Chinaman goes through to enable him with a good conscience to appropriate something worth a dozen cents or so, whilst he would scorn the idea of walking off with any of the more valuable property of his master, is a mystery to the foreigner. Perhaps he could hardly analyze his own feelings on the subject. His love for the indirect and curvilinear method of approaching a subject may have had some influence in making him unable to decide the question even for himself.

There is one subject that must not be omitted in this discussion of the servants, and that is the percentages they claim upon everything that the dealers from outside bring into the house. These are quite distinct from those that the cook makes in his purchases, and he never lays claim for any share in them. Although they are perquisites that are supposed never to come to the ears of their superiors, and are strictly private transactions, they do in a certain sense seriously affect the pockets of their masters.

The baker and the milkman, for instance, have to pay the boy ten per cent. at the end of the month when they receive payment for the goods they have supplied, whilst the washerman is more severely taxed, for, in addition to the above tax, he has to wash all his clothes for nothing. No tradesman attempts to evade these impositions, for he well knows that were he to do so, the boy would so manipulate matters that he would lose the custom of the house, which would at once be transferred to a rival that could offer more.

On one occasion a milkman was being coerced into increasing the percentage that he had been accustomed to pay. He declared that he could not possibly afford to do so, as his profits were so scanty. The boy became silent, but there was a gleam in his eyes that boded no good to the milkman. Next morning the latter as usual brought round the daily bottle of milk for the house. The boy placed it beside the hot kitchen range and, when the family assembled for breakfast, he brought the milk to his mistress and showed her that it had gone bad. When he was asked the reason for this, he assured her it was the milkman's fault, whose milk was of a decidedly inferior character; and as for his cows, they were well known to give only adulterated milk at the best. The lady is naturally indignant, and at once asks him if he cannot get another man to supply the home with milk. "Oh! yes, I have number one man, milk number one good, can do." He is directed to see if he could not get sufficient immediately to do for breakfast, which he declares can be easily done. This he can well guarantee, as he has already a man outside just waiting to be called. He produces a bottle of milk, which it would appear he came by accidentally, though the whole thing is planned and engineered by the boy. The milk turns out to be so excellent that the whole family is charmed with it. It has a rich creamy look about it, such as they have not seen since they left England, and which they will not probably see the like of for many a day to come. It has the look and taste of milk, and has no suspicion of the pump about it, and so the tea this morning has not tasted so nice since they know not when.

Imperative orders are issued that the old milkman who had dared to bring such inferior milk should be at once dismissed and the new one taken on, and so the deep-laid scheme of the boy has succeeded, and his increased percentage secured. From this moment the services of the pump will come into requisition, and the old sky-blue hue will colour every bottle of milk that comes into the house.

Chinese servants as a rule never accept a situation under a foreigner simply for the wages that are offered them. These usually are higher than could be got in a purely Chinese home. It is the fat percentages that are the main attraction, for by these the salary will often be increased as much as fifty per cent. A Chinaman is ever on the look-out for these, and like the eagle in the sky can scent his prey from afar.

You have had occasion, for example, to dismiss your boy. The news spreads in the most rapid and unexplained manner. There are no registry offices that are interested in supplying

servants. Not an hour has passed by, however, before you are told that two men want to see you. “Ah! the new boy,” you mutter, as you walk out to see them. One of the two is your cook, and a glance shows you that the other is the expectant boy.

The cook does all the talking, whilst the other looks nervous and uncomfortable. He moves uneasily from one foot to the other, gives now and then a short, dry cough, all signs of that species of nervousness that a man feels when some important question is going to be decided. He hangs his head, and his black, piercing eyes seem absorbed in his contemplation of the ground, but in the meanwhile he is reading your character and figuring up in his own mind how much he is going to make and whether he is likely to get on with you. [Pg 110]

The cook seems to be in the happiest of moods. His face is wreathed in smiles, and his speech is adorned with Oriental similes that excite poetic thoughts in your mind, if it is capable of such. He knows that you are in want of a boy, he says. Boys are difficult to be got: they are at a premium just now. Good capable ones are not to be obtained at any price, but as good luck would have it, here is one that has just turned up, a very paragon in his way, and one that would suit the master down to the ground.

You look at the man with a critical eye, but you get but very little out of that sphinx-looking face of his. Does he understand his work? you weakly ask the cook, more for something to say than for any hope of obtaining any exact knowledge about the man before you. “Certainly he does,” he replies, with a toss of his head in the air and a wave of his right hand as though he had just demonstrated a problem in Euclid, and was ending with the triumphant formula, Q.E.D.

After some further questioning, you ask the cook if he is prepared to stand security for the man and be responsible for his honesty. He is evidently ready to do so, for he at once strikes an attitude, slaps his breast with his open palm, and with gleaming eyes and impassioned look he says, “This is my affair; I will guarantee the man that he is a good and a safe one, and you may accept him as a servant without any fear.”

You are satisfied, and you at once take him on. The cook is also pleased, for the man will have to pay him the heavy percentage of one-half of his month’s salary for the service he has just rendered him.

The servant question is a most interesting one for watching the play of thought and the subtle and unexpected ways in which the Yellow brain works. It is at times a very irritating one, and is apt to give one distorted views of the whole Chinese race, and to cause one to make sweeping statements about the general incapacity of the whole nation. In one’s saner moments one will freely confess that the home servants are on the whole less obliging and more exacting than the same class out here. There is besides the ludicrous element in the Chinese, that always takes off the edge of almost any unpleasantness. Even when one is most annoyed there is something so funny about the way in which a Chinaman acts, that one’s anger is most likely to explode in laughter. There is one thing highly in their favour, and that is their great love and tenderness for children. Taking them all in all, any one who has had large experience of the servants in China can honestly declare that on the whole they are a faithful and satisfactory class of people. [Pg 111]

CHAPTER VI

[Pg 112]

THE ADAPTABILITY AND TENACITY OF PURPOSE OF THE CHINESE

Can live and thrive in any climate—Absence of nerves—Bear pain heroically—Great staying power—A long ride through the country—Dogged inflexibility of ordinary Chinese—Contempt for other countries.

The strength of the Chinaman lies in his power to adapt himself to the circumstances in which he may be situated. Place him in a northern climate where the sun’s rays have lost their fire, and where the snow falls thickly and the ice lays its wintry hand upon the forces of nature, and he will thrive as though he had descended from an ancestry that had always lived in a frozen region. Transport him to the torrid zone, where the sun is a great ball of molten flame, where the air is as hot as though it had crossed a volcano, and where the one thought is how to get cool in this intolerable maddening heat, and he will move about with an ease and a comfort just as if a sultry climate was the very thing that his system demanded.

He is so cosmopolitan in his nature that it seems to be a matter of indifference where he

may be or what his environment. He will travel along lofty peaks, where the snows of successive winters lie unmelted, or he will sleep in a grass hut where the fever-bearing mosquitoes will feast upon him the livelong night to the sound of their own music, and he will emerge from it next morning with a face that shows that the clouds of anopheles have left him a victor on the field. He will descend into the sultry tin mines of Siam, and at night he will stretch himself on the hard, uneven ground, with a clod for his pillow, and he will rise as refreshed as though he had slept on a bed of down.

[Pg 113]

JUNKS
(ON THE YANG-TSE RIVER).]

You meet the Chinaman everywhere under the most varied circumstances, and he seems natural in every one of them. He walks about in an easy, unsurprised way, a first-class passenger in a crack mail steamer, or he curls himself up in a native river boat, in a space where no human being but himself could live an hour, and he sleeps a dreamless sleep the livelong night in a fetid atmosphere that would give an Occidental typhoid, from which he would perhaps never recover. Whatever the social condition of the Chinaman may be, whether merchant, or coolie, or artisan, one becomes conscious that behind those harsh and unæsthetic features there is a strength of physique and a latent power of endurance that seems to make him independent of climate, and impervious to microbes, germs, bacteria, and all the other scientific scourges that seem to exist for the destruction of all human life excepting the Chinese.

One advantage the Celestial has over the Occidental is what may be called his absence of nerves. The rush and race and competition of the West have never yet touched the East. The Orient is sober and measured, and never in a hurry. An Englishman, were all other signs wanting, could easily be distinguished, as he walks along the road, by his rapid stride, the jerky movements of his arms, and the nervous poise of his head, all so different from the unemotional crowd around him, who seem to think that they have an eternity before them in which to finish their walk, and so they need not hurry.

There is no doubt but that this absence of nerves is a very important factor in enabling the Chinaman to adapt himself so readily to the circumstances in which he may be placed. Take the matter of pain. He bears it with the composure of a saint. The heroic never seems to come out so grandly in him, as when he is bearing some awful suffering that only a martyr could endure. I have seen a man come into a hospital with an abscess that must have been giving him torture. His face was drawn, and its yellow hue had turned to a slightly livid colour, but there were no other signs that he was in agony. The surgeon drove his knife deep into the inflamed mass, but only the word “ai Ya,” uttered with a prolonged emphasis, and the twisting up of the muscles of one side of his face, showed that he was conscious of any pain. An Occidental of the same class would most probably have howled, and perhaps a couple of assistants would have been required to hold him whilst the doctor was operating.

[Pg 114]

It is this same absence of nerves that enables the Chinese to bear suffering of any kind with a patience and fortitude that is perfectly Spartan. He will live from one year’s end to another on food that seems utterly inadequate for human use; he will slave at the severest toil, with no Sunday to break its wearisome monotony, and no change to give the mind rest; and he will go on with the duties of life with a sturdy tread and with a meditative mystic look on his face, that reminds one of those images of Buddha that one sees so frequently in the Chinese monasteries or temples.

The staying power of the Chinese seems unlimited. The strong, square frames with which nature has endowed them are models of strength. They are not graceful, neither are the lines of beauty conspicuous either in face or form, but for endurance there is nothing to surpass them anywhere throughout the world.

On one occasion, I had to make a journey to a large city some twenty miles or more distant. It was in the hottest days in summer, when the temperature was over ninety in the shade. I engaged two chair-bearers to carry me, who were taken at random from the nearest chair shop, where such men wait to be hired. There was nothing to distinguish them from the ordinary men who get their living by carrying chairs. They had the look of the farmer class from which they were taken, and were as dull and as uninteresting as shabby clothes and tanned and bronzed faces could make them. They had a mean and insignificant appearance, being not more than five feet and a half in height, and the blue colour in their garments, which is so popular with the Chinese, gave them a commonplace look that did not raise one's opinion of them. [Pg 115]

We started very early in the morning, just before the light of the dawn had touched the darkness that covered the land with its shadows. We had not gone far before the men began to show their mettle. With the heavy chair upon their shoulders, they kept on at a steady swing of over three miles an hour, in spite of the fact that the roads were simply footpaths, that had been worn into ruts and hollows by the feet of countless travellers and by the wear and tear of storm and rain.

The first hour's travelling was comparatively cool, for the sun had not risen above the mountain tops to flash his fiery rays upon the world around us. The scene at this time was full of beauty. The earth lay clothed in a dim, subdued, cloisterlike light that gave it an air of mystery. The rice in the fields looked shy and modest as it appeared to be hiding itself amid the shadows that still rested upon the earth. The clumps of trees took fantastic and grotesque shapes, and seemed like spectres that had come out to travel during the uncanny hours of night and had dallied too long by the way. But most beautiful of all were the hills in a blue thin haze that clung to them, and turned the rocks and boulders into seeming fortresses and castles, behind which one could fancy gallant knights and armed soldiers kept watch and ward. [Pg 116]

After a time, the sun rose with fire in his face and flashed his molten rays across the land, till everything glowed beneath their touch, and made life a misery. My men, however, strode on through the scorching air, with as firm a step as though they were on a Highland range with the purple heather at their feet. The sun blazed down upon their bare shaven heads till it seemed as though I should have a sunstroke out of sheer sympathy from looking at the glare that flashed about them; but on they went, their bodies steaming with perspiration, but with overflowing spirits that made them catch the humours they met by the way, which now and again sent them into uproarious fits of laughter.

The hours went by, and with a tread like fate they marched on along the burning roads, through villages and across flooded plains, till at last we reached the great city. It was a little after midday when we passed through the great gates that gave us entrance into the narrow streets, where the crowds jostled each other, and where the tide of human life flowed in a perpetual stream.

After transacting our business, I spoke to the men about returning. This was a most unusual proceeding, for one such journey was universally considered to be enough for one day. The day, however, was young, and the heat in the city, where the crowded houses kept away the breeze, made it a perfect oven where men could scarcely breathe, and where the mosquitoes revelled in the luxuries that the half-dressed people afforded them.

I asked them whether they could engage fresh men to carry me back, for I never dreamed of suggesting that they might be able to do so. “What need is there,” they replied, “to search for other bearers, when you have us, who are perfectly willing to make the return journey with you?” As they said this, their eyes perfectly danced with delight at the prospect of earning two days' wages in one. [Pg 117]

A SEDAN CHAIR.

To face p. 117.

I was perfectly delighted at this, for I knew the men by this time to be pleasant, good-tempered fellows, who would play me no tricks by the way, and then they were going home, and would not dally by the journey as strangers might be tempted to do. Preparations were at once made to start back immediately. The chair was brought round to the door, and the men with beaming faces and as fresh-looking as though they had done nothing all day, started back on the long weary journey of fully twenty miles.

Once more we were retracing our way through the long, winding streets of the city, and then we emerged through the gates into the open country beyond. A haze of heat lay upon the fields and on the hills. The afternoon sun, still breathing out fire, glared into the chair and shone upon my face and played upon the bare skulls of the bearers. Surely that fierce heat would break their spirit, for I began to feel limp and fagged, though the only exertion I had to make was to try and keep cool by fanning myself.

As the afternoon went on, the steps of the bearers became less elastic, and when we rested at the regular stopping-places, they were less eager in resuming their journey. Beyond this, they seemed as vigorous as ever, and forged their way through villages, and past market towns, and round the foot of hills glowing with amber colours that were flung there with the lavish hand of the fast-descending sun.

We reached home long after darkness had settled on the landscape, and had blotted out the hills around which the clouds had gathered to let the sun paint his evening pictures. We could hear the rustling of the rice, as the night wind sighed amongst it, and sometimes we would be startled by the sudden looming up of trees like huge fantastic spectres that had escaped from the land of darkness to terrify men by their presence.

Travelling in the dark was not an easy matter, for we had to pick our way over narrow uneven pathways, and across broken dilapidated bridges, and over stepping-stones in a mountain brook, till finally, worn out and wearied to death, we stumbled down the dark street that led to our home, and there I threw myself into the first chair I could find, utterly exhausted by a journey that few men would undertake even in the coldest days in winter.

The chair-bearers, after a few whiffs at their bamboo pipes, started to light the furnace and cook their supper. All the weariness they had shown during the last hour or two seemed to have vanished, and they laughed and chatted about the incidents on the road and the funny sights they had seen. One chopped the wood, whilst the other washed the rice and poured it into the cauldron, and prepared the vegetables they were to eat with it.

No one looking in casually upon the scene and listening to the merry voices and to the animated conversation of these men would ever have dreamed that they had travelled fully fifty miles, carrying two hundred pounds’ weight upon their shoulders, through the blazing heat of an Eastern summer day.

In one’s dealing with the Chinese one is continually being reminded of the strain of dogged inflexibility that runs throughout the character of nearly every individual that one comes in contact with. It is not simply occasional instances that one runs up against. It is in the race, and there is no doubt but that it is this force that has given it such a strength that it has been able to stand the wear and tear of ages and to be as strong physically as it was a thousand years ago.

Of course there are differences. There are strong men and there are weak men. There are those whose wills are as firm and unbending as the granite hills around. There are others, again, whose temperaments are of an easy, yielding description, and one is apt to imagine that they can be moulded this way or that at the will of another. Up to a certain extent this is true, and yet one soon discovers that even with them, when the true temper of the man is tested, there is a tenacity of will that nothing seems to be able to shake.

A man, for example, comes in to see you. He is common looking, with a face hardened and battered by toil. His clothes, which are shabby and well worn, consist of the ordinary blue cotton cloth that in its dull and dingy colour helps to give a mean and uninteresting look to the wearer. If the nation would but depart from the eternal tradition that has come steadily down the ages in regard to its clothing and would take some hints from nature, whose varied moods make her look so charming, how different would these unæsthetic people appear from what they do now!

His face is a weak one, and there are lines about his mouth that in an Englishman would indicate a want of will. Your idea of the man is a very low one, and you ask him with as much politeness as your poor opinion of him will permit you, what he wants with you.

In a hesitating, nervous kind of way, he informs you that he has ventured to come and ask a favour of you. It is a very important one, he says, and as he knows no one that is so kind as you are or who has so much influence as you have, he has taken the liberty to address himself to you and he hopes that you will not refuse his request.

You find as he tells his story that he wants you to use your good offices to get his son into employment in a responsible firm in the town. You are startled, for you do not know any one in the said firm, and moreover you have no knowledge of the young man either as to his character or abilities. You try and impress upon the father that it is impossible for you to help him in the matter, because you really have no influence with any one responsible in the house of business to which he refers, and that therefore he had better apply to some one else who has the ability to help him.

The man in a weak kind of way appears to agree with you, expresses his appreciation of your kindness in so pleasantly listening to him, and bids you good-bye, and any one not acquainted with the Chinese character would certainly come to the conclusion that the whole incident was at an end and nothing more would be heard of it.

To-morrow morning you are engaged, say, in writing when the same man is ushered into your room by your “boy,” and he in a timid, hesitating way expresses a wish to say a few words to you. In his hand he carries a fowl, with its legs tied and its head hanging down, and as this is the usual way in which such animals are carried in China, it seems to recognize the universal custom and to utter no protest against the indignity to which it is exposed.

Without referring to it, he lays it down in a corner of the room, and proceeds to make his request for his son in precisely the same language that he had done the previous day. Your statement then that you had no influence in the firm mentioned was considered by him to be a pleasant and refined way of showing your displeasure that a present had not been made you, and so to-day he is atoning for this by bringing you the fowl that lies fluttering on the ground.

You try and make him understand that you really cannot help him, that you would do so if you could, and you insist upon his taking away his present, as you absolutely refuse to accept it. He agrees with all you say, expresses his admiration at your disinterested and generous conduct, is quite sure that you cannot help him, and finally leaves you holding the fowl which you have forced upon him in his hand, and declaring that he is afraid you are angry with him since you refuse his gift, which he declares he knows is too small to be accepted by a person of your position and character. You happen to go out half-an-hour after and you see the identical fowl lying in the yard struggling to get free, and with a look of pain and misery in consequence of its legs having been tied so tight and because of the cramped position in which it has been compelled to lie so long.

You call the “boy” and you ask him why the man has not taken the fowl away, as you had positively refused to accept it. “Oh! it would never do,” he replies with an anxious look that pushes its way through its permanent sphinx-like veneer, “for the man to take back the trifling present that he has made you. He would have lost ‘face,’ for people would say that you were angry with him for making you such an insignificant gift that you could not possibly receive it.”

Next morning the man once more appears, but this time accompanied by a person well known to you. After a few complimentary remarks, the newcomer introduces the man, and begs of you to use your influence to get his son the employment about which he has already spoken to you. You state the case fully to him and explain that it is quite a mistake to imagine that you can assist him in the way he wishes. Both men listen with the most wrapt attention to what you say, and by smiles and vigorous nods of the head seem to believe in every word you speak. By and by they leave, and you feel convinced that the incident is at an end, and that you will hear nothing more of it.

In the afternoon of the same day, the man turns up once more, with a smiling countenance and a look of supreme satisfaction upon it. He holds a letter in his hand which he delivers to

you with the air of a man who is delivering a pleasant ultimatum that will settle the whole question in a manner satisfactory to all. It is from an Englishman who has been approached on the subject, and he asks me to do what I can to get the old fellow's son into a firm where he has been told I have some influence.

You are getting annoyed by this time, not simply because all your protestations have not been believed, but because you see that the dogged persistence that lies rooted in the Chinese character will not allow the matter to drop until you have either given him a piece of your mind, more forcible than polite, or taken some plan to carry out his wishes. After a few minutes' consideration, you remember that an acquaintance of your own has business relationships with the firm in question, so you at once write a note to him and request him as a great favour to exert himself to introduce the son of the bearer to the manager of a certain business house with which he is intimately concerned. Having sealed it up, you hand it over to the man, and direct him to take it to your friend, who may possibly be able to assist him in procuring the employment he wishes for his son.

The very next day, he once more appears, but this time with two fowls, a small basket of oranges and a tiny box of tea, and also with the most profuse thanks for getting his son that situation. You tell him that you have had nothing to do with that, and that if he is inclined to make presents, he had better take them to the friend who has really engineered the business. If the Chinese could only see the humour there is in a wink, there is no doubt but that he would express his feelings by one just now, but as he has never been taught the subtle part that the eye can take in conveying a joke, he simply smiles prodigiously, clasps his own hands instead of yours and leaves you with a profusion of the most elegant and polite phrases, such as the great Sage of China penned more than two thousand years ago for the guidance of people in contingencies such as this.

 It must be perfectly understood that the man never believed from the very first that you could not have got that situation for his son, if you had been so disposed, and the fact that you procured it for him at last proved that. Your writing the letter and sending it to a friend were but little subtle by-plays to save your "face." Acting like that is something inexpressibly dear to the Chinese, who are always posing before each other, and exhausting their histrionic powers to produce certain effects that shall redound to their credit. The one thing that was really to be admired in this Chinaman was the tenacity of purpose that caused him never to falter until he had gained the object that he had in his mind.

This distinguishing virtue in the Chinaman has unquestionably been a very large factor in the building up of their Empire, and yet on the other hand it is just as true that it has been one of the most powerful forces in preventing its progress and development.

The very persistence of character that made the Yellow race build the Great Wall of China and extend their conquests from their original home on the banks of the Yellow River, until the whole of the vast extent of territory embraced within the eighteen provinces has been subdued by them, has made them cling to old traditions and customs with a tenacity that has stayed the progress of new ideas, and has prevented them from adopting new methods that would have benefited both the people and the Empire.

The Chinese within certain limits are practical common-sense people and keenly alive to anything that will improve their worldly condition, but the moment they scent an innovation they recoil from it as though it were an enemy that was going to destroy them.

Illustrations of this abound everywhere. Take the farmer, for example. He has been accustomed to plough his fields with an old-fashioned implement that was devised ages before the Christian era. It is of the exact pattern that it was when it issued from the brain of the man who is credited with having thought it out. Through countless ages it has done the work of the Empire, but time has left it absolutely untouched, and if the inventor could come to life to-day he would see that the old clumsy thing that he had hastily thought out when the fathers of the race, tired of their wanderings, settled down on the banks of the mighty river that met them as they wandered eastwards, had never changed with the advancing fortunes of their children, but was identical in every detail with the one with which they began their first ploughing in the far-off misty ages of the past.

You talk to a Chinese farmer about the wonderful ploughs of the West, and how sometimes they were driven by steam, and in a few hours acres of land would be ready for the harrow. His eyes flash, for he is a farmer to the very tips of his fingers, and he thinks of the days of toil that it takes him to accomplish the very same thing, and for the moment he would like to have some of those ploughs to upturn the hard and rugged soil that his own antiquated implement seems so helpless to break through. He has a vision for a moment of how the monotony and drudgery of labour might be exchanged for a time of comparative rest, when nature in response to a new impulse should yield the fruits of the soil with a more generous hand. But the vision quickly dies out of his imagination, and the old conservative instinct flashes once more through his brain, and so the old plough and the hoe that have done the work of the centuries are more firmly fixed in his imagination than ever they were before.

PLOUGHING WITH A WATER BUFFALO.

To face p. 124.

One of the great results of the intense tenacity of purpose that characterizes the Chinese is to repress original thought. From their very loyalty to the discoveries and inventions of past ages, they have become merely imitators, and any one who should dare to deviate from well-established lines on any subject would be looked upon as a man dangerous to the well-being of the Empire. It may be confidently asserted that for a thousand years no new thought or original ideas that have quickened the pulse in this old country have been propounded by any one of its vast or varied population. Whilst the West has been seething with excitement and new continents have been discovered and society has been upheaved by vast discoveries, this great nation has been going on in its easy-going, sleepy way, content with the half-dozen or so of meagre ideas with which it started its career ages ago.

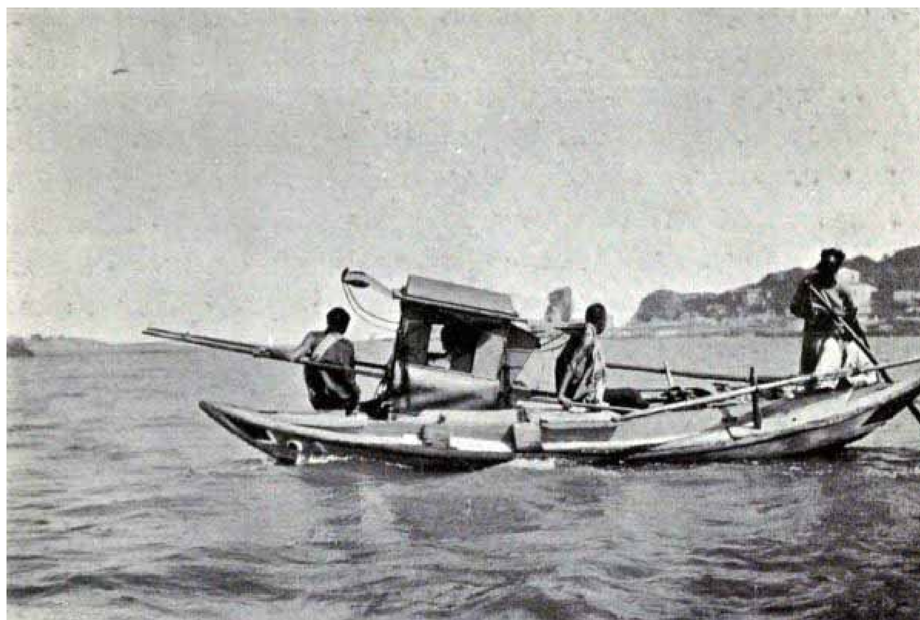
The Chinese are a proud people, and look down with supreme contempt upon every country outside of their own. They are very impartial in this and make no exceptions, for they call them all by a term that has been generally translated “Barbarian,” and which really means uncivilized, untaught, idiotic, and wanting in refinement; and yet after one has got over the first excitement caused by the odd and grotesque sights that Chinese life and scenes afford to the Westerner, there comes a sense of oppression at the absolute monotony that prevails in every department of life, and all as the result of the one idea of being true to established ideals. A man, for example, builds a house. There is no use asking him what is the plan he is going to adopt. That was settled for him a good many centuries ago, and though slight variations are allowed to meet the peculiar requirements of the land, the essential idea is scrupulously retained by every builder throughout the eighteen provinces. It is for this reason that the profession of architect is unknown in this land, and the sacred plan upon which every house is built is conserved with as much fidelity by the people of this Empire as though it were a great moral principle that lay at the root of all noble action and that had been specially revealed from Heaven for the guidance of the nation.

You travel up a river and you expect to find great diversities in the population, that has deserted the land and taken up its permanent habitation on the water, but the same inflexible devotion to ancient ideals is just as marked as it is on shore.

Here is a typical boat that belongs to the fisher class. Let us examine it for a moment, for I can promise that we shall get a glimpse into the mysteries of Chinese life and see how men and women can lead what seems to be a merry, happy existence in the closest possible quarters. It is twelve feet long and five feet wide in the centre, and tapers slightly as you approach the bows. It is divided into three distinct divisions, the front part being the open space from which the nets are cast when they are fishing. In one sense it might be called the workshop of the family, for besides the manœuvring with the nets, any odd jobs that are required to be done in connection with their mode of life are performed on this part of the boat. The centre is the family residence, and performs the part of sitting-room, dining-room, and bedroom, and is covered in with thick bamboo matting that is capable of resisting the heaviest rain. The hinder section is the family kitchen, where all the meals are cooked, and where, too, the steerer stands when he is guiding the boat.

The family in this particular craft consists of an elderly fisherman and his wife, a grown-up son with his wife and two little ones, six people in all, and as though the space were too ample for these, they have improvised at the extreme bows a small pigsty, where a pig that will add to the comforts of the home when it is ready for the market, lies apparently contented with its narrow and confined surroundings. It will never move from its home till it

is carried to the butcher. The old couple are weather-beaten and their faces are covered with the wrinkles that advancing age has put into them, but they are perfectly content with their life, and though they take a ramble now and again on shore when they wish to buy anything or when they want to look at some theatricals, they return to their home with as much zest as though it were a spacious house in which every accommodation was provided for their comfort.



A BOAT CARRYING A SEDAN CHAIR.

A PASSENGER BOAT.

To face p. 126.

There is really, after all, no mystery in this. Fifty or sixty years ago they were both born upon a boat of the precise size and shape of the one they are now living in. The old lady with the wrinkled features, and the eyes of which the flash and the sparkle have died out, and with the raven locks that have turned to grey, came here forty years ago as a bride, from a neighbouring boat, amid the sounds of fire-crackers and the chorus of congratulations that the Chinese are always prepared to give the newly-made wife.

The young fellow that received her then as his future wife was the pick out of all the fisher lads in the fishing fleet of that time, but he, too, is old now. Yet both husband and wife are content, for their home is a happy one. Have they not their own son to care for them in their declining years, and to save them from sorrow and hunger now that their strength is not what it used to be?

The son is indeed a man to be proud of by a Chinese father. He has the look of a man who can hold his own in the world, and though utterly uneducated, his face has a semi-refined

appearance, that speaks of a tender heart and of a mind that would easily be influenced for good. His young wife has a face that it is a pleasure to look upon. It is not by any means a beautiful one, for there is not a single feature in it that could by the widest charity be called pretty, and yet it is just such a one that has an attraction about it, that it wins men's homage though every canon of beauty is defied by it. [Pg 128] She has high cheek-bones and a large mouth, and a nose that is as far removed from the Grecian as it is possible to be conceived, but her eyes are bright and sparkling, and it seems as though the spirit of fun lay close behind them, for there is a perpetual suggestion of laughter in them. Her face, too, browned with the great Eastern sun, is a most kindly and pleasing one, and smiles at the least provocation ripple over it, and fill it with sunshine or shadows, as the mood happens to take her.

She and her young husband are busy hoisting the nets high up on a bamboo pole to have them aired and dried in the sun. The youngest child, which is but a baby, is strapped on her back, where he is sound asleep, the motions of the mother acting as a cradle would do in lulling him into forgetfulness of everything around him. The other child is a little over two, with a round, chubby face and large, staring black eyes, that look upon you with wonder as you make various signs of friendliness to him. He is stationed in the "sitting-room," to be out of the way of the workers, and to guard against his moving beyond certain limits and tumbling overboard, a good strong string has been tied to one of his legs, which effectually prevents any such accidents happening to him.

The old father, calm and placid looking, is sitting on his heels near the tiller smoking a long bamboo pipe. This mode of resting is a most popular one amongst the middle and lower classes of the Chinese, but one which an Englishman could not endure for five minutes without considerable discomfort. His wife is fussing about the diminutive kitchen, getting ready the meal for the family, and deftly cooking the rice and the salted turnips and the pickled cabbage that are the principal features in the daily meal of vast numbers of the Chinese.

NETTING FISH FROM THE SHORE.

[Pg 129] The above is an attempt to describe the kind of boat that a certain class of people who get their living by fishing in inland waters everywhere use. They are absolute facsimiles of each other. The question often arises, how is it they are all so identical? Why should not some of them be, say, a foot or two longer, and a few inches wider, so as to anticipate the needs of a growing family?

Such a thought never occurs to a Chinaman, or if it does, it is at once rejected as heterodox, or as treason to the original designer. A profound sense of the benefits conferred upon them by the man who had the brain to devise such a boat, though an Englishman would have the daring to think that any idiot could devise a much better one in five minutes, will prevent this nation from ever venturing to think it possible that any change could be made in it that would improve it in one single respect.

The fishermen are absolutely content. They spend their lives on these boats. Men are married upon them, and children are born upon them and grow up to be men and women, and men lie down and die upon them, and from them they are carried to their long homes on the shore, which during their lifetime they have looked upon as a place where they had no inheritance, but which perforce would have to give them a narrow space when they had finished with life, in which to hide them away from the world.

The boats I have described are but a sample of the multitude of ways in which the Chinese

are circumscribed and prevented by forces greater than the enactment of special laws from making progress in their national life. There are signs at the present moment that China is awakening and that the dead hand of the past is being lifted. It will be long, however, before the new movement will permeate into the villages and into the more retired and out-of-the-way places of the Empire, where under the shadow of lofty mountains, and out of the lines where human thought and human traffic are most vigorous, men cling to the traditions of the past. But that the movement will spread and finally change the whole character of the country, there is not the least shadow of a doubt.

A STREET SCENE.

To face p. 131.

CHAPTER VII

AMUSEMENTS

Chinese a laughter-loving people—Fond of society—Sources of amusements few—No seaside outings or holidays—New Year's time—Dragon boat festival—Feast of Tombs—Theatricals—Battledore and shuttlecock—Kites—Punch and Judy.

The Chinese are a laughter-loving people, and their broad, unæsthetic-looking faces seem to have been made with a wide and generous area, in order to allow their latent humour to have plenty of scope for its expansion.

No matter what a Chinaman does, there always seems to be a comical element about it that provokes one to smile. With other nationalities, when certain unpleasant things are done, one is inclined to be roused to sudden passion and to strong and vigorous language, and a feeling of indignation that takes a long time to die out. With a Chinaman the experience is quite different. He does something most aggravating, and your mind is filled with the deepest resentment, and you feel as though you could never forgive him. You look with indignation upon the man who has offended you. As you gaze at him, the subtle humour that somehow or other seems to lie about his yellow homely features grips you, and you find a smile rising to your face and your anger explodes in laughter.

There are no people in the world that seem to have such a hypnotizing power over the men of the West as the Chinese. It is not their beauty or their eloquence, nor the fascinating way in which they talk, but in the large amount of human nature they all possess, and in the strain of humour that seems to run through them as music does through an exquisite piece of poetry.

From this it may be easily believed that they are fond of laughter and merriment and the bright and joyous side of things, and social intercourse, and plenty of company, and loud-sounding music and firing of crackers. The solitary feeling that makes an Englishman like to be alone, and shut himself up day after day in a house by himself and not care to see visitors, is something that is quite incomprehensible to a Chinaman.

A man rents a house, for example, and he finds that in the other rooms that are built round an open courtyard there are one or two other families already residing. He welcomes this as one of the advantages that the house he has taken possesses. He comes in with smiling face, and remarks how very cheerful everything is. His wife stands by his side and expresses her pleasure that there are so many people close by them, so that they need not feel dull or lonely. They are both received with overflowing expressions of welcome, and are assured that their coming is an immense comfort, and will make their homes much more cheery and enjoyable than they would be without them.

Their love for their fellow-kind is a passion with the Chinese, and they seem to be able to stand an amount of noise and loud talking and screaming babies and barking of dogs, such as would send an Englishman off his head.

Now, many of the sources of amusement that are open to the people of the West have no existence in this country whatever. They have no Sunday on which they can lay aside the eternal round of work, and forget for one day that life is a treadmill which never stops its grinding. There are no stated holidays, when people rush off to the seaside or to the moors or to some fishing stream, where midst the hills they can forget the heat and pressure of the city. The legislators of China have never dreamed that any one needed a vacation. The school-boys, indeed, after eleven months of cramped school life have been thought worthy of a month’s holidays at the end of the year, but the grown-up people have to work. Without that, large sections of the community under present conditions would starve.

The most serious thing of all, however, is the illiterate character of the people. It has been reckoned by competent critics that only ten, or at the most fifteen, millions out of the four hundred can read. The result is that, excepting in the houses of the favoured few, there are no books or magazines or pictures, or, in fact, literature of any kind in the vast majority of the homes into which one may enter. What this means for the young people, full of restlessness and with an immense fund of animal spirits, may be more easily imagined than understood.

In their idle hours or during the dark nights of winter, they are thrown upon their own resources, and as these are extremely limited, it is no wonder that the young fellows take to the only things that they can think of to while the hours away, and that is gambling and opium smoking.

Of course, for the nation at large, these two forms would not meet the demand there is in human nature for some sources of amusement that shall be harmless. There are troops of children, in this land so prolific in little ones, who have to be amused with laughter and smiling faces, and feasts, and outings on the hills, and visits to relatives. There are equally large numbers of young girls, who must have the monotonous life in which they are compelled to live in their narrow homes changed from the unending routine that confronts them almost every day of their lives.

In order to satisfy this demand for recreation, there are certain forms of amusement that have become popular throughout the country, and which, to a limited extent, do meet the needs of the case. They may be roughly divided into two classes.

The first of these is the great festivals, that are religiously observed by the people of the whole Empire. The most important amongst these is the New Year’s holiday. The feasting and jollity really extend over three days, though, as is natural, it is the first one that stands out the most conspicuous of them all.

On this day all business is suspended, and for once during the year China puts on a Sunday look, for the shops are all closed, with the exception of those that deal in shoes and stockings, which by a licence that has come down from the distant past, are permitted to sell their wares, even though it is a New Year’s day.

Every one is dressed in his very best, and the women put on their gayest and most attractive garments. The children, too, decked out in clothes that have been carefully folded and put away in boxes for this special occasion, appear early in the morning, with faces full of joy and eyes sparkling with delight, ready for all the fun and enjoyment that the day is going to bring them.

The male members of the household go and pay visits to their friends, whilst the ladies stay at home and entertain the neighbours or relatives that may be calling upon them. It seems to be the object of every one to be as nice and agreeable to each other as they can be. No unlucky words must be uttered, for they might bring sorrow and disaster during the coming year, and so one sees everywhere pleasant, smiling faces, whilst the air resounds with kindly greetings and with wishes for prosperity and happiness.

Even the very houses put on a festal appearance, and bright red papers on the lintel silently join with the well-wishers in their loving congratulations to all and sundry, by themselves

offering up a prayer to Heaven to send down blessings upon the home within.

It is the custom on this festal day of the year to paste bright red papers on the lintel and on both sideposts of the door, [Pg 135] on which have been inscribed in large Chinese characters a wish for some form of happiness to be bestowed upon all that live within. “May the five happinesses descend upon the home.” “May Heaven bestow peace and happiness, and may clouds of trade gather round the business carried on here.” “May righteousness have its fullest accomplishment in this home.” “May the days of Shun and the times of Yau (two ancient rulers of China, when it is believed that the country attained its greatest prosperity) be the experience of this home.”

The above are quotations from some of the thousands of gaudy-looking strips of paper that deck the houses and give an air of gladness to the scene. Every house in the town, and even the temples of the gods have some pasted over the front doors. For three days the feasting and the visiting and the congratulations go on, and then the people go back to the old humdrum style of things, and to the steady grind and wear and tear of life, but in the meanwhile there has been a delightful break in the eternal monotony that has made things look so grey, and that has put so many shadows into the everyday working life of this patient people.

Another great festival is one that is held wherever there is a sea or a river or a stream on which a boat may be floated. This is called the “Feast of the Dragon Boat,” and is held in honour of an ancient statesman who committed suicide in the river Mi Lo. The story is that one of the feudal states into which China was then divided, named Tau, was prospering under the wise guidance of Ku Yuan, who was the Prime Minister of its Prince. The people were happy, and peace and plenty made the state a good one to live in. Suddenly, through the machinations of a rival, the ruler was tempted into evil courses, Ku Yuan was dismissed, and adversity loomed in the distance for the country.

[Pg 136] Unwilling to be a spectator of the sorrows that were coming on the people, Ku Yuan threw himself into the river and perished. As soon as the news of his death was known, boats were sent out to search the river for his body, but days went by, and it was never recovered. So grieved was the nation at his loss, that it was determined that the anniversary of his death should be commemorated by boat races, in which the fiction should be kept up that the boats were not simply racing, but were in search of the long-lost body. The death happened about B.C. 314, but though ages have elapsed, and revolution after revolution have torn and convulsed the country to its very foundations, the custom is as keenly kept to-day as though it had only just lately been established.

It is, indeed, one of the most popular festivals of the year, and is looked forward to for weeks before it takes place, and during the three days on which it is being kept, the whole place is full of excitement. It has been our good fortune on several occasions to witness the gatherings of the people who have assembled on a famous estuary to watch the racing of the boats in their mad search for the body of Ku Yuan.

This happens at the beginning of the Chinese fifth moon, which corresponds with about the middle of our June. The weather then is hot and the sun is bright, though rain often falls during some part of the three days, as though Heaven were weeping for the sad fate of the lost minister.

Nearly every one of the population who can possibly get away from their duties deserts the town and hastens to the seashore to witness the moving scene on the water. As it gets towards noon, strings of people may be seen wending their way in the direction of the harbour. There are young men, full of life and merriment, and with their black eyes flashing with excitement, [Pg 137] for the dulness of the dingy, evil-smelling town is going to be forgotten amidst the salt sea breezes that have blown over many a hundred leagues of ocean.

There are old ladies, with the young girls of their families chattering and laughing about them, glad to get out of the narrow homes in which they are usually confined to gaze upon the life of the streets and to look upon the strange faces of the people that are hurrying on to the great gathering by the seaside.

Wherever one looks one sees signs that the Dragon Boat Races are the great thought that is upon every heart. The peddlers are going to have a royal time of it, and see how, with flushed faces, they are rushing on with their goods to the hungry crowds on the hills and rising grounds by the sea shore. Here is a man with two great baskets balanced on a bamboo pole that rests on his shoulder. They are full of all kinds of cakes, just fresh from the oven, and some of them that have the appetizing name of “mouth-melters” seem longing to be bought, so that they may show how crisp and luscious they are, and how suited for such a holiday as this.

Following hard upon his heels, for the street is too narrow to allow of two such men walking abreast, comes the “Sweet and Sour” man, with his two loads heaped up with all kinds of goodies, such as every one likes to indulge in on a huge picnic such as the town is keeping on this bright, sunshiny day.

This popular street-dealer in toothsome and, to the younger generation at least, fascinating luxuries, has prepared himself to meet the large demand of the crowds, who at a merry time like this will be more reckless of their cash than they would be on ordinary occasions. He

has sugared orange lobes, and pine apple cut into dainty succulent little mouthfuls. He has also crab apples from the far North, crushed and flattened, but just as sweet as sugar can make them. These and other varieties of fruit that have no English names are pierced with thin slips of bamboo, which the buyer can hold between two of his fingers and drop each piece into his mouth without soiling his fingers.

Then for the sours, he has pickled olives, and rich luxurious-looking arbutus berries, that in the distance look like strawberries, and delicate little plums, and sliced peaches, and limes with the green of the trees still upon them. Every one can take his choice, and whether he likes sweets or sours he can put his hand into his pocket and select the kind that suits him best.

And now the crowds have gathered by the seaside; and what a scene of delight and joy it is to the men and women and children, who have been for weeks "cribbed and cabined and confined" in their homes, in the narrow streets and alleyways, where the green fields are never seen and where the sight of the sun is what they see of him as he passes overhead, as he pours down his fiery scorching rays upon the unsavoury, vile-smelling streets below!

There is hardly a sombre-looking face amongst them all, for the spirit of the day is upon every one. They present a most interesting and beautiful appearance; usually only men are seen in any numbers on the streets, but to-day women are quite as numerous as the men, and their gay and showy coloured dresses relieve the sombre blue in which the sterner sex delight to array themselves.

All at once the hum of voices is hushed and all eyes are turned in the direction of the sea, for there the Dragon Boats have suddenly made their appearance, each one madly striving to beat the other as they both race on towards a junk anchored in the stream, from which flags and many-coloured streamers float in the breeze, and which has been appointed to be the goal towards which the boats must race.

A DRAGON BOAT.

To face p. 129.

The Dragon Boats are long and narrow, and only just wide enough to allow two men to sit side by side and use their paddles to propel the boat. The number that is commonly employed in one of them is sixty, not including the coxswain, who stands in the stern holding a long oar with which he steers his way through the crowds of boats that have come with their passengers to get a good look at the races.

The effect of these sixty men paddling with all their might is very striking, and puts one in mind of a huge centipede, though the Chinese, with more imagination and more poetry, have likened it to the fabulous dragon that plays so large a part in the mythology and superstition of the nation.

The festivities continue for three days, and the inhabitants of the city with unabated zeal gather by the seashore to laugh and joke and gossip, and to look at the blue sky and to see the sea tossing and foaming under the pressure of South-West Monsoon.

With the conclusion of the sports, the great masses of people that lined the hills and eminences near the edge of the sea melt away down the narrow arteries that constitute the principal streets of the town. They slowly vanish down the winding alleyways that seem to be like runs that lead to the burrows where the Chinese, as dense as rabbits in their lodges,

pass their lives with little to vary the monotony excepting these joyous occasions that break in upon the dulness and greyness of their everyday experience.

Another festival that helps to divert the minds and thoughts of the vast majority of the people is the “Feast of Tombs.” This has its serious side as well as its pleasant one, and many a heart pours out its sorrows in tears and heartrending cries over the loved ones that have vanished into the dark world, whilst others, again, gather round the graves to hold fellowship, in spirit at least, with those whom they believe are conscious of their presence, and who can in some way or other affect the fortunes of the living.

Once a year the whole population turns out to visit the family graves. The wear and tear of wind and rain during the twelve months have flattened them down and given them a neglected and disordered look. They need repairing and returfing, and so with loving hearts the relatives wend their way amongst the countless tombs that cover the hillside to the ones that belong to them, and with their hoes they dig about and fix them up to bear the brunt of storms of rain and fierce typhoons for another year.

Another purpose of this yearly visit to the graves is to secure their rights to the ones that belong to them. For this purpose each family scatters paper money over them and bind them down with stones lest the wind should blow them away. They thus advertise to every one that the owners are still living and will resent any attempt of others to appropriate them. China is a country so densely populated that it is sometimes difficult to find resting-places for the dead. If a grave is left for a year or two without these symbols of ownership, some poor family who has not the means to purchase a piece of ground for their dead will pounce upon it, and use it for themselves. They are pretty safe in doing this, for if no papers mark the grave at the “Feast of Tombs” it is almost certain that the old family has died out, and not a single one is left to care for it at the annual festival.

It is a very pretty and interesting sight to see the hillsides dotted with the countless figures that are moving about on them, making their offerings to the spirits, and doing up the graves that have become dilapidated during the year.

But see, here is a family group that has just arrived, and as they fairly represent the hundreds that have come on the same errand, a description of them will give a fairly correct idea of what the “Feast of Tombs” means to the people throughout the Chinese Empire. It consists of a father and mother and one sturdy little fellow and a sister somewhat younger than himself. The father has a hoe over his shoulder, whilst the mother carries a basket which contains a variety of cakes, and several bundles of white and yellow paper money. The hoe is at once set to work to repair the damage that the weather has done to the grave, whilst the children romp about and gather wild flowers to take with them to their home that lies hidden in the town that seems to be creeping along the base of the hill on which they are standing.

It is the old grandfather’s grave, and for over three years he has lain on this quiet hillside, with only the sound of the wild wind blowing across it and the cry of the hawks as they hover high up in the air looking with their keen eyes for their prey, to disturb the perpetual stillness that reigns here the whole year through.

When they have done their work, and the new sods have been beaten well down on the top and sides of the grave to enable it to stand another year’s wear and tear, the cakes are taken out of the basket, and laid out in front where the spirit can see them. Then a little bottle with whisky in it is brought forth, and three diminutive cups holding about a tablespoonful each are filled with it and placed beside the cakes. Finally a small piece of boiled pork that has lain snugly at the bottom of the basket is taken out and laid carefully amongst the other good things.

Everything is ready now for the offering to be presented to the old grandfather, and the family stand up, and with hands clasped bow before the grave as though the old gentleman were in the flesh standing in front of them, and could hear every word that is said to him.

The scene now becomes most realistic and pathetic. The father, with a face full of intensity and eyes lighted with passion, tells the dead man how lately troubles have come upon the home, and how trade has been so bad that it has been a continual struggle to make ends meet. “Things have been so different,” he continues, “since you left us; we have missed your wise counsels, and when cases of perplexity have arisen we have longed to have you with us, so that we could go to you and you would tell us what to do. We now appeal to you to come to our rescue; we are your children, and unless you use the mysterious power you possess to deliver us, the family will be dispersed, and then when the ‘Feast of Tombs’ comes round, there will be no one to appear before your grave to make the offerings to your spirit. Come, father, come: see, we your children, with bowed heads and with hope in our hearts, appeal to you to change the fortunes of our home, and send prosperity to it.”

After the worship has been concluded, the cakes and the pork are laid out in picnic fashion on the grass and the family gathers around them, and they laugh and chat, and the youngsters break out into boisterous mirth. Everything around them conduces to clear away the shadows from their hearts. The stifling air of the city has vanished, and the smells and the monotonous surroundings, and here the purest forces of nature combine to lift their thoughts out of the narrow ruts in which they have been running.

And is it any marvel that this should happen? The sun shining in an unclouded sky has filled the wide landscape with his beauty, as though to-day he would cheer the hearts of the hundreds that dot the mountain side. The hilltops are ablaze with his glory, and his rays dart across the sea, and play fairy antics amongst the trees, and flash upon the graves where countless generations lie buried, as though they would break the gloom that rests upon them and point to a brighter day when the bands of death would be for ever unloosed and the dead should rise again.

The birds, too, as if in the luxuriance of their joy sing their songs, fly from branch to branch and hover about, whilst the kingfishers with their brilliant plumage skim about in the hollows, where streamlets trickle down the mountain side.

It is a joyous day indeed, and to the children is as full of happiness as it can contain. The grasses and the wild flowers, and the wide expanse of sunshine instead of the narrow court where their home lies, and the freedom to skip and dance to their very hearts' content fill every moment with the most supreme delight, the minutes pass only too quickly, and their only regret is that they cannot live out there for ever.

In the midst of these delights the time seems to fly as though the sun were racing down the great vault of heaven. Gradually the shadows begin to lengthen, and to lie deep and thick in the valleys and underneath the projecting cliffs, whilst the glory that still rests on the summit of the mountain, and on the solitary peaks, begins to be dimmed with the coming twilight creeping through it.

The time at last comes when the countless groups scattered so picturesquely amongst the newly-fashioned graves, where their loved ones rest, should begin to move homeward. The sun goes down quickly in this land, and the fast-fading light gives warning that if they would reach the city before darkness falls upon it, they must not linger too long on this delightful mountain side.

The little family we have described slowly and unwillingly begin to make preparations to tear themselves away from the spot where they had spent such a pleasant day. There is but little preparation indeed needed, for the basket that had contained the good things is empty. Just one more scamper by the little ones and one last look at the grave where the old grandfather lies, who has been feasted with the delicacies that are believed will satisfy his hunger till the coming round of the next feast, and then they descend, winding their way amongst the trim-looking mounds decked with paper money, till they reach the large road that leads to the town below.

About the same time, the whole face of the hills begin to be alive with moving groups. The glory has faded from the summits, and now a grey light with a touch of sadness in it is spreading over the landscape. The golden ripples on the sea have toned down and have put on the sombre air of twilight. The birds have all fled, and the great hawks that hovered far up in the sky have flown away, whilst the flash of the kingfisher has ceased with the setting of the sun. The holiday is over, but for many a day will the toilers in the narrow streets, and the women and the children in their poor untidy homes, have visions of glorious sunlight, and lights and shadows chasing each other, like school-boys, up and down the hillsides and right up to their very summits, and the fresh breezes, and the pleasant picnics beside the graves of the dead.

There are several other festivals, such as the Feast of Lanterns, and the Seventh Moon Festival, when all over the Empire tables are set with abundance of food for the spirits of the dead world, who have no living friends in this. The most expensive plays, too, are performed for the enjoyment of the hungry, wandering ghosts, who have been let loose by the prince of that gloomy land for one month to try and get some recreation and comfort in this upper world.

Whilst the ravenous spirits are supposed to enjoy the food that has been so abundantly provided for them, and to look with delight upon the actors that are putting forth their best artistic talent in order to amuse them, it is the people who provide these entertainments that really enjoy this month of feasting. The food that has been provided for the troops of hungry spirits that hover invisibly in the air, is diminished neither in quality nor in quantity, and a merry time the town has in disposing of the good things which nominally they have provided for the guests from the lower regions, but which they have arranged should be eaten by friends and relatives who have been specially invited beforehand.

It is the same with the theatricals. The highest talent has been engaged, and the most amusing and comical plays have been selected from the actors' repertory, but whilst they profess to be moved by a desire to entertain the ghosts, it is their own amusement and pleasure they are thinking about all the time. "What would happen," I asked a broad-faced, jolly-looking Chinaman, "if the spirits were really to come and eat up the numerous dishes that you have laid out for their special benefit?"

"They would never have a chance of doing so again," he promptly replied, "for we should take very good care never to make any offerings to them again in the future."

Whilst the great festivals provide large sources of recreation, there is one other form of amusement that to the Chinese is most popular and most fascinating, and that is theatricals. As these are expensive the common people would never be able to indulge in them were it

not the custom to have them performed in the open air, where everybody that likes may come and look to their hearts' content, without being asked to contribute anything toward the expenses.

The birthday of an idol, for example, comes round, and to please it and its worshippers, a troupe of actors are engaged, the stage is erected in the large open space in front of the temple, and the performance is held where the god can keep its eye upon it, and the whole neighbourhood can be accommodated to witness the play. As the idol's birthday is everywhere known, there is no need to advertise, and so the people come trooping from all directions with the certainty of having a most enjoyable time, and of being made to forget the worries and cares of life in the living drama that is depicted with such wonderful power by these native actors.

A rich man wishes to celebrate his birthday, and of course to do that he must have a play. A feast there will be as well, but there would be no *éclat* and no jollity and no letting the whole neighbourhood know of the happy event so well as can be done by having a good rousing performance by some well-known actors, whose fame has travelled far and near.

A stage is at once erected right in front of the great man's door, and the beating of a drum and the shrill notes of the fife advertise the neighbours that the troupe has arrived and is at the point of beginning to act. The news spreads like wildfire, and by the time the men have fairly begun, people may be seen streaming in from all directions to witness for nothing something that is inexpressibly dear to the Chinese heart.

And this is not something that is to last merely for an hour or two. Chinese plays are not such trivial things that they can be finished off in so short a time as that. The men begin the production of some popular comedy at noon. They play on till the evening is drawing near, when there is an intermission of an hour or so for the actors and the people to cook their rice. By the time this is finished, night has set in and the work of the day is over. Great flaring lamps are lighted that defy the wind, the drums are beaten, the shrill musical instruments fill the air with their weird sounds, and men and women and children, carrying their own stools with them, hurry with beaming faces towards what might be figuratively called the "Palace of Delights," and take up their position in front of the stage to enjoy the scene that is going to be acted.

ACTORS IN COSTUME.

To face p. 147.

The hours pass by and the great lamps flare in the night wind, and the actors, as they get more and more into the spirit of the comedy they are performing, become filled with enthusiasm, and with impassioned gestures, and with the very voices and tones of the characters they are personating, keep their audience spellbound in their attention.

The hours still move on, but the interest never flags. The rapid strokes on the drum in some of the exciting scenes, and the shrill falsetto tones of the actors, and the bursts of laughter as the crowd is convulsed by the dry humour that runs through the piece, wake the silence of the night, and people living near by, who could not leave their homes, are startled out of their first sleep by the unwonted sounds that wake up the echoes of the night.

Midnight strikes, but there is no sign that the play is near its end, or that the audience dreams of moving from the uncomfortable seats that each one has extemporized for himself. The small hours begin to lengthen and it would seem time for the women at least to be in their homes. The stern and strict etiquette of the country forbids women to mingle with men, but when a play is being acted, etiquette is flung to the winds, and the wives and the young maidens sit on into unseemly hours, forgetful of the nation's ideals.

The wind becomes chiller and the darkness of the East deeper and denser, but still the merriment grows more fast and furious, when suddenly, as if with the wave of an enchanter's wand, a thin streak of light touches the border of the thick curtain that has fallen on the world, and ere long the dawn dyes the eastern sky with its colours and night begins to fly before the coming day.

This is the signal for the play to stop. The actors, weary with their long night's work, descend quickly from the stage, whilst the audience, with pale faces and worn looks, hurry away to their homes to cook their rice and prepare for a long sleep to make up for the loss of it during the night.

It has been a merry time for them all, and the blue feeling that had been gathering round their hearts and made them have long faces and caused them to be unpleasant in their homes, has vanished in the laughter that caused them almost to split their sides. A celebrated humorist has declared that if he could have but one laugh a month, the whole character of his life would be changed. During the pleasant hours in which the actors beguiled the time, they must have laughed scores of times, and the memory of those jokes will linger in their brains for many a week to come, and make them look on their sorry surroundings with a lighter and a more cheerful heart.

I have in the above mentioned the chief source of amusement, but I have by no means exhausted all that the Chinese have devised wherewith to while away the hours that would hang heavy on their hands. There are tops and kites, some of which represent birds fighting in the air, which old men with hoary heads may now and again be seen flying as well as the younger generation. There is also the popular game of shuttlecock, played not, however, with battledores, but with the sides of the soles of the shoes, and done so expertly that the shuttlecock will be kept flying in the air for several minutes at a time. There is also Punch and Judy, and puppet shows that have a fascination about them because of the ingenious and marvellous way with which the operator causes the figures to imitate the motions of actual life, simply by a deft movement of the strings attached to their limbs.

Another and less informal way of getting amusement is in gossip and chatting with friends and neighbours. There is nothing stiff or formal about the Chinese. It requires very little introduction to make people acquainted with each other, and their powers of conversation are so great that with apparently nothing to say they are able to talk and laugh and spin yarns that make the time pass both rapidly and pleasantly.

The Chinese are a humorous and jolly race of people and absolutely misrepresented, excepting in their mere physical appearance, in the popular pictures that appear of them on the tea-chests and in facetious literature. If they had not been, they would not have borne the strain of thousands of years of dulness and poverty and fierce struggles for existence that have tried to crush all life out of them so well as they have done. The position that they hold to-day in the Far East is a signal proof of the vitality and the determined pluck that have carried the Yellow race through the revolutions[2] that during the past centuries have rent and shattered the Chinese Empire.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FARMER

Society divided into four classes—Farmers stand high in the estimation of the nation—Poverty of the Chinese—Money lending and borrowing—Small farms—Cause of poverty—Sell daughters to meet debts—Farmers have to engage in various occupations to meet the necessities of life—Some become coolies—Some chair-bearers—Some emigrate—Chinese farmer second to none in the world—Implements few—His knowledge of manures—Description of rice culture—Tried by droughts—System of tenant farming—Method of paying their landlords.

In the four great divisions into which the Chinese have roughly divided the whole of society, viz. scholars, farmers, artisans, and traders, the one that holds the highest place for usefulness is undoubtedly the farmer. The fact that the scholar is placed first shows the high estimation that the nation has always entertained for learning. This is not a modern idea that has gradually sprung up with the growth of civilization. It was started at the very dawn of the country's history, for the men that have really been the moulders and fashioners of the Empire were scholars whose writings still continue to influence the thoughts and habits of the people.

What Confucius thinks, no literary man, and much less the great unwashed, would ever dare to dispute. In great moral questions the maxims he has transmitted for twenty-five centuries are accepted by all as the very inspirations of Heaven, whilst in matters of government and the guiding of the affairs of the nation, the great principles that he and Mencius have enunciated for the ruling of a people have been accepted by nearly every ruler that has ever sat on the Dragon throne.

A FARM HOUSE.

It is for this reason that the only aristocracy that exists in China is that of learning. Wealthy tradesmen or artisans have no right to become members of it, and the only possible way by which they can enter the privileged circle is by buying literary degrees and passing themselves off as scholars. This is sometimes done when the Government is in want of funds, for the rich merchants are willing to pay fabulous sums for the honour they gain by being allowed to wear the hat and button of a mandarin, and to attend receptions where only the literati are permitted to be present.

Next in rank and in importance are the farmers, who in their own special line are no less honourable than the scholars. One of the great kings in the remote times of Chinese history was a man who was taken direct from the plough, to be a colleague with the famous Yau, a fact that has shed a lustre upon the calling of the husbandman ever since. One of the very greatest names in history was a farmer who subsequently sat upon the Dragon throne, and the rulers of the various dynasties that since his time have governed China, have all seemed to think that the farmer king has left them a legacy in the land which was to be as much one of the glories of the throne as any other that has descended to them through the long range of the past centuries.

Every year, as the spring time comes round, and Nature proclaims to the world in the awakening of tree and herb and flower that she is going to begin her work for the year, the Emperor comes out of his palace with his retinue of ministers and high officials, and guides a plough across a field that has been prepared for his royal coming. By this act he assumes the leadership in the agricultural work of the nation, and just as he stands on the sacred hill by the Temple of Heaven once in the year and becomes the High Priest for his people, so in this annual ceremony he is for the moment the supreme farmer that would invite the golden harvests that are to be reaped by and by, and which will fill the homes throughout the wide extent of his Empire with abundance and prosperity.

The great mass of the farmers in China own their own land, which has in the main

descended from father to son for many generations, though in consequence of the poverty of the people a very large amount of buying and selling of farms is constantly going on all over the country. The absolutely insolvent character of Chinese society is to the foreigner one of the most remarkable features about it, and one that contains so many perplexing elements, that after many an effort to solve it he drops it as a puzzle to which he can find no answer.

It may be assumed as an undoubted fact that fully seven-tenths of the whole nation are in hopeless debt, from which they will never be able to release themselves as long as they live. Another tenth owe money, and though these have the means of freeing themselves whenever their bills become due, the tendency to borrow seems to have become so inwrought into the very blood and fibre of a Chinaman that he cannot resist doing so on the least provocation. The remaining fifth are the men of means that have capital at their disposal, and who are the money-lenders to any one that can give the least shred of security that the interest and capital will be forthcoming at the particular times that are agreed upon.

But even these last are borrowers as well as lenders. No Chinaman would ever dream of possessing money and not putting it out to interest. It would be considered the sheerest waste to let it lie idle for a single day, and so they are continually on the look-out for impecunious people to whom they can lend with safety. In addition to this, he will borrow at a certain interest, and then relend at a higher rate, and so money keeps flowing backwards and forwards into his coffers, and though he loses occasionally, his gains are so large and on the whole so certain, that his wealth slowly but surely increases, whilst the seven-tenths I have already spoken of become more and more hopelessly involved.

There are several reasons why the farming population should be so much at the mercy of the money-lenders, though it must be understood that these are not a special class of people that get their living by letting out money at any extravagant rate of interest. Every man or woman that has a spare dollar, at once becomes a money-lender, so that the creditors to whom they are in debt are those in the same position in life, but who are fortunate in having a little more spare cash at their disposal.

The smallness of the great mass of the farms is one great disposing cause why their owners are always in such a perilous financial position. Under ordinary favourable circumstances, these small farmers can work their holdings so that they can make ends meet. Still, even then there is only a very small margin left for the contingencies that this Eastern climate and its great red-hot fiery sun are always producing. Should there be a deficiency in the rainfall, and the rice be left in a waterless field, or should the great typhoons blow with hurricane force, and the flood-gates of Heaven be opened so that the growing crops shall be beaten down and submerged beneath the deluge of waters, then indeed the condition of the farmer is pitiable in the extreme.

There is no resource left them but to borrow, and with the fatal facility of the Chinese for adopting this plan to relieve their immediate necessities, they resort to it with a carelessness of spirit that is perfectly astonishing to a Westerner. An Englishman, for example, with an ordinary sense of honour will shrink from borrowing money, unless he has in his mind some definite plan of being able to repay it at some period in the near future. A Chinaman’s mind being afflicted with turbidity is not troubled with thoughts of this kind. He seems to be able to grasp but one idea at a time, and that is that he is desperately pressed for money, and that by bringing along the deeds of his farm, and depositing them with a rich neighbour, sufficient money will be advanced him to meet his needs. Beyond that he does not take the trouble to think, but he hopes that in some indefinite way he will be able to pay the debt and redeem his deeds.

The light and airy way with which a man will borrow sums that he must know he can never hope to repay is most charming for its naïve simplicity, especially when the high rate of interest that is demanded everywhere is considered. Twelve per cent. is a moderate charge, and is asked where the securities are of a first-rate character. Where these are slightly doubtful, double amount is demanded and obtained, and even as much as thirty-three per cent. is paid by persons who are in great straits, and who wish to be accommodated for a short period of time. An ordinary farmer that borrows at this ruinous rate of interest, unless he has a series of exceptionally good years during which his crops have been most abundant and luxuriant, can hardly hope to pay anything beyond that, and happy will he be indeed if he has not occasionally to add some of the unpaid interest to the original sum he borrowed, and thus add to the liabilities that he is unable to discharge now.

This widespread existence of debt, which I may say is just as prevalent in the cities as in the rural districts, is the cause of a great deal of suffering, especially amongst the farmers, and comes very heavily upon the girls. A farmer, for example, borrows fifty dollars (£5) from a well-to-do man, with the stipulation that fifteen per cent. be paid for the use of the money. When the time comes for the payment of the interest there is not a spare dollar in the house. The year has been a bad one, and sickness has been in the home and medicines have had to be bought. The result is, all the money that had been gradually put aside to give to the money-lender has vanished. The creditor insists, however, upon being paid; he will not be put off, and when he is assured that they have no possible way of raising money before the taking in of the next crop, he quietly points to their little daughter, that with the guilelessness of childhood is amusing herself in her own childish, simple way, whilst the

discussion is going on with her father and mother, about the money that has fallen due.

This child is a sweet-faced little girl of about eight years old. She has large black eyes, and a round fat little face, and a merry smile that flashes across it and that gives it such a sunny look that she seems like a sunbeam as she darts in and out of the house in the course of her childish gambols. Both the father and the mother understand exactly what the money-lender means by that significant motion, and without any further discussion they promise that if he will come again in three days more, they will pay not only the interest due to him, but the fifty dollars they had borrowed from him.

Next morning the little girl, who is their only child, is asked if she would not like to go into the great city a few miles away, and see the sights and buy some rare toys that she knows can be got there. She dances for very joy at the idea, and after breakfast she sets out in high glee with her father to see the wonderful things in that great town and to bring back a present for her mother, who bids good-bye to her with tear-dimmed eyes, and a weight upon her heart as she takes a last lingering look at her little one that she knows she will never set eyes upon again.

Upon their arrival in the city, the father, instead of visiting the toy-shops, makes his way to a large imposing-looking mansion where a wealthy family resides, and after some bargaining the little girl is sold to them to become their slave, and to be their absolute property to treat and dispose of as they may deem right. When this transaction is finished and seventy dollars have been transferred to the father, he tells his little girl, who has been looking with wondering gaze at the glories of the house to which she had been brought, to rest awhile and he will call for her by and by when he has seen to some little business that he has to do in a neighbouring street. She little dreams as he goes out of the great door that she will never see him again, and never more will her mother’s eyes look down upon her with the light of affection beaming in them, nor ever again will she see the flash of love illumining her face as she runs to her with some childish grievance or some question that she wishes her to answer. She is a slave now and has lost her freedom, and her new master can dispose of her as he thinks best; and all this she suffers that the debts of the home may be paid and the homestead may be saved from passing into other hands.

The Chinese farms as a rule are small. This is almost entirely due to the custom that prevails in China of the land being divided amongst the sons when the father dies. The constant subdivision that has been going on during the centuries of the past has resulted in the great diminishing in the size of the holdings, and the leaving of many of the rural population without any land at all.

There are of course many rich landowners who have invested their capital in land, and who have a superabundance of it. Where the native banks are uncertain and the modes of investment few and precarious, it has been found that to buy up farms brings in after all the highest interest, and is more to be relied upon than any other method of disposing of surplus funds.

A large number of farms are just large enough to support a family, say, of four or five people, but should the seasons be unfavourable, and the crops be parched by the fiery-faced sun and gradually be scorched to death in the fields, then sorrow comes upon the home, and the money-lender has to be sought to give relief. A still more considerable number of farms are too small even under the very best conditions to support the family. The fields are too few, though cultivated with the deft and cunning hand of the Chinese farmer, to produce food enough for the home, and so plans have to be thought of by which the deficiency may be met, and food and clothes provided for the wife and the little ones.

It is this widespread condition of affairs that has made the farmer in this land one of the handiest men in all the four great divisions into which society has been divided. The pressing needs of his home, and the absolute necessity for some mode of increasing his income if he would keep it together, have taxed his wits to the very utmost, and consequently have developed his thought and his ingenuity.

Some of them open little shops, where they sell miscellaneous articles that do not require a large capital to the neighbours and others who do not care for travelling as far as the neighbouring city to make such small purchases. Others, again, who have no money whatever to invest in even such small enterprises as these, start for some great centre of trade and there act as coolies. They become the beasts of burden of the whole city. Their muscles have been toughened by toil on their farms and their minds have been developed in their struggle with nature, so that they become valuable auxiliaries in doing the heavy work connected with the business of the town.

The favourite resorts of these farmers that are striving to keep a home above their heads, are the great shipping ports, where foreign vessels bring their cargoes from the four corners of the earth. Here labour is abundant and better paid, and consequently the chances of saving money considerably greater.

In Shanghai, for example, and Hongkong, the two greatest shipping ports in this extreme East, it is intensely interesting to watch how the farmers flock to them, to do the rough and dangerous work of loading and unloading the steamers and sailing ships that come in almost daily from their ocean voyages. Thousands of them congregate on the wharves and jetties

waiting to be called off to the ships that are lying in the stream. Usually they are a rough-looking crowd, and, judged by a similar class of men that are seen in our home ports, they would seem to be of a much inferior character to those that we are accustomed to see there.

They are poorly clad, and their clothes are of such an unpicturesque description and so badly fitting and usually so full of patches, that they give one the impression that they must be the very refuse of the neighbourhoods from which they have come. If they were Englishmen, we would call them loafers and tramps who had gathered round the dock gates, not really to get work, but to pose as members of the unemployed in order that charity might be doled out to them.

But every man there is a *bona fide* farmer, who has so studied the mysteries of nature that he is able to wring her secrets out of her, and cause the fields to be covered with luxuriant crops. They nearly all have farms, and the wives and children are working them whilst they are away, and living on the barest subsistence that will keep body and soul together until they return with their hard-earned gains to drive away the wolf from the door, and to satisfy the inexorable money-lender, who will have nothing less than his pound of flesh.

A HARBOUR SCENE
(HONG KONG).

And bravely do the men toil at the work that is to bring independence to their homes. Down in the deep holds of the great ships, with but small intermissions the livelong day, the huge bales of goods are swung by sturdy arms that seem made of iron into the lighters alongside, and at last as the sun shows signs of setting, the men wipe the dripping perspiration from their faces, and with laughter and jokes that show the unconquerable pluck of these brave fellows they quit their work for the day.

Other farmers, again, have heard of the golden legends that have been wafted to them from the Straits and Java and Borneo, and from Sumatra, which have told of the fortunes that are to be made there by men who are willing to work. Those lands are to the Chinese what the fabled country that was said to contain the Golden Fleece was to the Grecian heroes that set sail to gain possession of it for themselves. They feel that if they linger in their homes, poverty and hunger must be the lot from which there is no escape, and so, leaving their farms to be worked by the women, they set their faces towards the setting sun, and with their brains dancing with visions of fortunes that they are to discover there, they start on the long journey, in the hopes that in a very few years they will return with money sufficient to pay off their debts, and with enough left to enable them to live in comfort the rest of their lives. And so the lands that lie about the equator, and the countless islands that look straight up at the sun, and the Malay Peninsula, where the forests cover the land and countless myriads of mosquitoes sing their high-keyed songs, men from the great Empire of China abound throughout them all. They make the roads, and they dig in the tin mines, and they pull the jinrickshaws, and they seem to be the great workers everywhere. Who are these men that thrust themselves so prominently upon the notice of the stranger and the traveller? They surely must be the refuse of the land from which they have come, for here they are the hewers of wood and the drawers of water. They are nothing of the kind, for nearly every man you see is a farmer in that great Empire of China, and through the stress of poverty and the desire to save his home from distress, he has come to do any work, no matter how menial, that will enable him to accumulate enough to return to his beloved home to bring succour to those who are enduring whilst he is away.

The farmer is truly the handy man of China, for he seems to be able to turn his hand to almost anything, and to succeed fairly well in whatever he touches. He can turn sailor at a moment's notice, and he seems as familiar amongst the ropes and in the management of the helm as he is amongst the growing grain, that appears to recognize his presence and to rustle and whisper with gladness as he passes unconcernedly with the air of a master down through its midst. All the great fleets of boats that cast their shadows upon the mighty rivers of China are manned and worked by farmers, who, when their voyages are over, return home it may be for a shorter or longer period, and aid the wives in the management of the few fields, that they manage with the same tact and cunning touch of hand as their husbands would do were they not compelled to go afield to earn something to eke out the scanty produce that they are able to get out of their farms.

The stranger from abroad travelling by the native boats that sail, say, up the Yangtze for a thousand miles or more, is struck with the intelligence and activity and pleasant, sociable character of the men that work the boat. He is with them for weeks together, and he admires the quiet, efficient way in which they manage the sails, or get out on the bank and tow her against the stream when there is a head wind or perhaps a dead calm. He never once suspects that they never spent any time as apprentices in learning their business, but that every one of them, even including the captain, is a born farmer, and that his real vocation is to till the lands that his fathers have transmitted to him.

A picnic party is organized to ascend a mountain that rears its lofty head above the plain that lies at its feet. The gentlemen can walk, but the ladies must have sedan chairs to carry them up the narrow pathways trodden by the feet of the buffaloes, and by those of the woodcutters who climb up high on the hillsides to cut down fuel for the homes in the villages below. The ordinary chair-bearers accustomed to carry on the level roads would be no use on these rough and rocky ribands of pathways, that only men who are surefooted and have the wind to mount up steep inclines could travel with safety.

In this emergency a number of farmer lads are engaged, and though they do not carry the chair as scientifically as the regular carriers, they will fly up the steepest hill, and jump over chasms, and surmount boulders in a way that these latter would never attempt. The process is a little rough and one is apt to get somewhat shaken, but there is never any danger of the men falling or of their precipitating their fare over the edge of a precipice into the yawning ravine beneath.

Where the villages are near the great thoroughfares, the carrying of sedan chairs is a very favourite method with the farmers of earning a few extra cash to help to meet the expenses of the home. After the crops have been gathered in, and the rush of work is over, they are accustomed to stand at various points on the roadside, and watch for the coming of sedan chairs that may be passing up or down. No sooner do they come opposite them than they call out and ask the bearers whether they do not wish to engage some one to give them a rest for a few miles and to carry their burden for them. If the men they address have been carrying for some hours and have grown weary, negotiations ensue which end in their dropping the chair on the road, and its being hoisted on to the shoulders of the new men, who, full of vigour and anxious to get their job finished, rush on like racehorses over the rough, uneven road.

The payment for this toilsome labour is of the most meagre and unsatisfactory description. One day I was travelling over one of these great thoroughfares, and the men that were carrying me were becoming somewhat exhausted. The road, which had been very much left to nature to repair, was in a shockingly bad condition. It ran, moreover, through a very hilly country, and sometimes it wound up the sides of hills, and again it descended by rough, circuitous windings into the valley far beneath. The men had the greatest difficulty in keeping from falling. The chair on their shoulders was heavy, and the road was strewed with stones, and tiny waterways that the rains and the streams from the hills had cut into it had to be jumped. Very often I had to hold my breath in terror lest in passing over the face of a sloping rock the men's feet should slip, and I should find myself rolling down the hillside into a miniature rapid that fretted and foamed as it whirled and tossed in its wild career towards the plain below.

My two bearers, who would have trotted along on an even road with only an occasional grunt, or a muttered expression as to the hardness of their lot in life, broke into expressions of disgust as the various difficulties of the way came one by one upon them; still they struggled manfully on, till finally we reached a small oasis in the hills, where a few houses embowered amid splendid banyan-trees offered refreshments to the travelling public as well as to our panting, perspiring chair-bearers, who dragged their weary limbs under the shadow of the great boughs of the trees, and dropping the chair in the middle of the road, threw themselves utterly exhausted and worn out on the benches that had been provided for those who intended to purchase refreshments before they proceeded further on their journey.

After sitting for a moment listless and drooping, with apparently no strength to utter a word, one of my men held up his hand deftly fashioned into the shape of a bowl, when the shopkeeper, who had kept a keen eye upon the newcomers as possible customers, at once dipped out a bowlful of steaming rice from a huge cauldron that was kept on the boil, and placed it within the bowl-shaped fingers with a pair of chopsticks laid across it, ready for the

immediate use of the weary coolie. At the same time he placed before him a tiny little platter in which were some nicely browned strips of fried bean curds to act as appetizer to the rice, and to arouse his flagging appetite.

After a few minutes of solemn stillness, when the only sounds that were heard from the weary men were the music of the chopsticks and the satisfied sighs as the rice was driven down their throats by the two "nimble boys" (a pleasant title given by the Chinese to the chopsticks), the faces of the men began to lighten up. The weary look vanished, smiles covered the yellow visages, and soon jokes were cracked and bantering language was tossed from table to table, until the air rang with the echoes of their laughter.

At this juncture two farmers stepped out from a number who were hanging about in a listless fashion, and asked my men if they did not wish to hire for the next stage, which was about three miles long. At first they pretended that they did not, but that was simply bluff and intended to knock the price down. After some noisy discussion, the men said they would carry for forty-five cash. It must be remembered here that one cash is the thousandth part of two shillings. My men objected that the sum asked was extravagant, and offered ten less. Another wordy contest ensued, when the farmers came down to forty, whilst my men came up to thirty-eight.

Both sides refused to budge an inch, so my chair was once more hoisted upon the shoulders of the chair coolies, and we issued from beneath the branches of the banyan into the glare of the great sun, and the weary march along the toilsome roads was once more begun. We had proceeded on our journey fully a third of a mile, and the whole incident had passed from my mind, when loud sounds of voices calling out were heard behind. In an instant my men let the chair slip from their shoulders on to the road, and stood quietly within the bamboo poles, as though they were expecting some one. "What is the matter," I asked, "and why do you stop?" "Oh," one of them replied, with a twinkle in his eyes, "the farmers have consented to carry you this stage for thirty-eight cash, and so we are going to have a rest."

By this time the men had come up, and putting on their straw sandals to protect their feet from the rough stones, tightened their girdles, twisted their tails round the crowns of their heads, and tossing the chair on to their brawny shoulders, they started with a run on their three-mile race. They might have been chair coolies all their lives, considering the easy manner in which they manipulated the chair, and the perfect way in which they kept step, and yet they were simple farmers, whose lives are spent in the cultivation of the soil, but whose poverty has compelled them to devise some rough methods to enable them to drive the wolf from their doors. Some idea of the strain that has been put upon them may be gathered from the fact that these men were willing to carry me for three miles and walk back the same distance for the trifling sum of thirty-eight cash, which was to be equally divided between the two, and which would thus give each one a little under a halfpenny.

The Chinese farmer stands second to none in all the world. It would seem, indeed, as though nature recognized in him a master hand, and that she responded to his touch, and poured out her riches in willing obedience to a mind that understood her and had learned her secrets. There is nothing in the world of agriculture that a Chinese farmer does not understand—that is, as far as the products of this land are concerned—and he seems to know the peculiarities of each, and their moods and their whims, and to be able to coax them to show their best face when the time of the harvesting comes round.

This is all the more remarkable since he has really so few implements with which to work the marvels he produces. These are the hoe, the plough, and the harrow, and beyond these the Chinese farmer never dreams of desiring any other. The first of these seems never to be out of his hands, for it is the one upon which he relies the most, and the one that is really the most effective implement that he possesses for the cultivation of the soil. It really takes the place of the spade in England, though the latter is never put to such extensive and general uses as the hoe. The Chinaman can do anything with it but make it speak. A farmer well on in years can easily be recognized amidst a number of working men by the curve his hands have taken from holding the hoe in the many years of toil in his fields with it.

With it, if he is a poor man and has no oxen to plough the ground, he turns up the soil where he is going to plant his crops, and with it he deftly, and with a turn of his wrist, levels out the surface so that it is made ready for the seed. With a broad-bladed hoe he dips to the bottom of a stream or of a pond, and he draws up the soft mud that had gathered there, and with a dexterous swing he flings the dripping hoeful on to his field near by to increase its richness by this new deposit. The stump of a tree will send out its roots wandering for moisture underneath a choice little plot where his potatoes are growing, and the farmer feels that these are an infringement upon the rights of the plants that look to him for protection. He seizes his hoe, and with a few sturdy strokes of its keen, sharp edge driven into its very heart in a short time the stump has vanished, and the roots have ceased tapping the moisture that the potato tubers require for their own growth.

But it would take up too much space to describe all the thousand and one ways in which this truly national implement is used by the farmers of China. It is quite enough to say that without it they would be left quite helpless, and if the agriculture of the country was to be carried on, some other implement equally serviceable would have to be devised to take its place. The plough and the harrow are of secondary importance to the hoe, but still they occupy a prominent position in the agricultural economy of the nation. They are of course

antiquated, for they have come down from the remote past untouched by any inventive genius during the long centuries that have elapsed since they were devised in the early dawn of Chinese history. To alter them, or even to make a suggestion that they could be improved in any way, would be such a monstrous heresy that the nation's hair would turn grey, and would cause the spirits of their ancestors such misery and shame that there is no knowing what calamities they might send upon the Empire to avenge their wrongs.

The ability of the farmer in this country is measured by the crops he is able to produce. China is an old country, and for countless generations the teeming populations have had to get their living out of the land. There is no rest given it, for one rarely sees any of the fields being allowed to lie fallow in order to give them time for recuperation. The pressure of the hungry mouths is upon it, and to satisfy the needs of the people they must go on indefinitely producing sustenance for them. It is here where the genius of the Chinese farmer comes in. If hungry stomachs can only be satisfied by a supply of food, so the impoverished, famished land can be made to bear the strain upon its resources by putting into it a liberal supply of manures.

This, after all, is the true secret of abundant crops. The land, in the South of China at least, is mostly of a poor and indifferent character. Along the courses of rivers and in the alluvial valleys it is rich enough, and produces splendid crops year after year. But when you get beyond these, and come into the hilly regions, you touch upon territories that are exceedingly reluctant, excepting when they are liberally supplied with manures, to produce crops that are worth the gathering.

The Chinese farmer has no scientific knowledge as to how he should best develop his farm, but he knows by experience that unless the land is coaxed and petted with an ample supply of manures, no acquaintance with the art of farming will avail to cover it with the harvests that will keep his family from hunger, and that will still leave a margin to be sold in the market to bring enough to meet the incidental expenses of the home.

The list of fertilizers in China is a very brief one, and bones and beancake are two important ones in it, but the one that stands the first and foremost in the estimation of the farmers throughout the country is nightsoil. This is the one that is universally used because it is the cheapest, and also because it is the only really available one. The system by which that important manure is collected and distributed is a thoroughly perfect one, and ages of practice has made the managers of this intricate business so well up in it that there is never any hitch in it. The towns and cities, and any place indeed where a considerable population has collected, are so relieved of their accumulations that the Government is never called upon to interfere, nor are sanitary inspectors ever appointed to see to their cleanliness or to prevent the people from suffering from insanitary conditions.

A regular trade is carried on between the towns and the farms that lie in all directions around them in this particular manure, and the farmers' wives, who are the principal carriers of it, will come into town in the early morning and carry it miles away to their houses in all directions throughout the country places. On one occasion I had started out from a large city of at least a hundred thousand people and had got a few miles from it, when I overtook twenty or thirty young farmers' wives carrying their purchases in buckets slung on bamboo poles resting on their shoulders, and a merrier set of women it would have been difficult to have met with.

They seemed quite unconcerned at the heavy loads they had to carry or the miles that still lay between them and their homes, nor did they appear to consider that there was any disgrace in having to perform the duties they were doing. They seemed, indeed, to forget all about the toil they had to endure, for they laughed and chatted and joked with each other till the road echoed with the sound of their merry voices. The exercise, which was severe, did not seem to fatigue them, for their eyes twinkled with humour and their brown faces were covered with smiles, and they looked so good humoured and full of pleasant thoughts that it was really a treat to look upon them. Every day these women would come into the city until they had carried enough to their little holdings to suffice for the crop they were going to put in, and then they would have a respite until that had been gathered and it was time to make preparations for the next one.

In the South of China there are two great crops in the year, that absorb the greater part of the energies of the farmers whilst they are in the fields. These consist of the rice which is the staple food for all classes of society, and which occupies the place in the social economy of the Chinese that wheat does in that of the English. The first is gathered in July and the second in November, and from the time that the first crop is put in during the month of April, until the second one is garnered, it may be positively asserted that there is a continued tension on the mind of the farmer.

CHINESE FARMERS.

The planting of the rice is not the simple thing that the cultivation of wheat is. This latter is sown in land that has been carefully prepared for it, and after that it is left very much to nature to do the rest. The rain falls, and the sun shines and the dews lay their diamond drops on the growing grain, and the farmer looks at the miracles of changes that are wrought upon it, until golden-hued he puts the sickle in and gathers it into his barns. With the rice there is no such luxurious rest or waiting.

He first of all sows his seed in a plot of land that is full of water, and they fall into the soft oozy mud at the bottom and take root. As the little spires pierce above the surface, they have the most exquisite light-green that the eye has ever been pleased to look upon. They grow up rapidly with an airy look about them as though they were conscious that the farmer is depending upon them for the whole of his rice crop during this season. They do indeed constitute the stock from which he draws the materials to fill his empty fields waiting to be planted with rice plants.

After they have grown to the height of five or six inches they are all pulled up by the roots, and in little bundles of four or five they are replanted in the larger fields that have been prepared for them, each bundle standing apart from the rest about three or four inches. And now the race of life begins with the several little bunches that have their roots submerged in water, and their emerald pointed leaves looking up at the blue sky. They started life together and grew up side by side, and now marshalled in groups they are not rivals, but friendly competitors in the race to show which shall give the best of beauty and power to the farmer who is caring for them.

From this day until the hour when they are cut down golden-hued, there must be no faltering in the care that is bestowed upon them. The water in the field must always be kept up to a certain level, for should that fail the serried ranks of rice would soon show how keenly they felt its loss, by their drooping heads and distressed-looking manner, as the great sun beat down upon them, and seemed to paralyze them with his scorching rays. Water must be led in some way into the field, or if there is a stream running close by, the endless water-wheel must be set in motion until little rivulets have flowed in, and the gaping cracks in the mud are closed up, and the thirsty roots have drunk their fill, and the drooping stalks once more stand up erect and look the sun in the face without flinching.

Every now and again, too, the farmer must walk between the marshalled ranks and with his hands tenderly feel at the roots of each separate bunch of the growing rice to remove any impediment there may be to the free access of water to them. These roots seem like spoiled children that need petting and coaxing and humouring in order to be willing to send up the vital forces through the stalks above so as to help them to produce the healthy heads of grain that are to give delight to the farmer when he comes to gather in the harvest.

In addition to this precious crop that needs so much attention, the cultivator has others that claim his thoughts and time. These are the beans that are used in the manufacture of soy and in the making of bean curds that are considered so important as condiments to be eaten with the rice. There are also the sweet potatoes which in some of the poorer counties are the staple food of all but the well-to-do. There are also various kinds of vegetables which the Chinese are most expert in growing, but the cultivation of these is considered as pastime when compared with the incessant care and labour that have to be bestowed on the rice crop from the very first day that the seed is cast upon the waters until the moment when the fields are allowed to run dry, and the golden-hued stalks rear their heads in the air with no

more anxiety as to whether the rain shall ever fall again or not.

The one element that causes the farmer most distress in his cultivation of the rice is the uncertainty of the weather. When the rainy season has been one in which abundance of rain has been poured down upon the earth, so that the fountains that lie beneath the wells and close by the ponds are filled to overflowing, then his mind is comparatively at rest. He knows there is a perennial supply that can constantly be drawn upon, when the water begins to ebb away in the fields where the rice is growing. Should the showers that the thunderstorms pour down occasionally from the clouds that gather so quickly in the sky come with any kind of regularity, his mind is still more relieved, and he can think with equanimity of the day that is coming when he will gather his precious crop into his garner.

Such an experience, however, as this is not one that falls very often to the lot of the anxious farmer. The rainy seasons are apt to be capricious, and to withhold the rich stores of rain and moisture without which not only his rice, but his beans and his potatoes will be scorched in the field and will wither and perish before his very eyes. It is pitiful to watch the efforts that he has to make to try and preserve his crops from destruction when the year is a dry one.

The days go by, and every morning his first looks are towards the hills around which the clouds have gathered during the night. There seems a great promise in the dense masses that have gathered around some lofty peak, and it is hoped that to-day at last, after weary days of expecting, the rain that is to save the crops will come down in abundant showers. The sun by and by rises in a great red orb of scorching heat, and his rays flash as though they had come straight from a furnace, and they touch the clouds that have taken refuge on the hills, and slowly they vanish into thin air and are gone.

Another day of heat, and the sun in a cloudless sky draws up the water that is standing at the feet of the rice, and he looks upon the ponds and they dissolve in vapour, and he touches the vines of the sweet potatoes with his breath and they turn pale with anguish, and the tubers within the ridges wither up and die for want of moisture. Days and sometimes weeks of this go by, till one wonders at the vitality of nature that can endure such a fiery ordeal and have anything left to tell the tale.

It is on such occasions as these that the profoundest grief and sorrow are felt by the farmers. The dried-up ponds are dug still deeper to reach any reserve of the precious fluid that may have sunk below the surface, and in order to secure that none of that shall be absorbed by the sun, they carry on their operations about the hours of midnight, when the air has become slightly cooler, and when every drop of water can be saved for the dying crops near by. It very often occurs that the farmers of a whole district will be out in the dark nights, and with their hoes are busily engaged in turning up every available spot of ground to discover whether there is any water below. Where the ponds border on each other's fields, the fiercest struggles will frequently take place for the possession of the discovered treasure, and the night air will resound with the noise of battle, and wounded men will be carried to their homes to add to the bitterness and the grief that have already thrown their shadows there.

 In the earlier part of this chapter it was stated that in consequence of the custom of dividing the farms amongst the sons and not handing them over to the eldest, as is done in England, a great many of them are too small to support even a small family, whilst many of what might be called the younger sons are left without any land whatever. It has become the custom with many such people to rent lands from others who have a surplus of such on their hands. It is the custom for rich men to invest their money in the purchase of farms, which they let out to others to cultivate, and taking one year with another they find this is a very profitable way of disposing of the ready money they have at their command.

The system of letting out their lands is thoroughly Oriental and quite different from that which is in vogue in the West. The landlords do not charge any rent, but they share the produce with the tenant. This seems a most equitable arrangement, for when the years are good both tenant and owner mutually reap the benefit, whilst in the seasons when a scarcity of rain prevents the ground from producing as much as it legitimately ought to do, both parties share in the sorrow of diminished crops.

The rule that prevails very generally is for the landlord to take half the crop after it has been gathered. The tenant provides seed, manure, and labour, and for his use of the land he hands over a half of all that it produces. It is very interesting to watch the proceedings that take place when the times comes for harvesting the various kinds of crops during the year. The tenant, with his wife and sons, if he has any, repairs to the field where the grain is ready for the sickle. It is a time of great rejoicing, as it is in all countries, and the months of labour and anxiety are for the time being forgotten in the joy of the golden grain that is now waiting to be gathered.

But another figure is there, who takes no share in the harvesting. He is well dressed and does not have the air of a farmer about him. He has taken his seat on a bank or some place where he can keep his eye upon the whole of the joyous proceedings that are being carried on. Upon inquiry we find that he is an agent of the landlord, and has come to receive his half of the contents of the field. He has bags with him to put his share in, and when the rice is cut and at once threshed on the field, the half is duly measured and handed over to him.

By this arrangement all arrears of rent are avoided, and the distress of feeling in debt to one’s landlord is never experienced by the farmers of China. That their life is an anxious and a troubled one, I have shown very fully, and that sometimes their crops are too small to meet the needs of the family. These are inevitable in the very nature of things, but there is one thing that they are never troubled with, and that is excessive rents. Rack-renting is a thing from which they are mercifully preserved, and it is one sign of the common-sense of the Chinese, and of their instinct for fair play both for landlord and tenant, that the present system was initiated ages ago, and is still carried out all over the country.

CHAPTER IX

A RAMBLE THROUGH A CHINESE CITY

Peculiarities of a Chinese town—Narrow streets—Smells—Mean-looking buildings—One storey—Description of a silk shop—Uncleanness the rule—Sights on the streets—Itinerant kitchen—Crowds on the streets—No rows—A mandarin and his retinue—Beggars—Fish market—Shoe street—No public-houses—An opium den.

The sight of a Chinese city is something that one never forgets, for there are so many features about it that are absolutely new, that our minds are so impressed by what we see that a photograph of them is engraven upon our memories that will never be erased. Our conceptions of a city are those that we have gathered from those that we have seen in England, and we picture to ourselves wide streets with pavements on each side, where the foot passengers walk in comfort without having to jostle each other. We see, too, in imagination lofty houses, built with a certain degree of regularity and with taste about them. Cleanliness, too, is one of the things that we remember as being associated with it, whilst policemen day and night patrol the streets and preserve order amongst the people that travel along them. Cabs, and trams, and omnibuses crowded with passengers are the conspicuous objects that are to be met with in any moderate-sized towns in the homeland.

Now, all the above things are absent from any part of a Chinese city that one may happen to visit in any portion of the Empire. This statement is made with a good deal of confidence, for, unlike the cities of the West, which all vary more or less one from another, the Chinese towns are very much facsimiles of each other, and when you have seen one, you may confidently assert you have a very true conception of what all the rest are like.

The ideal city was drawn in the brain of the designers and builders of the first one in the remote and misty past of Chinese History, and the spectacle evidently has seemed so sublime and overpowering to the succeeding generations of Chinese that no original genius has appeared since then to dare to suggest anything better. And so every city is built upon the same model throughout the length and breadth of the land, and whilst some are larger and more imposing than others, the plan of the walls and the configuration of the streets, and the architecture of the houses are pretty much the same everywhere.

But here is a town close at hand, and so, without waiting to discuss the theory of a Chinese city, let us boldly enter in and see with our own eyes exactly what it is like.

The first street we travel along gives us a shock.

Instead of the broad and spacious roadway along which the traffic is carried, we come into a narrow, dingy-looking artery which at its extreme breadth is not wider than twelve feet, and even that is not all available for the use of those that have to pass up and down it. The shopkeepers on both sides have put out their counters, on which they expose their goods, so that only five or six feet are left free for the use of the public.

This particular street which we are now in is not an exceptional one, in fact it is one of the principal ones in the town, and therefore is a very fair sample of what the business quarter is like. If we were to diverge down the side streets that run into it we should find them all much narrower, more forbidding, more dingy and very much dirtier.

We have not advanced far in our walk before we begin to be conscious of peculiar odours that seem to be the heritage of the East. The air is never fresh, but at corners of the street and indentations in the houses, and on the spots not actually in use, there are always accumulations of refuse and garbage that fester in the sun and send out the most abominable smells. But these are healthy and playful when compared with others that now and again seem to strike one as if with a sledge-hammer and paralyze one for the moment.

These are caused by the foulness of the drain that lies underneath the centre of the street.

As the roads are so narrow and are occupied by houses on both sides, the only available place for the drainage of the city is right through the middle of the roadway.

There is no Public Board of Works to superintend the construction of these, and as the Chinese as a race have very hazy and elementary ideas as to the necessity for drains of any kind, it may easily be imagined how badly they make them. The result is that gases generate and evil smells collect for which there is no escape excepting through the cracks of the stone slabs that pave the streets. Never has there yet been a writer with the genius to describe these. It is simply enough to say that they have the concentrated essence of the ages in them. They trace back their ancestry to the times that are lost in myth and fairy tales, and they would look with disdain upon any of the modern smells, just as an aristocrat that holds his title from the times of the Conqueror would gaze with scorn upon some upstart, whose father sold soap and was knighted for the wealth he had amassed.

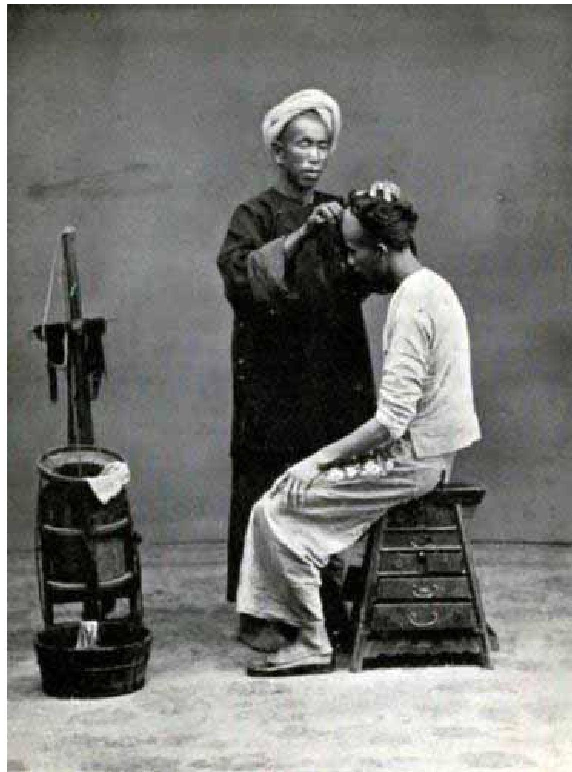
It is astonishing that the people that live in the houses near by are not carried off by typhoid or other deadly fevers, but they are not. They have, on the other hand, a lively, healthy look about them as though they lived in some country place, where the air comes fresh from the mountain near by and where they breathe a wholesome stock of ozone all the year round.

The fact of the matter is the Chinese have no belief in the word infection. There is nothing in this huge cumbrous language to express the idea of germ, bacillus and such like, and so when some terrible odour from a drain that is seething and frothing in the sun, such as would knock off the head of a water buffalo, the Chinese puckers up his nose for an instant and then puts on that childlike smile with which he so often adorns his countenance, and attends to his business without any more fuss.

Now, this is one of the best streets in the town, and contains goods to the value of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Some of the wealthiest merchants in the town have their places of business in it, and yet there is not one to be compared with any ordinary shop that one meets with in any of the ordinary streets that abound in our cities in the West.

They have all a comparatively mean-looking appearance. They are only one storey high and have no fronts in them. When the shutters are taken down in the morning, the whole of the interior is at once laid bare to the public gaze, and as only the poorer shops attempt to display the goods they have for sale, one can see nothing but rolls on the shelves, and drawers tightly closed, and a number of Chinamen lounging about in a free and easy way, who are really clerks, but who act with a freedom that would ensure them being packed off at a moment’s notice by any vigilant shop-walker in a good business house in England.

But here is a silk shop that it will be interesting to visit. It is one of the best in the whole town, and it is said to contain specimens from all the famous silk-producing districts in the Empire. It does not seem to have anything in it, beyond what one sees lying on the shelves, carefully wrapped up in paper as though the great purpose was to conceal everything from the gaze of the public. We find our progress impeded by a large counter within which the clerks lounge about, and as purchasers are never supposed to sit down, we have to stand on the outside of this, as no chairs of any kind have been provided, not even for the women, when they come to buy. Ladies of course never by any chance come out shopping, so the great majority of the customers are men, and occasionally elderly women of the middle class, who are not supposed to need to sit down.



A BARBER AND HIS CUSTOMER.

To face p. 178.

The appearance of a foreigner causes a commotion, and a responsible-looking man steps forward with a hesitating manner, evidently questioning with himself how he is to address you, since he knows nothing but his own mother-tongue. You inform him, however, in Chinese, that you have come to look at his silks, and at once his countenance clears, and a look of pleasure flashes into his eyes and across the wide and expansive area of his Mongolian features.

The clerks, too, without any apparent restraint from their master's presence, crowd around and make remarks about your personal appearance, and criticize your dress, and give their opinion about the way in which you pronounce Chinese. In the meanwhile two or three have been dispatched to an inner room, where the precious silks are kept, and they soon appear with a dozen rolls or so carefully wrapped in paper, and tied with string to keep the dust and the sunlight from getting to them.

As each one is unrolled, you gaze with absolute delight upon the exquisite colours that flash upon your sight. Here you have one piece of a delicate creamy white, that seems too pure to be touched without being defiled. Next to it is another of a beautiful rose pink, a colour that the designers must have caught from some rose that had just opened its petals to the sun, and so as the men deftly unwind the various rolls you have displayed before you the whole array of colours that the Chinese weavers have woven into their fabrics, and for the moment the unæsthetic-looking Chinaman becomes sublimed in your imagination, because of the marvellous power with which he has reproduced the various hues of nature in the rolls of silk that are deftly unfolded before you.

The silk you have been examining is of an inferior quality and will not cost more than sixpence a foot, the standard measure with the Chinese, as they know nothing of yards in any of their measurements. You ask to see some of their more expensive articles, and soon the clerks return with specimens from the looms of Canton, Hangchow, and Soochow, each with its own distinctive characteristics, and so exquisitely beautiful that you stand gazing upon them all with admiring looks, and with words that are quite inadequate to express your high sense of the workmanship displayed upon them. The amazing thing is to understand how the weavers, in their poor tumble-down cottages, and with looms so cumbersome and antiquated that they might have come out of the Ark, could have produced such exquisite specimens of art as these rolls of silk undoubtedly are.

We pass along this narrow unsavoury street, when we turn into one of the smaller ones that run into it. The shops here are of a decidedly meaner character, being inhabited by a much poorer class of people. In plan, however, they are very similar to the ones in the street we have already described. There are no fronts to them, and everything that goes on in them can be distinctly seen and heard by the passers-by. There is this decided difference in them, that the back part of the shop is the home of the family that are carrying on the business, which is never the case with the better ones.

Fortunately the Chinese do not believe in the privacy of the home as we do. They do not mind having the whole details of their daily experiences seen by every one that cares to

look. How they live, what they eat, and even the family jars that we try and hush up from the public are things that seem to be common property, and not to belong exclusively to this particular family who are most concerned.

The impression one gets from a look into these miserable homes is that the Chinese idea of comfort differs essentially from our own, and that they can put up with a vast amount of discomfort such as would drive an Englishman mad. Their houses are filthily dirty and untidy. The wife after a few weeks of married life loses the trim, neat appearance she had as a young girl. She drops naturally into the slattern ways of the women who are her neighbours, and ere long dust and dirt and cobwebs, and frowsy and untidy garments, are the leading features of the home.

It would be unwise to infer from this state of things that the Chinese are unhappy, or that they are conscious that their surroundings have something in them to induce melancholy or discontent. The ideal of the West is cleanliness, a thing that the East never seems to aim at, or to even dream of. This great city through which we are walking is an example of this latter statement. Its streets are unswept from one year's end to the other. Heaps of rubbish festering and fermenting in the sun and exhaling the most unpleasant odours meet you at every turn. The drains are badly made and left absolutely to themselves until, choked up, they are opened up for repairs, when the hidden compressed effluvia send their noxious vapours into the homes around.

The people are highly uncleanly in their persons. They never bathe, and even in the homes of the rich the bath tub is an unknown luxury. The face and hands are about the only parts of the body that on ordinary occasions ever make the acquaintance of water. Their clothes, too, from a Western standpoint, are anything but satisfactory. They are frowsy and wanting in the crisp cleanliness that a liberal supply of soap and water impart to them. There are always certain garments that are worn day after day and week after week, that men never dream of cleansing in any way whatever. The lower you go down in the scale of life, the more conspicuous is this disregard of cleanliness, and yet it does not seem to affect either the general health or spirits of the people. They are a laughter-loving race, and jokes and funny stories and everything that would raise a smile to the face find a ready echo in their hearts. The fact that they are surrounded by dust and dirt and untidiness such as would put the shivers into any ordinary Englishman, and dim for the time being the very light of life, have no seeming effect upon this long-lived race.

The people of this town appear to be endowed either with very good appetites, or to have very defective arrangements at home for supplying the wants of the inner man, for there seems to be an altogether extravagant number of itinerant kitchens with food already cooked stationed at various corners where the traffic is the greatest, to cater at once to the public appetite.

Here is one close at hand, and as we have a few minutes to spare let us draw near and see what it is like. It consists of two wooden stands which can be slung on to the ends of a stout bamboo pole and carried at a moment's notice in any direction that suits the owner. Where trade is brisk at any particular spot, he remains there until his customers desert him, and then, shouldering his miniature eating-house, he goes off at a quick trot to the localities where the hungry are most likely to congregate.

On one of the stands there is a large rice pan which is filled with rice that is kept just on the boil by a fire that burns underneath. The heat must be so modulated that it will never blaze into a flame, for to allow it to do that would be fatal to the success of the enterprise. The Chinese, who are connoisseurs in the art of cooking rice, can never tolerate it being boiled to a pulp. The grains must to a certain extent retain their individuality, and though boiled to the very heart, there must be no loss of that. The man who would wish to be popular must have learned the secret of how to please the taste of the most critical. The other stand is a kind of rough dresser, where the condiments that are to allure a pleasant passage to the rice are tastefully set out. These are salted turnips of a brown, leathery look, and the most popular, because very cheap, of all the various articles that the Chinese eat with their rice. There are also bean curds and cucumbers pickled crisp and juicy, and celery and lettuce, and salted beans and plates of various kinds of fish, and different kinds of soy, which are sprinkled with a sparing hand over the bowl of rice to give it a flavour in order to induce an appetite with the first sip that the customer takes of the savoury compound.

It is interesting to watch the deft way with which the man fulfils the orders that are given him. He first of all ladles out enough rice from the pan to nearly fill one of the bowls that lies turned upside down on the dresser. He then selects with his chopsticks a bit of salted turnip and drops it into the very centre of the steaming rice. Then once more, with the eye of a connoisseur, he picks up a bit of crisp pickled cucumber about the size of a bean and drops it on the top. If his customer is extravagant and is going in for luxuries, he selects a tiny sprat that lies cooked and ready for use, and places it in a tempting position just within the lip of the basin, and resting on the rice as though it were in its native element. A little savoury soy is then sprinkled over the whole, a pair of chopsticks are daintily laid crosswise over the steaming compound, and the man whose mouth has been watering all the time this process has been going on takes it with eager hands, and without any delay proceeds to satisfy his appetite, and all for the modest sum of a little over a halfpenny.

Several men are seated on their heels round this peripatetic kitchen, shovelling down with

their chopsticks the good things contained in their bowls. It does not seem at all strange to any one that they should thus in the sight of all the passers-by and without tables or chairs be willing to be seen eating on the public streets. The free-and-easy methods of Eastern life, as well as the intensely sociable character of the Chinese mind, make many things possible here that would be considered highly improper in the West.

The scene before us is a thoroughly Oriental one and in some respects a very picturesque one. The narrow street only six feet wide, packed as it were with human life, is a splendid place from which to view the various items of which the life of the city is composed. Here is a scholar in his long gown, threadbare and showing signs of decay. Amidst the crowd of passers-by we should never mistake him for anything but what he is. His face has that keen intellectual look that the students of this Empire usually have. Though poor, he has a proud and haughty air, as though he felt himself higher than any of the crowd that brushes up against him. Coming close behind him is a farmer, rough and unsophisticated, with the sun burnt into his face, and with the air of a man who never opened a book in his life except the ancient one of nature which he has studied to such a purpose that he can read her secrets and can extract such crops from her as make his fields laugh for very gladness. Following on is a countryman whose home lies at the foot of the hills in the near distance. He is carrying a huge load of brushwood balanced on the ends of a bamboo pole slung across his shoulders, which he is carrying to the market to be sold as firewood. He occupies more than half the roadway, and when he swings his burden from one tired shoulder to the other, the width of the street is only just enough to contain it. He passes along, however, at a steady trot as though the town belonged to him. His loud cries, “Clear the way,” “Get to the side,” “I’ll bump against you,” are uttered with an air of authority as though some royal edict had given him the authority to take possession of the road in this masterful manner.

A REFRESHMENT STALL.

To face p. 184.

It is amusing to watch the good-natured way in which the ebbing and flowing crowds yield to this man from the hills. Every one gets out of his way, and even the scholar, with pride and contempt in his heart for the unlearned masses, stands meekly at the side of the road and crushes himself up against a counter to let the imperious seller of firewood pass by. No thanks are given and none are asked, and as the tide of men close up behind him, we can hear coming down the air, “I’ll bump you,” “I’ll bump you,” “Go to the side,” “Fly, fly,” until the sounds so masterfully given and so meekly obeyed are lost in the distance.

In looking at this moving panorama there is one thing that is strikingly conspicuous, and that is the good-natured, easy, tolerant way with which they treat each other on the street. It would seem as though every man, the moment he got on it, had determined that forbearance shall be the word that should guide his conduct in his treatment of every one that he meets. Just think of it: a roadway of five or six feet wide, along which constant cross currents of people, of all kinds and conditions, are travelling, and yet no collisions, or at least so rarely that they are not enough to be quoted. Business men, clerks, coolies, opium-smokers, thieves and vagabonds, country bumpkins and elegant and refined scholars, all with an instinctive sense of the rights of others, yield to the necessities of the road, and bear with infinite good nature whatever inconveniences may arise, and treat each other with patience and courtesy.

As we have been watching the motley crowds passing and repassing before us, the man with the kitchen has been doing a roaring business. Customers have come and gone with most pleasing succession, and the heap of cash that he has received in payment for the savoury bowls of rice has grown into a little mound, and as he looks at it his eyes glisten with pleasure. All at once there is a sudden and mysterious change in his attitude. Instead of standing with a benevolent look upon the group sitting on their haunches round his eating-house, he becomes agitated, and hastily bidding his customers to hurry up, he begins to make preparations for an immediate move. The men gulp down their rice, the bowls are hurriedly piled up on the dresser, and before one can hardly realize what is taking place the kitchen has been shouldered, and he has disappeared at a jog-trot amid a stream of people that have engulfed him and his belongings.

Whilst we are wondering what it is that has caused this sudden panic and collapse in a business that was so prosperous, we hear the clang of the slow and measured beatings of gongs. Higher, too, than the voices around us there comes trailing on the air, as though unwilling to leave the locality from which it started, the sound of the word I-O in a crescendo note, but which finally dies away in a slowly decreasing volume till it finally vanishes in silence. There is now an agitated movement amongst the crowds in the street before us. Some seem full of hesitation, as though undecided what to do; others assume a perplexed air and look about for some opening into which they may escape. A sedan chair, that comes lumbering up with the shouts that the bearers usually indulge in to get the people to make way for them, comes up, but no sooner is the sound of I-O heard than the men hastily retrace their steps and disappear in the opposite direction from which they were coming.

The beating of the gongs, and the prolonged wailing sound I-O, in the meanwhile advance rapidly in our direction, when all at once, all indecision on the part of the passers-by vanishes, and every man flattens himself up against the outstanding shop counters, drops his queue that has been twisted round his head, lets fall his hands by his side and assumes a look of humility and respect. The centre of the street is in a moment deserted, and there bursts into view a mandarin with his retinue.

The first members of it who come swaggering down the empty lane are the men that fill the air with the sound of I-O, in order to warn the crowds ahead of the coming of the great man. They are a most villainous-looking set of men, and seem as though they might have been picked up out of the slums and gutters for the special duty of to-day. At first sight one is inclined to burst into a loud fit of laughter, for to a Westerner they have a most comical and ludicrous appearance. Each one has a tall hat on his head, shaped very much like a fool’s cap, but set on awry to meet the contingencies of their tails that are twisted round their heads. This makes them look like clowns that have come on to the street from some neighbouring circus to amuse the populace. A closer look at them, however, soon dispels that idea, for in their hands they carry long rattans, which they wield menacingly as though waiting for a chance to let them fall heavily on the shoulders of some unwary one who is transgressing the rules of the road and thus showing disrespect to his Excellency. They have a truculent look as they furtively glance over the silent walls of human beings that line the roadway, and a discontented, sullen frown overcasts their faces as they find no chance to use their despotic power on the person of any unfortunate one.

Immediately behind them comes another set of men, quite as evil-looking, with chains in their hands. These have a proud and haughty mien, as though the supreme authority of the town rested in their hands. Should any one be unwise enough to dispute that for a moment, he would find himself instantly bound and shackled, and bundled off to prison, where ample time would be given him to review his temerity.

Coming closely behind these scamps, the luxurious chair of the mandarin, carried by eight bearers, fills the vacant space in the street. He is the mayor of the town, and for all practical purposes the supreme power in it. He is an ideal-looking official, for he is large and massive in appearance, whilst he has that stern and uncompromising look that is supposed to be necessary in any magistrate who would hope to keep his subjects in order. He has a stern and forbidding aspect, as though he were on his way to the execution ground to have some criminal decapitated. This is the kind of air that the mandarins put on when they appear in public. In the course of many years’ experience, I have never once seen any one of them, from the highest to the lowest, with a smile on his face or a look of sympathy for the people whilst he was being carried officially through the streets. In a few seconds the procession has passed by, and the human stream again flows along its ancient channel, and the life of the street is once more resumed.

We saunter along again closer to humanity than the most crowded city in the West, except on some great festival, could let one have. The sensation is not in every respect a pleasant one. The ancient odours of China assert themselves and will be felt, whilst the aroma of unwashed garments and persons that never used a bath, gives a delicate taint to the air that is purely Oriental.

But whilst moving slowly on and carefully guarding lest our feet should trip against the uneven slabs of stone with which the road is so badly paved, a strange procession of men catches our eye and at once arrests our footsteps. We count them one by one, and there are just ten of them, as gruesome and unsavoury a collection of human beings as could be made were the whole city to be ransacked to find their equal.

They are beggarmen, and are taking advantage of the privilege allowed them by a custom that goes back into the remote past, of soliciting alms from the shopkeepers on the days of the new and full moon. They are perambulating the streets and visiting every shop that lies in their way, and almost demanding from each their accustomed toll of one cash each. A cash, I may remind the reader, is the one-thousandth part of two shillings.

They walk in a string, each man behind the other. The leading one in this particular set is an old man, with wrinkled face and hair turned to grey. His clothes are in rags and tatters, and so dirty that one would not care to touch them even with a long pole. He is a thorough gipsy in look, and there is a vigour about his sharp-set features and a flash in his coal-black eyes that show him to be a person of considerable independence of thought.

Close behind him is another with his hand resting on his shoulder, and depending upon him to guide him through the streets. He is quite blind, and it is most pathetic to see how he raises his head up towards the sky, as though the sun in some mysterious way could impart light to the deep sockets where his eyeballs ought to be. Following close on his heels is a jolly musical beggar, whose soul, amidst all his dirt and squalor, is touched with the spirit of music. He has an old banjo, with two strings, that he uses in his profession, and as he moves along his fingers strike the chords, and the first notes of a Chinese ballad sound out with a lilt that for a moment seems to relieve the tragic look that this weird procession has.

Behind this Orpheus of the band come several ragamuffin degraded specimens of the begging fraternity, the last of whom holds a bamboo stick, which a blind man, who brings up the rear, holds in his left hand to act for him in the place of eyes. As each one comes to the shop door the owner stands ready with a cash for each one, which he hastily puts into his hand and motions him on.

There is no attempt to evade this poor-rate which custom has decided shall be paid. Were any man so mad as to defy the unsavoury crowd, he would soon be brought to his senses in a way that he would not forget for many a long day. They would stand around his counter till the cash was paid, and they would in turns appeal to his pity, and then call down the imprecations of Heaven upon his head because of the hardness of his heart.

No one in the meantime would dare to come near his shop. His customers would be so terrified by the dirt and smells of the diseased and unwashed crowd that they would take their custom for the time being elsewhere, and when, finally worn out by the noise and disorder at his door, he gave the cash, he would find perhaps that some of his wares had been so damaged by the mere presence of these filthy beggars, that he had lost far more than he would have gained if he had come out victorious in his contest with them.

It is only on two days in the month that the beggars are allowed the privilege of collecting their tax from the shopkeepers, for these latter have originally compounded with their king for a regular payment, which prevents them from being annoyed with their visits at any other time. As soon as the amount has been settled a printed form, with the picture of a gourd on it, is pasted over the door, and no beggar will dare to approach it for the purpose of asking alms. There are many specimens of humanity in China that, through destitution and in the bare struggle for existence, have to go through want and hunger and intense suffering both of mind and body, but for real degradation and acute acquaintance with the pains and penalties of poverty there is no one to be compared with the beggarman in this land. The beggar in the West is a royal personage when compared with him, clothed in purple and fine linen, and living sumptuously. He is often able to lay by money, and cases have been not infrequent that when he has died sovereigns and bank-notes have been found stitched in various parts of his garments.

Such an experience in China is absolutely unknown. A beggar here is really poor, and always close up to the border line across which is starvation. Besides, he is nearly always diseased. A beggar, except he is a wandering minstrel, would fail to charm the solitary cash that is usually thrown at him, unless he had some glaring disease that would excite pity. The stock-in-trade of the begging fraternity is some hideous sore, or twisted legs or sightless eyes, or some abnormal deformity that disqualifies the person from gaining a living by manual labour. And then, too, the hovel into which he crawls when night drives him from the streets is something unspeakable for its wretchedness and discomfort. The beggars' camp is filthy, and so unsavoury that it may never be pitched within the precincts of the city, but is always erected in some open space outside its walls, where its smells and abominations may not contaminate the rest of society.

As we wander aimlessly along, only anxious to witness the sights that an Oriental town gives in such striking contrast to the cities of the West, we come upon a street where there is an unusual bustle, and a sound of many voices and loud tones, as though men were quarrelling. One accustomed to Chinese life would never make the mistake of imagining from these signs that there was any trouble going on. They are simply evidences of increased activity. The Chinese are fond of noise and high-toned speaking, and clash of voice, and bawling to each other. They have absolutely never properly learned the art of whispering. Two men are carrying a heavy burden on a common bamboo pole through the streets, and they shout in a rhythmical strain that can be heard a hundred yards in the distance. A play is being performed, and from the very beginning to the end, the drum keeps beating and the cymbals clash, and drown the actors' voices at those points where it would be supposed the greatest silence would be required. And so in many other things, it would seem as though noise were

an essential for the performance of any effective work in China.

The sounds we hear are evidences that we have come upon one of the busiest streets in the town. It is the fish market for the whole city, and as we move slowly along it we begin to understand how it is that such loud tones caught our ear a minute or two ago. Here are great brawny fellows with sleeves tucked up, and the sea breezes, as it would seem, blowing on their faces. In loud voices, as though they were trying to outbellow the roar of the storm where the fishes were caught, they cry up the superior quality of the catch they are displaying for sale. Others are chaffering with their customers, for no true Chinaman ever gives the price that is first asked of him, and with jest and banter he gradually comes down to the sum which he finally means to take.

The very best fish in the whole town are to be found in this street, for the moment that the fishing boats come in from sea, the very choicest of their catch is hurried off by men who are interested in the trade and brought to the dealers here. It is interesting to stroll along and watch the ingenious way in which the fish is presented in the most attractive way to the various kinds of purchasers.

Here is a heap of the less expensive kind such as the poorer classes can afford to buy. They look like magnified sprats, and a man stands by and continues to sprinkle them with salt water, and he does this in such a deft way that they present a sparkling appearance as though they had just been brought out of the sea and were fresh and full of life. Close by are some splendid mackerel that were caught this morning, and they lie with a stiff and dignified air, as though they resented being laid out here to the public gaze. Some of them have already been cut into slices and customers are trying to beat down the dealer to a more reasonable price. It is noticeable that the most of those who are bargaining for the fish have brought their own steelyards to weigh their purchases, as they evidently have no faith in the honesty of the one belonging to the shop.

Further on we notice a young shark, that seems very much out of place, and altogether plays a mean and inglorious part for an animal that takes so conspicuous a place amongst the dwellers in the sea. Close beside it is a native fish that evidently has been too long out of the water to add to its market value, and so it has to be doctored to induce customers to look upon it with favour. To carry out this idea, it has been cut in two, and the ends have been ingeniously smeared with pig’s blood to make it appear to the uninitiated that it has only just ceased to live, and the red streaks show where its own life-blood has just ceased to ebb out. Yet this simple and childlike deception is plain to every one that comes to buy, and no one is taken in by it. It is one of the devices of the trade, that some clever scamp invented in the past when the forefathers of the race were more ingenuous and more easily taken in than men are to-day, and so the trick is kept up, in order that the inventor of it, wherever he may be to-day, may not “lose face” in the eyes of his descendants.

After we emerge from this busy and unsavoury market, where the odour of decaying fish mingles with the national and purely Chinese exhalations of the drains, which here are peculiarly foul, we turn into a narrow street, where the passengers are few, and the shops have a dull, semi-respectable look about them. They have no counters outside of them, and so the whole street, which is about five feet in width, is entirely available for foot passengers. We discover to our astonishment that every shop in it sells shoes. It is in fact the great centre of the shoe trade for the town, and also for the country districts for many miles outside of it.

At first sight it would seem that this placing of a considerable number of shoe shops side by side would interfere with the trade of each, but the Chinese think differently, and the result has proved that they are right. Instead of diminishing the business of each it has had actually the very opposite effect. When people want shoes, they have not to wander all over the city in search of a shoemaker. They make their way to this particular street, the first shop that takes their fancy they step into, and they are soon served with what they require.

This plan is especially serviceable to the countryman, who looks upon the town very much as a country bumpkin does at home, when he leaves his fields and green lanes for the busy streets of a great city. He wants a pair of shoes, say, for his wedding day, and the village shoemaker has not sufficient style to suit him for such a great occasion. He must go away to the great city where the latest fashions in shoes are to be found, and where he can purchase a pair that will be the envy of every young man who shall attend the joyful ceremony. But how amid the maze of narrow streets shall he find a shop where he shall be able to make his selection? He would be lost in the windings and intricacies of the labyrinths along which the streams of human life pour incessantly the livelong day, and in inquiring for such he might be recognized as a greenhorn by some sharper, who would soon relieve him of his spare cash. The fact that the shoe shops are all in one street renders it easy for him to inquire his way there, where without delay he will be served with the very article he requires.

A STREET SCENE.

To face p. 194.

In our stroll through the city, there is one feature about it that has been most noticeable, and that is its freedom from rows and disorders. It contains fully two hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants, and yet there is not a single policeman patrolling any of its streets during either the day or the night. No doubt this is due in a large measure to the law-abiding character of the Chinese. They are essentially peacemakers, for not only do they avoid breaking the peace themselves, but they also exert themselves most vigorously to put an end to any row that may be started amongst others. The result is the disgraceful scenes that often disfigure the streets of the West are of very rare occurrence in any of the cities of this great Empire.

There is no doubt but that one potent reason for this is the absence of the public-house. Fortunately that is an unknown institution in this land, and consequently the mad excesses and wild disorders and terrible rows both in private and on the public streets that are the result of the use of alcohol are never seen anywhere throughout the country.

Whilst we have been sauntering around, we have noticed one particular kind of building that differs from all the others about it. It is not a private dwelling-house, and yet it has none of the signs that it is a shop, where goods of some special description may be purchased. Its front is not open like those next door to it so that the public can see what is going on inside. Its aim, indeed, seems to be to conceal from the passers-by the movements of the people within, whilst at the same time intimating that any one that likes to enter may do so freely. [Pg 196]

Every window is closed up so that one can get no glimpse of what is going on behind them. The door, indeed, stands wide open, but hanging about two feet in front of it is a bamboo screen that effectually guards the secrets of the house. Any attempt to peer inside will be ineffectual, for the utmost that can be seen beyond the sentinel screen is the posts of the door that are but the outer works of the fortress beyond.

As we stand speculating why this house and others that we have seen of a similar character during our stroll should be so different from the rest, a man approaches in a furtive manner, with head cast down as though he were ashamed, and glides in a ghost-like manner into the opening behind the screen and vanishes into the dark interior. We caught but a glimpse of him, but what we did see did not favourably impress us. His clothes were greasy and dilapidated looking, and his face wore a leaden hue as though his blood had been transmuted by some chemical process into a colour that nature would never recognize as a product of her own. He was a man, we should judge, that we should not care to have much to do with, for there seemed to be a shadow on his life, and he was not anxious to get into the sunshine where men could have a good look at him.

Hardly has he disappeared when a man still in the prime of life, with slightly stooping shoulders and the same dull colour in his cheeks and on his lips, advances quickly to the screen, dives behind it, and except for a momentary shadow that falls upon the doorway, disappears at once from sight.

We begin to speculate as to what kind of a place this is that pretends to have a huge secret from the public, and what is the nature of the goods that it supplies to men that have one characteristic at least that seems common to them all. It cannot be a pawn shop, for the two men had no parcels with them, and besides, the “Uncle” in China does this business openly and hangs no screen in front of his door to conceal his operations from the public. Whilst [Pg 197]

these thoughts run through our own mind, a young fellow of about twenty hurries up with an impetuous rush as though he were racing to catch a train, and after a quick glance up and down the street plunges behind the screen and is gone.

Our curiosity is excited. This man differs from the two that preceded him in that he has no leaden hue, but the evident desire to avoid being seen going into the place is just as strong as it was in the case of the others that came before him. We feel we must investigate, and so we cautiously get within the screen and peer into a dimly-lighted room that lies right in front of us. No sooner have we got to the doorway than a sickening, oppressive odour at once reveals to us the secret of the place. It is an opium den.

We advance into the room and the fumes are so dense that we feel inclined to retreat, but we are inquisitive, and we should like to have a glimpse at what at the present moment may be called the curse of China. We find the owner seated in front of a little desk where he keeps the opium all ready for the use of his customers. In the dimly-lighted room and in this dull and drowsy atmosphere he seems just the man to preside over a place where men lose their manhood, and where the ties of nature and of kindred dissolve before the touch of an enchanter that no writer of fairy stories has ever had the genius to imagine.

His face is thin and emaciated and his Mongolian high cheek-bones jut out like rugged cliffs that have been beaten bare by the storms. A leaden hue overspreads his parchment-like skin, and his eyes have lost their flash and are so dull and listless-looking that they might have been made with balls of opium fashioned by some cunning hand to imitate the creation of nature. His fingers are long and attenuated and stained with the dye that the opium has put into them, and they are deftly measuring out into tiny little cups, in anticipation of coming customers, the various amounts that he knows by experience each may need.

With a ghastly smile that would have suited a corpse he invited us to be seated, for he knew at a glance that we were no opium smokers, but had wandered in simply out of curiosity, and with no intention of smoking.

As we complied with his request we noticed that the three men who had preceded us were already curled up, each one on his own particular bench, busily manipulating the opium and with infinite pains thrusting it with a knitting-like needle into the narrow opening in the bowl of his pipe. He then held it close to the flame of a small lamp, and as it gradually melted, he drew a long breath, and the essence of the opium travelled in a cloud to his brain, while at the same moment he expelled the smoke from his mouth.

“You do not seem to be particularly busy just now,” we remarked, as we noticed a considerable number of empty benches in the room, all set out and ready for immediate use.

“No,” he replied, “this is our slack time, as it is still early in the afternoon. We shall have to wait till night falls before our regular customers will begin to drop in, and then we shall be busy until the small hours of the morning. You know,” he continued, “that the ideal time for the opium smoker is the night time, when the duties of the day are over, and when, free from care or anxiety of any kind, he may dream and while away the hours under the soothing influence of the pipe.”

“How is it, then, that these three have come so much earlier in the day than is the custom with opium smokers?” we ask him.

“Oh! these are exceptionally hard smokers,” he replies, “and so they cannot wait for the usual evening hours when the others assemble to allay the craving that comes upon them. Look at that young fellow over there, with what feverish eagerness he is filling his pipe and taking in long draughts of the opium. When he came in just now he appeared to be wild with pain and every bone throbbed with agony, and every joint seemed as if it would dissolve amidst intolerable suffering.

“The man on the next bench to him is one of the heaviest smokers in the town, and can take as much as would poison two or three beginners. He has smoked over thirty years, and now he seems to have lost all will of his own, and all ambition for anything, excepting the one passionate desire to get the opium when the craving creeps into his bones. At one time he was fairly well to do, but now he is a poor man. Everything he possessed was gradually disposed of to get him his daily amount of opium. His business of course was neglected and failed to support the family. By and by he had to sell his little son to get money to satisfy his craving, and when that was spent he disposed of his wife, and now the child is in one part of the town and his mother in another; and a happy release it was for them both,” he added with a grim smile, “for the man is hopeless and could never have supported them.

“Opium,” he continued as he fixed his lacklustre eyes upon me, “is an imperious master and treats its subjects like slaves. It first of all comes with gentle touch as though it were full of the tenderest love for man. Then in a few weeks, when it has got its grip upon the man, it shows itself to be the cruelest taskmaster that ever drove men to a lingering death. It knows that no one in the world can allay the intolerable craving that comes over a man’s life but itself, and as though it were playing with a man’s soul, it demands that before relief is given the dose must be increased. It has no pity or remorse. It will see the home wretched and the girls sold into slavery, and the boys calling another man father, and the wife in the home of a stranger, rather than remit a single pain or give one hour’s release from the agony with which the opium tortures both body and soul.

“By the way,” he added suddenly, as though the subject were too painful for him and he had been rehearsing his own life’s experience, “is it not true that opium was brought to China by you English? How cruel of your people,” he said with a passionate flash in his eyes, “to bring such wretchedness upon a nation that never did them any wrong!”

The subject had taken an unlooked-for turn, and in that dimly-lighted room and with three men lying with ghastly upturned faces on the benches and the man gazing with ghoul-like features upon us, we felt that the opium question had entered upon a tragic phase that we were not prepared to discuss. Bidding the man a hasty good-bye, we passed out of the reeky, vile-smelling room past the screen, and into the open air, and though the ancient aroma of China was in it, it seemed as though we had got into the green fields and the fresh breezes were blowing over us, and we had escaped from a prison where we should have been stifled with a poison that would have killed us.

CARRYING A COFFIN.

To face p. 201.

CHAPTER X

HADES, OR THE LAND OF SHADOWS

Death a great problem that has been studied by the Chinese—Attempts to solve the mystery—Conception of the Dark World—A counterpart of China—Story of the scholar—Other life a continuation of this—Doctrine of retribution—Metempsychosis—Modifications of this great doctrine possible—The stories of the witch—Happiness of the dead influenced by the condition of the graves—No babies in the Land of Shadows.

The great problem of death is one that has oppressed the Chinese people in all ages with its profound mystery, and has cast its shadow upon the thought and life of the nation. The great sage of China, Confucius, discoursed eloquently upon Heaven and its great principles, and has left on record statements about it that cause those who can read below the surface to see in the picture he has drawn a dim and shadowy vision of the true God. He discoursed also about the duties of life and the human relationships with such broad and statesmanlike views that twenty-five centuries have passed by since they were first penned, and yet the Empire accepts them to-day as the very inspiration of genius.

The subject of death was one that he would never discuss. He had evidently pondered over it, but had found it too full of mystery for him to grapple with, and he was too honest to pretend to be able to lay down any rules by which the anxious seeker could find comfort when he came to stand face to face with this grim enemy of our race. One of his disciples said to him one day, “Master, I venture to ask you to tell us something about death.” Confucius replied, “Whilst we do not know sufficiently of life, how can we know anything about death?”

A most pathetic commentary on the national feeling of helplessness with regard to the question of death is seen in the graves that form so conspicuous an object in any landscape that may be seen in any part of China. The overwhelming population that must have peopled the plains and valleys and mountain sides of this great country may in no uncertain manner be estimated from the prodigious number of tombs that project themselves upon one’s attention everywhere. The one marked feature about every one of these is the utter absence of any indication that the living have any conception of where the dead have gone to. The gravestones are absolutely silent on this point. In Christian cemeteries they speak with affection of those that are gone, and they predict a joyful union in the future, whilst some of them at least declare with confidence the happy lot in the unseen world of beloved ones that have been snatched away by death from those who have been left mourning their loss here.

A Chinese tombstone is usually stereotyped in the cold and dreary statement it has to make about those who lie beneath it. On the top is the name of the dynasty or of the place where the person was born, then in a perpendicular line in the centre of it is the sex and family name of the deceased. To the left, in smaller letters, is the name of their sons, and positively nothing else. There is no loving record of their virtues, and no hope expressed as to any meeting them in the future. They seem to have dropped completely out of life, as far as any mention is made of them. It is true that in the worship at the graves on the “Feast of Tombs,” and in the ancestral temples on the anniversary of their death, they are spoken to as though they were still living; but they are approached on those occasions not in the loving and affectionate way that was done when they were alive, but rather as spirits that must be propitiated in order to send blessings on their former homes, or coaxed into good humour so as to cause them to refrain from hurling calamities upon the friends whom they have left behind them.

But whilst death is a secret that none may fathom, it has not led men to give up in despair the hopes of solving it. The Chinese, whilst feeling themselves unable to find out what lies behind it, have built up a mythical and yet at the same time a very human conception of what the “Shadowy World” is supposed to be like. Having nothing to guide them in their thoughts but the world of matter around them, they have imagined that Hades is an exact counterpart of China, and that it has its emperor and great and small mandarins, and provinces and counties with exactly the same names that these have in the actual and visible lands of the Celestial Empire.

That this is the conception of the thinkers and writers of this country is evident from one of the fairy stories contained in a popular work which gives a large number of exciting and wonderful incidents where the fairies are the principal actors in the stirring events that are recorded.

In this it is told how that a certain scholar became seriously ill, and it became evident that unless some great change took place, he would soon die. As he lay in great pain and weariness on his bed, a man of stately and dignified appearance, and one that he had no recollection of ever having seen before, suddenly stood in the doorway of his bedroom, and, saluting him with a pleasant smile, invited him to rise and go with him. “I have a horse outside ready to carry you,” he said, “and I want you to accompany me on a journey that I wish you to take with me.” “But I am too ill to get up,” the scholar said. “I feel so weak that I can hardly lift my hand, and to attempt to travel would certainly end in failure.” “Oh! no,” gently said the stranger, who was really a fairy, “with my assistance I think you will be able to manage it,” and taking him by the hand, he tenderly raised him from the bed and led him with slow and faltering footsteps into the open space in front of the house, where a white horse, beautifully caparisoned, awaited his coming.

No sooner had he mounted on its back than his disease seemed in an instant to vanish from him, and he felt himself light-hearted, and with a keen appreciation of the beautiful scenery through which they were passing. It seemed, however, very singular to him that he could not recognize ever having seen it before. It was all new and strange, and it had a beauty and a fascination about it that he had never experienced in any of his previous travels.

After some hours, they came to a magnificent city, whose walls towered high like those that might belong to the capital of an empire. Passing through one of its lofty gates, he noticed how wide its streets were, and how crowds thronged them, though they seemed shadowy and unreal, and there was a silence and a gloom about them that he had never seen in any city that he had ever visited before. After winding in and out through these spacious thoroughfares, they came at last to what seemed to the scholar like a royal palace, so grand and imposing was its appearance.

Entering through its massive doors, and ascending numerous flights of stone stairways, he was led by his guide into a magnificent reception-room, where a number of what looked like mandarins of high official rank were sitting as though they awaited his coming. The chief

one amongst them had a kingly air about him, and it seemed to him that he strongly resembled the pictures he had often seen of the King of the Shadowy World. Pointing him to a seat close by a table on which were paper and pens and ink, and at which another scholar was seated, a subject for examination was given them both, upon which they were to write an essay.

As soon as they were finished they were handed up to the royal-looking personage, who after carefully examining them both, decided that the one written by our scholar was decidedly the best, and was worthy of the highest commendation and praise. "In consideration of the talent you have shown, and your evident ability to do useful service for the State, I appoint you to be the prefect in a certain city in the Province of Honan," said the kingly president.

The scholar now realized for the first time that he was really dead, and that the noble-looking man that had been examining him was after all the King of the Shadowy World. Trembling at the truth that had just burst upon him, his thoughts flew back like a flash of lightning to his widowed mother, and, rising from his seat, he pleaded with passionate earnestness with the King to give him back his life and allow him to return to earth and live as long as his mother, so that he might comfort and care for her in her declining years.

His Majesty was deeply moved with this exhibition of filial piety, and turning to one of the men sitting on the bench asked him to bring him the "Book of Life and Death," in which the destined hour of every human being's life was recorded, in order that he might see how many years the mother had still to live. Turning to the page where her birth and death were recorded he found that she had still nine years to live.

Turning to the filial son he said, "Your prayer is granted, and for nine more years a fresh lease of life will be given you, and the man who has been examined with you to-day shall act in your place as prefect, till you can return and take up your post in Honan."

This is a very pretty story, and we could wish that it were one that was founded on fact. The reason for quoting it here is to show how the other world is considered to be the exact counterpart of this, only life there is filled with gloom, for the shadows of a sunless land rest upon every department of society, and take away the joyousness and the hope that the bright sun shining in a cloudless sky is apt to impart to men living in this upper world.

The conception that China should be the ideal that ought to be followed when the "World of Shadows" was devised as an abode for the dead, has been carried out not simply in the arrangement that has been made with regard to its territorial and political divisions. Even society has been mapped out on the same lines as those we see in what may be called the Mother-country. The same businesses and callings are carried on by the dead as those they pursued when they were alive on earth, for it is an extraordinary fact that the inhabitants of the dark land have managed to be clothed with the same bodies that they had when in life, and whilst these are mouldering in the graves on the hillsides they seem in some mysterious way to have regained possession of them when they reached the other shore, and with the instinct of industry that is deep in the Chinese race, they no sooner get there than without any loss of continuity they begin to carry on the trades or professions that occupied them when they were in life.

The carpenter, for example, continues as soon as he can get his breath in the other world his old trade by which he has been lately earning his living. No one ever supposes that either enterprise or ambition will induce him to desire to enter upon any other line of life. The blacksmith with his brawny arms, and his muscles as hard almost as the metal that he has been working on, will naturally find his way to the smithy, and in that darkened land where only an evening light ever penetrates, the sparks will again be made to fly, and the red-hot metal, which glows with a brighter light in the subdued and gloomy atmosphere, will as of yore yield to his sturdy strokes and take the shape that he has in his mind.

 The man in high position here will naturally gravitate, by a conservative law that secures the continuity of life, into the same social position there, whilst the men and women in the humbler ranks will just as certainly move into similar spheres when they pass the narrow bourne that divides the two lands from each other.

There is, of course, a great deal of vague statement and often a contrariety of opinion with regard to the other world and how things are carried on there. In such a profound subject and where speculation only can be relied upon for any thought upon the question, it is evident that the popular beliefs must often be at fault to explain difficulties that arise in the logical carrying out of any theories that may be held on a matter of such vast moment to the countless millions of this Empire.

There are certain leading ideas that men generally have about the World of Shadows and the condition of the men and women there, and when they are confronted with difficulties of details, they are either silent as to how these are to be explained, or they boldly acknowledge that they can suggest no solution to them, and they go on holding them precisely as they did before the objections were raised. The turbidity of mind that is constitutional in a Chinaman, enables him to accept theories which are often in themselves self-contradictory, and in a Westerner would so shake his faith in them that he would infallibly reject them before long. The idols, for example, have so many vulnerable points

about them, that these have simply to be stated to be at once accepted, but this does not seem to undermine the faith of their worshippers in them. They will laugh with the objector, and will even suggest points that he had not thought of, and yet they will be as earnest and devoted in their belief in them as though no suspicion had ever been raised concerning them.

In addition to the belief already stated that Hades is but a continuation of the Chinese Empire in its social and political aspects and conditions, there is another one, most mysterious and most fateful, that is held by the masses, and that is that where retribution had not been visited upon the transgressor in this life for the evils he has committed, it will be meted out to him in full measure by the King of the Land of Shadows when he comes within his jurisdiction.

This is a Buddhist idea that came to this country with the idols from India. It is true that the thought was dimly foreshadowed in the teachings of the early sages, who declared that "virtue had its rewards, and vice its retribution, and that if neither the rewards nor the retribution had yet been meted out, it was because the time had not yet arrived for such action." It was seen, however, that good men often died in sorrow, and their noble life had not been rewarded as the sages declared it would be, whilst men who had passed their lives in the commission of great wrongs, accumulated great wealth, had sons and daughters born to them, and finally died without the prediction of the great teachers of the nation being verified.

The Buddhist doctrine about retribution in the next life filled up the space that had been left undefined by the sages, and men everywhere have accepted it as a solution of the difficulty. The teachers of this faith are most emphatic in the way in which they preach it, and in many of the Buddhist temples there are gruesome and realistic pictures of the various kinds of tortures to which these men are condemned in the prisons or hells that are kept in Hades for the special benefit of the men and women that have violated the principles of Heaven during their stay on earth. These are forcible reminders to the wicked and ungodly who will not repent and abandon their evil lives, that even though they escape the consequences of their misdeeds here, a day will surely come when in the prisons of the Land of Shadows they will pay the full penalty for the wrongs they have committed in their previous existence.

A BUDDHIST PRIEST.

To face p. 208.

Now, it is evident that at an early stage in human thought, the idea of men and women suffering such terrible torments in the prison-houses of the under world touched men with infinite compassion, and a new doctrine was conceived that was intended to mitigate the horrors connected with the retribution for wrong-doing. This was the famous theory of metempsychosis, which has permeated the whole of the East, and has made a permanent impression upon every one of the native religions.

Metempsychosis, as it is understood in China, declares that every adult sixteen years after entering the Land of Shadows is allowed to depart to be born again into some position on

earth. There is a general release to every one, good, bad, and indifferent, and once more they may return to the upper world and be relieved from the pain and gloom of that sunless realm.

But even in this great act of mercy the ideas with regard to retribution for evil and reward for virtue are sedulously maintained. The bad man who is let out of the hideous prison in which he has been confined is not to be allowed to escape the consequences of his previous vicious life. He is allowed to return to the world again, but he will appear perhaps in the shape of a pig or a dog, or some other of the lower animals.

It is for this reason that the Buddhists are so opposed to the taking of animal life. The animal upon whose flesh they are feeding may have been when he lived before on the earth a notorious criminal, who for his iniquities has been degraded by being transformed into, say, a buffalo. Wrong-doing is a serious matter, and though released from the pains of hell and allowed back again to earth, the criminal must pay the penalty in the debased condition in which he is allowed to live once more amongst men. A cock that is waking the morn with his shrill and defiant cries may have been a man that a few years ago lived in another part of the Empire, and who for his wickedness has been condemned to take the shape of the animal whose voice fills the barnyard with its echoes. It may take a good many births before these two individuals shall have expiated the crimes they committed, and shall be allowed again the dignity of appearing amongst mankind on earth.

Even in regard to the criminals who are undergoing the extreme tortures that the King of the Land of Shadows knows how to inflict, the thought of mercy comes in to break upon the monotony of their suffering. Every year for the whole of August their prison doors are opened and their chains and fetters are unloosed, the great entrance to the upper world is thrown wide open, and they are allowed their freedom to wander once more at their own will wherever they like throughout the whole of the Chinese Empire. So firmly is this belief held by the people of this country, that during the whole of their seventh month in every town and city and almost every village in China, tables are spread out in the open with every ordinary luxury that usually appeals to the Chinese tastes. There are roast chickens and ducks, and ducks' eggs, and a variety of savoury vegetables, delicately cooked and browned, so that the very look of them makes the mouth water. These are left for hours where only the blue sky looks down upon them, and the hungry spirits that have been famished in their prison-houses tearing up and down, with invisible forms, through the air, feast and feast again upon the good things that the benevolent have spread out for their use.

The Buddhist Church has devised a system by which it can give deliverance to the imprisoned souls without waiting for the seventh moon. They have invented a service which is called "The breaking open the prison doors," and consists of chanting certain rituals, and going through a lot of mummery, as the result of which the person for whom the service is performed suddenly finds the torturer stay his hand, the saw that had been ruthlessly grinding through his limbs gently and tenderly removed from his body, and with a polite bow he is ushered through the prison gates into the Shadowy Land outside to wander at his own free will, until the sixteen years are up, and he is reborn again into the world in that particular shape that the King may think that he deserves.

This process is a very expensive one and brings in a considerable revenue to the Church, especially when the person who is incarcerated has wealthy relatives on earth. This service reminds one of the practice of which Roman Catholic priests were accused at the time of the Reformation,—of professing, for a consideration, to lighten the pains and sorrows of those in purgatory, which was one of the principal abuses denounced by the Reformers in Germany in the sixteenth century, and has actually been said to have been borrowed from the Buddhists.

With regard to the men who have lived the average life, or who have distinguished themselves for their nobility of character in their previous state of existence, the King sees that they shall be properly rewarded when they pass away from under his jurisdiction. Some of the more noted are born to be kings or mandarins, or men with lofty titles that shall bring them great honours and emoluments. Others, again, become sages or statesmen and famous literary characters, whose writings will influence a nation for many generations. The ordinary rank and file compose the usual members of society that one finds throughout the towns and villages of the Empire, and who are the steady law-abiding citizens upon whom the Government mainly depends for the preservation of law and order.

The usual time of sixteen years that the popular theory gives before a person is again reincarnated into the world may in special circumstances be very considerably shortened. A man or woman, for example, enters the Land of Shadows with a first-class reputation. In some mysterious way the King knows his whole history and is prepared to treat him liberally. After watching his conduct for some time, and marking that he still continues to exhibit the same admirable features that made him a power before he died, he hastens on his rebirth, considering what a loss society in the upper world would suffer from his absence. He is therefore sent back into the world, but never into the same locality from which he originally came. The recollection, moreover, of the scenes and sights and strange mysterious experiences that he passes through in that gloomy, sunless land are all blotted out from his memory. No story is ever told of that life by any one of the countless millions that have come under the sway of "Yam-lo," the Yama of the Hindoos and the mighty King of

Hades, and though men have implicit faith in the myth that the Buddhist Church has propagated, never in the history of the past has any one hinted at any personal experience that he has passed through in any of the many periods in which he must have been a dweller in the land of gloom and twilight.

There is, indeed, the story of an adventure connected with the Shadowy Land that puts one in mind of the Greek hero, who went down to Tartarus in search of his beloved wife who had been torn from him by death, but it appears in a book of fairy tales, and as the writer was a man of a romantic turn of mind no one is inclined to take his statement as sober history.

The story describes how a certain young man had become enamoured of a certain damsel who had bewitched him with her black eyes and her fascinating manners. He had seen her one day as she passed along the street with some girl friends, and he had been so entranced with her beauty, that he had fallen desperately in love with her. So fully had he made up his mind that he could never dream of ever having any one else for his wife, that he was making arrangements to engage a middle-woman to discuss the question of marriage, when he was told that the girl had been taken suddenly very ill, and in a few hours she had died. [Pg 213]

The news distressed him beyond measure and almost broke his heart. Pondering over his great sorrow he determined that he would descend into the Dark World and try and discover in what part of China the woman that he had fallen in love with would appear when "Yam-lo" decided to let her return again to earth. With the licence of the romancer, the writer of the fiction declared that he successfully accomplished his purpose, and that the dread King, touched by the devotion he had shown, not only shortened the time of residence of the girl within his dominions, but also managed in some way or other to let him see the "Book of Life and Death," where the exact date of her rebirth was recorded and the locality where she was to reside. The lover returned to earth, though the writer does not explain how he could do that without a rebirth, which would have obliterated all knowledge of the past, and would have quenched his passion for the girl. At any rate, he leaves the Land of Shadows, and, guided by the information he had obtained there, he proceeds directly to the new home into which she has been born, and after various adventures that belong to the region of fancy and romance she becomes his wife.

No sober writer has ever dared to suggest that the men and women who have travelled into the unknown and mysterious land where perpetual shadows rest, and where the gloomy torture chambers for the unrepentant criminals and transgressors of this world are to be found, ever whisper the secret of what they have seen when they are once more born again into the world. The mystery has been well preserved by the ages, and the Buddhist Church has discreetly kept its own counsel about a matter that every one longs to penetrate, but which countless multitudes for a thousand generations have with absolute unanimity refused to say one word about. [Pg 214]

This is all the more remarkable because there is a most passionate desire amongst the living to find out what the inhabitants of the gloomy land are doing, and there is a class of women who get their living by professing to be able to penetrate the mystery and describe what is going on there. These persons resemble very much the Witch of Endor, who is recorded to have called forth the prophet Samuel from the invisible world to predict the calamity that was going to fall upon King Saul in the battle to take place on the morrow.

These women are utterly illiterate, and belong to what may be called the lower middle class of society. They are shrewd and clever, and have a rough persuasive manner with them that commands the belief of the less intelligent women that resort to them to learn about the relatives and friends that have been removed by death. There is the most profound faith in their utterances, for though they do make mistakes and say things about the deceased that are contrary to fact, they so often hit upon real facts that the inquirer, astonished that they should know something that was supposed to be a family secret, at once jumps to the conclusion that they must certainly be inspired by the spirits.

Some of the more famous of these witches are constantly being resorted to by sorrowing relatives, so that they make a very comfortable living, whilst a few lay by money and in time become quite wealthy. But I will here describe one or two cases that have come under my own knowledge as having actually occurred. A lady in respectable society had lost her daughter, who was eighteen years of age. Both the girl and her mother were devotedly attached to each other. The latter, anxious to know how the loved one was faring in the dark country where no sun or moon or stars ever shone, called in a witch that she might describe to her the condition of her daughter.

[Pg 215] The witch having seated herself, the ancestral tablet that was believed to contain the spirit of the dead maiden was placed upon a high table and several sticks of incense were burned in front of it. The mother then in a loud, clear voice called out the name of her daughter, her age, and the date on which she had died, and she entreated her to come and reply to the questions that the witch was now going to put to her.

The woman, who had been sitting with a stern and stolid looking face as though wrapped in spiritual meditation, now addressed the girl who it was believed had obeyed the summons of the mother. "Is your name Pearl?" "Yes." "Did you die on such a date and were you eighteen years of age then?" These questions are asked in order to identify her, and to prevent her from being confused with any other vagrant spirit that might have wandered here in order

to play a trick upon her.

“Now tell me,” the witch continues, “how are you in the world of darkness, and whether you are happy in your life there.” “Oh! I am pretty well,” is the answer that comes at once in reply to these questions, “but I cannot say that I am very happy. I am continually thinking of how distressed my mother is at my death. I know that she is thinking of me morning, noon and night, and that her heart is full of sorrow because she feels that she will never see me again. With regard to my condition in this gloomy land, it is not all that I could wish, but it is on the whole bearable. I am living in the house that mother had made for me and that was burned at my grave, so that in that respect I have nothing to complain of.”

The question of what friends she has made, is answered by the statement that she lives very much alone and that she knows hardly any one, but that her father, who came into the Land of Shadows some time before her, occasionally visits her, though, singular to say, she makes no suggestion about planning to live with him. It would seem from the popular, though somewhat vague ideas on this subject, that relatives keep strictly apart from each other in that mysterious country, and though they do now and again come and see each other, the intimate relationships that they sustained with one another whilst they were on earth are almost entirely broken off in that other country.

Another very important question was now put to her, viz. “Do you find that your grave is dry or wet?” and she at once replied that she has been quite satisfied as far as that is concerned, for that her mother has evidently taken great pains that the rain or running streams from the higher ground above it shall not flow in upon it. It would seem that the Chinese hold that in some mysterious way the condition of the dead is very largely affected by the wetness or dryness of the grave in which they have been buried. This explains the extreme care with which they select the spots in which to lay their friends that have departed this life.

There is a class of men called geomancers, who get their living by giving their professional opinion as to the suitability or otherwise of plots of land that people have in view to use as graves. There are certain conditions that these must fulfil, or else they will be rejected. One of these is that they must be dry. This specially the case in the South of China, where a wet piece of land would attract the white ants, and in a very short space of time the coffin would be eaten up by them, and worms and noxious insects would then have free access to the body.

But, independent of this disastrous result, damp seems to be a potent factor that affects the happiness of the departed, which not only renders their life more miserable in the other world, but which also induces them in revenge for the want of care of the living to send all kinds of misfortunes upon the homes they have left.

CEMETERIES.

To face p. 216.

The mother at this stage asked the witch to describe what her daughter looks like. Taking a black cloth which is usually one of her paraphernalia, she puts it on her head, letting it droop down over the face, and getting into an assumed kind of trance, she begins in a slow and solemn chant to describe the scenes that she pretends she sees in the Land of Shadows. “The country that lies before me,” she says, “is a gloomy one, and there is no sun to be seen. Shadows lie everywhere, and an air of depression rests upon the hills and on the plains that stretch before my vision. I see men and women passing up and down the roads, but they all look like spectres, for there is no laughter on their faces, and no signs of joy about them. They seem to be oppressed with a sense of their desolate condition. But wait! here is the figure of a young girl standing by a bridge looking into the sullen stream that is flowing rapidly and with scarcely a sound underneath it. She is about eighteen years of age, and though her face is pale and has caught the colour of the land in which she lives, she does not seem to be in bad health. Her house, which is on the bank of the river, is a very pleasant one and has a courtyard, a guest-room, and a bedroom. She has a pleasant face, and one that could be very sunny did she not live in so gloomy a country. She has a spray of jessamine in her hair, and her dress is put on with exquisite taste.” “Ah! that is my daughter indeed,” exclaims the mother. “Jessamine was her favourite flower, and she was always so neat about her person, and had such fine taste about her dresses,” and here, overcome with the sad thoughts that filled her heart, her tears began to flow and she sobbed forth the bitterness of her heart in words of anguish and despair.

This was the end of the witch’s visions, and having received her fee of about twopence, she went off with a smiling face to explore the mysteries of the Land of Shadows for the benefit of other sorrowing ones whose sight could only reach to the scenes and people of this world.

Many of the scenes in which these second-sighted women engage are really most interesting, and supposing for the moment that the pictures described are inventions of their own—which, of course, they indignantly deny—they usually manage to import into them a fine sense of poetical justice that one would hardly expect from minds so illiterate and so untutored as they always possess.

On one occasion a wealthy man invited one of these women to his home to call up a vision of his father, who had died a few months before. It will make the story more plain by explaining that the old man had been a mandarin, who had been notorious everywhere wherever he had held office for his avaricious, grasping disposition. His ability to accept bribes was immense, and no case came before him but was finally decided not on its own merits, but by the amount that either the prosecutor or the defendant was able to give him.

When he died he had a grand funeral, and houses and wives and concubines, and male and female slaves, fashioned at great expense in paper, were burned at the grave, which by some mysterious and unexplained way were to follow him into the Land of Shadows, where he could set up house on the same princely scale that he had been accustomed to on earth. Nothing had been neglected that money could purchase to make his life in the Dark World as thorough a success as it was possible to ensure, for in addition to a complete suite of furniture and kitchen utensils, and the providing even of a dog to guard the house from robbers, immense quantities of ingots of gold and silver, and piles of dollars and copper, all in paper, were dispatched by a fiery way into the land of gloom to prevent him from suffering any hardships that money could prevent.

It was felt in his late home that everything had been done that religion or money could suggest, for not only had every convenience for living a high-class life been lavishly provided, in paper, but Buddhist priests had been engaged to perform the most elaborate services to deliver him from the pains and sufferings of the infernal prisons, in case Yam-lo should have decided to have him imprisoned in one of them. These last had cost them thousands of dollars, which they had willingly spent, however, since they had been solemnly assured by the priests that their relative had been safely delivered from the horrors of the gaol in which he had been confined.

The witch having arrived, the ancestral tablets of the deceased mandarin, elaborately carved and chased with gold, were placed on a magnificent black wood table. Incense sticks were then lighted, and the usual questions identifying the spirit were asked and satisfactorily settled. This preliminary is a very essential one, for it has often been discovered that the inhabitants of the Land of Shadows retain many of the peculiarities of character that they had in the land of the living, and the witches are frequently taken in by vagrant spirits, who assume the name of others in order to obtain the offerings that are being presented to their friends in the other world.

The witch being satisfied that the spirit of the dead mandarin was really in the tablet before her, asked him if he was happy in the dark land, when it burst out into sorrowful complaints about the utter wretchedness of the life he was leading. Yam-lo, because of his exactions and disregard of the claims of justice when he was a ruler, had condemned him for his sins to be a chair-bearer, and his days were now spent in the severest toil, and at night he was tortured with cold, for he had not enough clothes to put on to keep out the damp air that struck a chill into his very bones.

“But did you not receive the mansion I burned for you,” broke out the son in an excited tone, “and the servants, and the thousands of gold and silver, that would have enriched you until you were released from that terrible land by being born again into the world of men?” “I have received nothing of all the offerings you made me,” the father replied, “for Yam-lo intercepted them, because my life had been such a bad one, and he declared that I deserved to suffer misery and degradation; and so I am working as a chair coolie, bearing hardships and sorrow every day of my life.”

“And is there nothing we can do for you?” asked the son. “Yes, there is one thing that will be of great service to me, in my present miserable condition. Buy two hundred pairs of straw sandals, such as chair-bearers wear, and send them to me at once; also a few rain hats to keep me from the wet. My feet are cut and lacerated with the rough roads, and I am continually wet through with the rain that seems to be always falling in this gloomy land, so that my life is one continued misery.” With the promise that these things would be burned and sent to him, the *séance* ended, and the family were left to mourn the sufferings of the man who had brought upon himself such a terrible fate through his passion for money, and because he had wished to enrich his family so that they should not know what want was after he had been taken away from them.

As might have been expected, there is a great diversity of opinion with regard to the dwellers in the Land of Shadows. Some hold that relatives do not know each other there, whilst even those who dispute this theory still believe that whilst they may visit each other occasionally, they never dream of reuniting the scattered members of a family and living together as they used to do before death divided them.

The general theory that after the lapse of sixteen years men and women are released and allowed to return to earth is subject to a good many modifications. A person of high moral character, for example, and one who has gained the approbation of the stern and inflexible Yam-lo by uprightness of life, is sent back many years sooner than the allotted time. Young boys and girls, unless they have developed decidedly vicious tendencies, are dismissed after a very short probation, to begin again the experiment of life that had been so rudely interrupted by the cruel enemy of our race.

It is a remarkable fact that there are no babies in that gloomy under world, for never having done any wrong against society, no sooner do they die than Yam-lo sends them back to life to begin once more their struggle with evil, by which their characters are to be developed, and, after a number of births, they may become the teachers and the sages of future generations.

This doctrine of metempsychosis has its fascination for a good many people, for where the future would otherwise be a dark, mysterious thing, with no ray of light to break the solemn darkness that broods over it, this breaks its awful monotony and gives men hope of escape from its mystery and power. A colonel was one day haranguing his soldiers just as they were about to engage the enemy. With the natural timidity of the Chinese soldier, they showed symptoms of alarm, and he was afraid that, carried away by their fears, they would incontinently bolt with the first sound of the bullets flying about their ears. What motive could he bring before them to induce them bravely to meet death? He could not appeal to their love of their country, for that does not exist in the hearts either of the common people or in the army. Neither could he bring forward high and lofty incentives from their religion, for though of a deeply religious nature, there is not a single system of belief in China for which any one, man or woman, would be willing to lay down their lives.

Looking at them with steadfast gaze, he said, “Soldiers, let me exhort you to be courageous in the presence of the foe to-day. You are better men than they are, and if you only stand firm they will fly in terror before you. Do not be afraid to die, for though you fall during the fight, remember that in sixteen years hence you will be men once more on earth, and for your valour Yam-lo may send you back to high positions in your country’s service.”

A poor incentive this to induce men to risk their lives on the battlefield, but it was the highest that this officer could think of, for the shout of “King and country” would have failed to inspire them, and idolatry produces no enthusiasm to raise a war cry at the sound of which death would cease to have any terrors.

One day a poor woman was bending over her baby that lay dead upon the bed. The home was wretched and forlorn and showed signs of the greatest poverty. There was not a single comfort in it, and to add to its utter desolateness death had come and taken away the little joy that filled the mother’s heart. Never had the house seemed so dreary as to-day, for the smile that used to fill her heart with sunlight and the childish voice that had thrilled her soul with the sweetest music, both had died out in the solemn stillness and silence of a sleep that would never know an awakening. “Oh, my dear little one!” said the heartbroken mother. “I shall never see you more, and your sweet laugh will never again fill me with gladness. Your life has been a short one, and very little happiness in it, for we are so poor that we could not give you the comforts I should have liked. And now my hope is that when you are born into the world once more, it will be into a family where they will be rich enough to give you every luxury, and where you will grow up to be a great scholar; and though I shall never see you, or be able to share in your good fortune, still as long as I live my thoughts will go out to you, where in some unknown part of China you will be living a happier life than you were able to do with me.”

The whole conception of the Land of Shadows and of the doctrine of metempsychosis are a most pathetic attempt to penetrate the profound mystery that lies about death and the unknown future. Where no revelation from God has reached men on these two profound and mysterious subjects, they are bound to fashion out for themselves some theory that will be an attempt at least to solve some of the perplexities that the heart can never get rid of until some light has been thrown upon them. The Chinese theories are oftentimes vague and contradictory, and when they are put to the touch of logic, they fail utterly before its tests. They are as brave an effort, however, as has ever been made by any heathen people to construct a system that shall try and satisfy the cravings of the human heart about the unknown. They are profoundly human, and an exalted vein of righteousness runs throughout them. There is no paltering with evil, and no elevation of vice or impurity, and even their ideal ruler of the Land of Shadows, stern and severe as he is represented to be, can always unbend before the exhibition of goodness in any of the spirits under his control.

CHAPTER XI

A CHAPTER ON SOME OF THE MORE SHADY PROFESSIONS IN CHINESE LIFE

The geomancer—Description of—Instances of his profession—Fung-Shuy—Laws of geomancy—The quack—His methods—Instances given—Disreputable character of the story-teller—Examples of his stories—Kung-Ming—The story of the prince and concubine—The interpreter of the gods—Mode of selection—Depraved character.

There are certain trades and professions in this Empire that are looked upon by the Chinese with respect, because they all represent an honourable attempt of men to earn their living in a straightforward and honest way. As in England, some of these are looked upon with more respect than others, and men pride themselves, just as in the countries of the West, on the higher local standing that their trade or profession gives them in the eyes of the community. Outside of the Government officials, there are practically only two respectable classes of professions, viz. the school-master and the doctor. There are of course others, such as the geomancer, the pettifogging lawyer, the priests, and members of the theatrical professions, and those who get their living in connection with the idols, but these are all looked upon with a suspicion that their morality is not of the highest, and consequently society refuses to accord to them the respect and honour that they spontaneously give either to the scholar or to the *bona fide* medical man.

This chapter will be devoted to an account of some of the more well-known professions that belong to this doubtful category of professional men, and the first that I shall take is the

geomancer. This man is a product of the beliefs that the Chinese have regarding the dead, and also with regard to the malign and evil spirits that are supposed to people the air and to be always on the lookout to bring sorrow and calamities wherever the unwary have not taken measures to frustrate their evil designs. In spite of their high-sounding beliefs that life and death are all arranged and settled by Heaven, the Chinese universally hold that the ground in which a man is buried has much to do with his happiness in the Land of Shadows, and also with his ability to benefit the members of his family that still remain in the land of the living. [Pg 225]

A TEA HOUSE.

The study of this subject has become an exact science with the Chinese, and there are men that spend their lives in mastering its principles, and they become so familiar with them that they are constantly employed in pointing out the precise spots where the dead may be buried so as to secure the highest benefit both to them and to the living.

The poorest and the commonest amongst the people have not the means of engaging these professors of the geomantic art, neither have they the funds to buy expensive plots of ground where the "Fung-Shuy," as it is popularly called, works with a strong and imperial will to summon to itself the forces in nature that will secure wealth and fortune and worldly honours to all that are connected with it. Their homes are narrow and will barely suffice to accommodate the living, and so the dead have to be hurried away and laid in any piece of ground on the side of a hill that some benevolent individual may make them a present of.

Persons with any means and with a spare room where the dead may be laid for a few days, would never dream of burying any of their relatives without engaging a geomancer to examine all the available vacant plots of ground that may be in the market for sale, and in giving his professional opinion as to which of them would be likely to satisfy the feelings of [Pg 226] the dead and bring the greatest prosperity to the home they had left behind them.

It would seem that according to the laws of geomancy, a low position where the soil is damp, and where the rains would be allowed to settle, is one of the very worst that could possibly be selected for the burial of the dead. It would mean that in the South, at least, before very long, white ants, captivated and allured by the scent of wood, would come in their myriads and attack the coffin. As they can do no work without moisture, the damp and sodden soil would supply them with an abundance of that, and the working members of the great army would continue their labours with a perseverance and an industry that would soon riddle the abode of the dead so that only the merest and flimsiest shell of the coffin would survive after the attacks made on it.

This it is believed the dead resent with a fierce and bitter feeling that seems to set them in the wildest hostility to the friends who are responsible for this state of things, and in the Land of Shadows they plan how they shall be revenged upon those who have shown so little feeling for them, as to bury them in such a position.

The professors of "Fung-Shuy" are careful to prohibit all permanently damp localities, or where the drainage is so imperfect that during the rainy season, when for weeks the annual rains pour down in more or less continuous torrents from the heavens, the grave must be thoroughly sodden with the wet. They know that then, unless the grave is dug in a situation where the water will easily drain off, the most disastrous results will happen to the coffin, such as would bring lasting mischief both to the living and the dead.

[Pg 227]

There are several things that according to geomantic laws are essential to the making up of a good grave or Fung-Shuy. The first of these is, it must be dry. Next, it must have a wide and if possible a charming outlook, for there is nothing that the dead dislike so much as to be confined in their view by high walls, or by mounds, or elevations that would limit them in looking at the landscape that stretches out before them in the distance. Any proximity of large trees is considered to be specially obnoxious to the occupants of graves. It seems that the waving of the branches during a storm, and the sighing of the winds through them, produce such doleful sensations that the spirits are apt to get irritated, and by and by to vent their wrath by hurling calamities on the living.

The gentlemen that get their living by catering for the dead have all these things to keep in mind when they are in search of a place where the dead are finally to be laid. Proceeding to the hills with their large compass in hand, which is inscribed with cabalistic characters and lines and divisions that mark off the cardinal points with a precision that would be needed to guide an ironclad across the ocean, they cast their eyes across the landscape, and with the look of experts they take in at a glance the general features that combine to make any particular spot a Fung-Shuy, where the dead will have all the consolations that external circumstances can afford them. It would seem, indeed, as though these demanded very much what the living would like to have if they had the choice. A wide and extensive scenery with mountains in the distance, and hills standing as sentinels to the right and the left; also grassy mounds sloping down towards a stream that fills the air with its music as it travels on in graceful curves and loses itself amongst the ravines in the distance. These are the ideal elements that go to form a Fung-Shuy where a king might be laid with the certainty of finding complete rest.

[Pg 228]

Whether it is their training that has developed the artistic element in these geomancers or not it is impossible to declare definitely. There is one thing, however, that one may be quite sure of, and that is, they have the keenest instinct in at once pitching upon the most romantic and the most exquisite spots in a landscape as the places where they declare the dead may alone with safety be buried. As a result of this, one continually is struck with the way in which the graves have been constructed on points of a hill or a mountain, where the widest outlook may be observed from them. They may be looking over a wide expanse of fertile plains, or peering along some mighty ravines, or catching a vision of a far-stretching sea, but in each case they are there not by any accident, but in obedience to the decision of the geomancers, who selected them with a special view to the beauties of the location where the dead were to be buried.

There is one point on which all geomancers are agreed, and that is that wherever any natural object has the shape or appearance, say, of a man or of some of the more intelligent or powerful of the brute creation, you have there a collection of the strongest forces of nature which will all work for the welfare of everything that lies within their influence. Such objects as these make the finest Fung-Shuy, for there is nothing in the whole range of natural scenery that can in any way be compared to them.

On one occasion there was a civil war being carried on between two powerful clans. Scores on each side armed with guns and pitchforks, and any deadly weapon that could be got hold of, made fierce forays against each other, and inflamed with passion risked their lives in their mad desire to kill their enemies. In one of the houses that lay on the borderland of the fight a man had recently died, and fearful lest the attacking party should set fire to the building and so burn the coffin with the corpse inside, a number of the relatives made a rush with it from the house, and in a cleft of the rock that went by the name of the "Crow's Beak," [Pg 229] they placed the coffin in the narrow opening. It was so called because in the distance it exactly resembled the mouth of a crow as it looks when it is perched motionless on a branch. Hastily thrusting it into the very mouth of the bird, they flew down the narrow path that led to the village, and taking up their arms they again joined in the battle that was going on.

After hostilities had ceased and peace was proclaimed between the two parties, a geomancer was called to find a lucky spot in which they might bury the man who for the time being had been thrust with so little ceremony into the "Crow's Beak." He belonged to a well-to-do family, and they could afford to engage the services of such a man. On their way to a specified locality where a suitable place was likely to be obtained they passed along the foot of the hill which contained the "Crow's Beak." Casting his eyes up towards it, this gentleman caught sight of the coffin, and in the greatest excitement exclaimed, "There is no need of our proceeding any further, for you have already laid the dead in the finest Fung-Shuy that could be obtained in all this district. The coffin is in the very place of power, and if you value the comfort of your deceased relative and the honour and prosperity of your family you will not remove it from the place it now occupies."

This advice was attended to with the greatest possible care, and the strange spectacle was seen of a coffin perched up in this rift in the rock instead of being laid away in mother earth, where it would have been sheltered from the storms of wind and rain that now and again battered around it. Very singular to say, from the very day that the dead man was placed in the "Crow's Beak," prosperity seemed to come to the house he had left, and for many years wealth and honours flowed in without cessation upon his friends and relatives. As the sons grew up they became distinguished scholars and took high positions in the service of the [Pg 230] Government. That in itself was enough to ensure that the family should be enriched, for the posts they held were so lucrative that fortunes must come to those in possession of them.

The family finally became of such importance, and held so much landed property in the neighbourhood, that its influence became supreme in the whole of that region. All this was ascribed to the coffin in the "Crow's Beak," and the members of the clan guarded that with the most scrupulous care, lest any outsider should interfere with it or surreptitiously displace it by the body of a person belonging to another clan, when the good fortune would pass away from the family and flow into that of another.

Whilst the geomantic art is a recognized one and is believed in by the whole of the nation, the professors of it are not held in the highest esteem by the community at large. There is so much room for lying and deception in their statements about the plots of land that they may recommend that it is felt by the public generally that their honour and their veracity are not of the highest character, and that when an opportunity is presented them of making money, they will seize upon it without any regard to the fact that they may be violating the principle of truth and equity.

The next person that I shall attempt to describe is the "quack" or strolling doctor.

If ever there was a people in the world that believed in doctors it is the Chinese, in fact they seem in themselves to be a nation where every one has more or less a knowledge of medicine. Learned and unlearned alike profess to be able to understand almost every disease that the Chinese race are subject to, and to have nostrums of their own that will cure those that are afflicted. It is this fatal facility for diagnosing disease and for suggesting remedies that crowds the medical profession with so many incompetent practitioners in this land.

The State takes no cognizance of the men who profess to keep society in good health, and then it is so easy to put on a long gown, look profound, and ape the airs of a literary man, and be transformed in the twinkling of an eye into a regular doctor, who is prepared to treat any disease under the sun, with the confidence of a President of the College of Surgeons in England. No study is required to be a doctor. There are certain traditions floating amongst society as to how a number of diseases should be treated. These are stored up in the mind. Then there are well-recognized books that have been written in former days by famous physicians with prescriptions for an unlimited number of diseases, and there are also secrets how to treat special ailments that have been transmitted through several generations in some particular family, and are never allowed to leak out to the general public.

All these are sources to which the man who aspires to be a doctor can apply, and by a careful study of which he may get such a knowledge of the Chinese herbarium that he will be able to deal with simple and elementary cases with some degree of success. He must also have unbounded cheek, a fluent tongue, and a natural eloquence that will win its way to men's hearts and fill them with a confidence in his skill that they will never think of questioning his ability to deal with their particular ailments, no matter how difficult or complicated they may be. Of these three elements nearly every Chinaman has an abundant supply, so as a doctor he starts business with a stock-in-trade that are most valuable assets in dealing with the troubles of his countrymen.

But my business now is not with the regular practitioner, but with that medical species that is popularly known as the strolling doctor. And now let me give a description of a typical specimen of this Bohemian representative of the medical faculty in this land. In nine cases out of ten he is a degenerated member of the literary class. He is a man of good ability and well versed in the classical writings of China. He has always been wanting, however, in character, and consequently managers of schools became chary of engaging him as a teacher in any of them. His roving and unsteady habits really disqualified him for the long hours demanded of him in Chinese school life. He would teach a few days and gain the approbation of the parents by the scholarly way in which he would read and explain the profound statements of Confucius and Mencius, and then, to the great delight of the lads, he would wander away, impelled by the vagrant instinct that was in his very blood, and not appear in the school-room again for perhaps several weeks.

To add to his disqualifications he became an opium smoker. He was not induced to do this by a purely evil spirit, but rather because life was dreary and unsatisfactory, and he hoped in the solace and blandishments of that dangerous drug the monotony of life would be broken by an occasional glimpse into the realms of Elysium. The parents became still more opposed to the idea of sending their boys to a school that had him as their teacher, and so he found himself without employment and without any means of satisfying the craving that came upon him morning and evening, and which refused to be banished until the fumes of the opium had filled his brain with visions and dreams of such bewildering beauty that the pains and sorrows of earth seemed to have vanished, and he was in a realm where mortal feet had never trodden and sighing and tears were utterly unknown.

As he had no resources of his own to fall back upon and the doors of every school-house were shut upon him, the only means of making a livelihood now was to turn travelling doctor. This was a very simple proceeding, as it required but very little capital, for his whole stock-in-trade could be laid in for a few shillings. Besides a scanty supply of herbs, second-hand teeth, etc., he had to provide himself with a banner on which was inscribed the diseases he was able to cure, and the wide renown he had achieved wherever he went for the marvellous cases of recovery from dangerous sicknesses that had been affected by his patent medicines and by his skill in treating disease.

And now behold the man as he starts upon his travels, that will take him wherever the fortune of the day may lead him. His face is a sharp and a shrewd-looking one. His eyes are bright and piercing, but they are restless, and speak of a mind that is ill at ease and is continually discussing the question how the needs of life are to be met. One looking at him would not say that he was a bad man, but the opium pallor that rests upon his features would not incline one to put him down as a saint. In spite of his bad luck and his low fortunes, it is evident that a sense of humour is strong within him, and that the comical side of life still appeals to him; for when he smiles it is not an artificial lighting up of the countenance, but a veritable flash from a heart that still knows how to laugh in spite of the misfortunes he has brought upon himself.

The travelling doctor does not care much for the cities. There are too many of the regular practitioners there who are called in regularly by their patients; still one does occasionally see one of them now and again passing along the crowded thoroughfares, casting wistful glances at the open doors and the people that are lounging about them, in the hopes of picking up a case that may give him the means of providing himself with a meal and the money to pay his lodging-house bill during the night.

The places where they appear most in their element are in the country fairs, where great crowds of country bumpkins and farmers and unsophisticated people gather either for business or for pleasure. Here he has no rival and no competitor, for the regular doctor would as much disdain to set up his stand in any such places as a first-class doctor in London would wheel a barrow to some of the slums or great thoroughfares in it, and display his medicines to induce the public to patronize him.

Fortunately for the quack, the country abounds in just such gatherings. The very large villages have one every second or fifth day. The farmers in the district know this, and they come with their produce and their cattle to sell to those who are in need of such. Young fellows, too, wishing for some change from the monotony of country life, come to get some enjoyment, for all kinds of entertainments are prepared by itinerant caterers for the amusement of the public, and for a few hours they forget the *ennui* and mouldiness of their daily experience, and, having laughed at the funny things they have seen, they return with lightened hearts to their homes. Every day in the year, in a large district, there are scores of fairs that the people in the neighbourhood can attend, and it is to these that the gamblers, and puppet shows, and Punch and Judys, and conjurors resort, in the certainty that there will always be a crowd ready to be entertained, and with none of the highly critical notions that the townspeople are accustomed to indulge in. The strolling doctor selects a suitable place where he can best display the various articles that he hopes will attract those who may be in need of his services. Perhaps it is under the great boughs of a banyan-tree that cast their leafy shade between the people and the great red-hot sun, or it may be on the steps of a temple, where the grim and solemn-looking idol looks out complacently on the crowd that gathers to listen to the eloquence of the doctor.

Gathered closely around him are his medicines that he is going to prescribe for his coming patients. These consist of dried roots, and withered-looking stalks cut from bushes on the hillside, and various kinds of grasses, that seem fit only to be swept into the gutter as useless rubbish. There is one little mound that he builds up with deft and careful fingers, as though he relied much upon its component parts for his success to-day. It is a gruesome sight, for on looking at it carefully, one finds it to consist of a considerable number of teeth in a pretty good state of preservation that have been extracted from patients in days gone by, and that have still sufficient vitality in them to enable them to do service in other people’s mouths for some years to come.

Slowly the crowd gathers in the front of the doctor, who soon shows how profound is his knowledge of human nature by the way in which he captivates the attention of the rustics, who gaze at him with open mouths, and wonder what great scholar is this that has come with such a flow of eloquence, and such an amazing knowledge of medicine, to deliver men from diseases that the local doctors have not been able to cure.

Whilst he is talking, a man rushes up with face flushed and eyes congested, with both hands holding one side of his face. He is evidently in the greatest anguish, for, oblivious of what the crowd may think, he fills the air with his groans and breaks out into agonized cries that show the extreme pain from which he is suffering. With a piteous look up into the face of the quack, he slowly opens his mouth, and, pointing to the interior with mute but eloquent language that every one understands, he asks if he can do anything for him.

The doctor, with a complacent smile that shows that he perfectly understands the case and will instantly relieve him, whips up an old rusty pair of forceps that lies conveniently at hand, and before the man can realize what he is about to do, he has taken a grip of the offending molar and is dragging the patient about, howling and screaming because of the agony he is enduring, and at the same time holding on to the doctor’s hand to try and get him to unloose his hold upon the tooth.

At last, after one tremendous pull, the man staggers back, and the quack, holding the forceps in the air with the tooth enclosed within its fangs, excites the admiration of the whole crowd, who with open mouths and wonder on their faces, express themselves delighted with the skill of the doctor. This open-air dentistry has an immediate effect in

instilling confidence in those who have witnessed it, for several people at once apply for the herbs that he has for sale, and a few others consult him upon the various complaints from which they are suffering.

The fees for these, however, are so small that he begins to feel that his receipts are so insignificant, that he is apprehensive whether he will have enough to pay even for his lodgings during the night, without considering the good round sum he will require for the purchase of the opium, without which he would have to spend the night sleepless and in the greatest possible agonies. In order to bring in the cash to meet these demands he determines upon a ruse. Amongst the crowd is a well-dressed farmer who is evidently absorbed in admiration at the eloquence of the doctor, and keeps his eyes fixed upon him as he discourses upon the virtues of his medicines. That he is well to do is manifest from the whole look of the man. Fixing his eyes upon him steadily for a few seconds, the doctor says, "My friend, I hope you will excuse the liberty I am taking with you, and not be offended at anything I may say to you. My knowledge of diseases and their symptoms enables me to see that you are on the verge of a very serious illness, and that unless you take speedy measures to avert it, your life will be in the greatest danger."

Every eye was now turned upon the countryman, and looks of sympathy begin to flash over their faces as each one fancies he can detect symptoms of the threatened disease. The man himself is paralyzed with terror, for the Chinese are an exceedingly superstitious people, and are easily influenced by vague fears into a belief of what may be absolutely unreasonable and absurd. He trembles in every limb, and the perspiration breaks out in beads on his forehead. The people nudge each other, and point to these symptoms as evidence of the clearsightedness and ability of the doctor.

The latter, who feels that he is master of the situation, says to the trembling farmer, "Put out your tongue." The mere sight of the red healthy organ that is shot out in an agony of fear is quite enough to prove to any one who has half an eye for such things, that he is in the most robust health, but there is not one amongst these country bumpkins that knows anything about tongues as indicators of disease. "You see, my friends," says the quack, taking the crowd as it were into his confidence, "how true it was when I declared that this poor fellow was on the point of having a very serious illness. Look at his tongue," and here every one gazes at it intently, as though he sees blue death in that exceedingly healthy organ, "and just mark how the symptoms of the coming disaster are plainly outlined upon it. He should see a doctor at once about his case, who, if he knows his profession only tolerably well, will be able to take such measures that the disease may be stopped. It will be rather expensive to have this done, for the particular medicine required in this case is a very rare one, and consequently a high price will have to be paid for it."

By this time the feelings of the farmer are wound up to the highest pitch. He already feels himself getting ill, and he can feel the grip of the disease fastening upon him by slow degrees. He has become so hysterical that he is ready to believe anything that this scamp says. "Doctor," he cries out, "I quite believe what you say about my going to be ill, for I feel the disease you have spoken of has already begun to work upon me. Have you the medicine you just now spoke of as essential in my case? If you have, I need not apply to any one else. Why delay? Let me have it at once, so that I may take it and be relieved from the terrible feeling that oppresses me now."

The quack's eyes gleam with delight as he realizes that his little financial scheme has succeeded so well. "I certainly have the medicine," he said, "and I can give you a dose at once that will give you instant relief," and, taking up a folded paper that contained some white powder, he pours a few grains upon the man's extended tongue, and tells him to swallow it. Pausing for a short time after it had disappeared with a gulp down the man's throat, he asks him how he feels. "Very much better," he replies; "in fact I feel cured, for the distressing sensation that I had has almost entirely disappeared." A fee is paid by the farmer that makes the quack's heart leap for joy, whilst the farmer, with elastic steps and a radiant face, starts off for his home, to tell how he has been saved just in time from a calamity that might have imperilled his life.

The strolling doctor's profession, which is the last resort of the dissipated Bohemian literary man, is in some respects a picturesque and amusing method of getting a living. A book could be well written on this one subject alone, and if it were composed by one who could enter heartily into the spirit of the thing, it would be a most entertaining and amusing one. There is no doubt but that one would get from it a most realistic picture of the common life of the Chinese such as has never yet been written. The humorous and the grotesque would abound in it, and tragedy and comedy would follow each other in rapid succession as the experiences of these flotsam and jetsam of human society were recorded in it. Men write ponderous tomes upon China that generally are insufferably dry, and that give the West an idea that the Chinaman is an absurd, bizarre kind of individual, and that the main features about him are a pigtail and a pair of chopsticks. The fact of the matter is, he is brimful of wit and humour, and is just packed with as much human nature as one would meet with in any other part of the world. If the Chinese could only jump to the idea of having a Punch of their own it would be so filled with jokes and witticisms, though Oriental ones, that not even the famous English weekly would be able to surpass it for true wit and humour.

The next professional that I shall try to depict is the public story-teller. This man, as in the

case of the strolling doctor, is almost always a man with a certain amount of talent, and with a literary cast of mind that has inclined him to study the ancient writings of China, but more particularly those that deal with fiction and romance. The literature of China is particularly rich in works of this latter description, and those who are fond of exciting adventures and hairbreadth escapes, and dark and mysterious plots, will find a large field in the countless models that have come down from the past for their satisfaction and entertainment.

A man sometimes becomes so saturated with the stories he has read that he feels himself competent to entertain a crowd, whilst he describes in a graphic and realistic manner the men and women that are depicted in some famous novel. Few men do this, however, unless they are driven by hard necessity; for a story-teller, though popular with the masses, is not held in high respect, but is looked upon as a man who has failed in the more respectable walks of life, and has taken to this simply because it is the only way left him by which he can lead a lazy, indolent life, and earn just enough to supply him with opium and the small amount of daily food that his opium-drenched system will allow him to take. [Pg 240]

The story-teller, or, as he is popularly called by the Chinese, “The Narrator of Ancient Things,” is really the historian of the common people. Without him, the history of the past, and the story of the great men that lived in ancient times, and the deeds of heroism, and the revolutions of dynasties, would all be lost in oblivion. The great mass of the Chinese are absolutely illiterate, and cannot read the books that contain the stories of the past. The story-teller comes in to supply the lack of learning, and he recounts the tales of great battles that were fought in the dawn of Chinese history, and he tells of the struggles that the Empire has had with the warlike tribes that lay along the northern frontiers of China, and in vivid word-painting he describes the heroes and sages that have played so mighty a part in the building up of the Middle Kingdom. It is entirely due to him that the past lives in the thought and imagination of the men of to-day, and that men’s blood is fired and their passions moved at the thought of the great deeds that their fathers in days gone by were able to accomplish.

These men are accustomed to come out every afternoon when the weather permits and take their positions in some well-known public resort, and recount their stories to the groups of people that very soon gather round to listen to them. Their favourite place is in front of some popular temple towards which the roads converge, and where incessant streams of people pass and repass without ever ceasing their flow. Some of these are always sure to stop awhile and listen to the stirring tales that never seem to lose their attraction for the Chinaman. [Pg 241]

Some of the most popular of these are taken from a standard work, half fiction and half history, called *The Three Kingdoms*. This book contains a description of the times when three great rivals, occupying three different sections of the country, were contending for the mastery with each other (A.D. 221). It is written in a very delightful style, and is crammed full of adventures of the most exciting and romantic description from the first page to the very end.

The hero that shines most conspicuously in this historical novel is Kung-Ming, the beau ideal general and warrior, and the audience is never weary of listening to the exciting stories of his adventures, whilst he was striving to uphold the falling fortunes of his royal master. One of these is exceedingly popular, as it deserves to be, since it illustrates the fertility of Kung-Ming’s mind in his ingenious devices in carrying on the war with the two rival leaders with whom he was contending.

On one occasion he had sent on a large army that he had collected to fight with a rival general who was nearly as able as himself, whilst he followed behind, hoping to reach it before the enemy came into contact with it. He was proceeding leisurely along, when he was suddenly disturbed by a rush of defeated soldiers who were flying in the utmost disorder as though pursued by a successful foe. He found to his dismay that these were his own men, who had been routed and dispersed by the opposing army; and so thoroughly had they been demoralized by their defeat that all the influence and prestige that he possessed had no power to stay their flight, or to induce them to gather round his standard and once more follow him to meet the enemy. [Pg 242]

The panic indeed was so universal and the fear of the pursuing enemy so great, that he was deserted by every one excepting two of the most devoted of his followers, and with these he retreated to the city of Han-chung that lay some miles away in the rear. Entering into this, he ordered the city gates to be thrown wide open, whilst he and his two friends took up their position on the city wall with guitars in their hands, and there, as though they were celebrating a great victory, they sang songs and played the most lively airs on their instruments.

Before long the first ranks of the advancing foe appeared in the distance, and ere long the whole army, with banners flying and trumpets braying and with every sign of exultation, rapidly advanced in the direction of the city with the certainty of capturing it without a blow. As the troops drew near, what was their astonishment to find that the gates were flung wide open, whilst Kung-Ming, the redoubtable general, was seen playing the guitar on the walls of the town in full view of the whole army.

The general immediately ordered a halt of all the troops under his command, and rode

forward with his staff to examine into this remarkable state of things. The city gates truly were thrown wide open, but not a soldier could be seen either there or upon the ramparts, neither was there any sign of defence whatsoever. All that could be seen was Kung-Ming sitting with a gay and festive air on one of the towers, twanging his guitar and singing one of the national songs of the time. As the general gazed in the utmost perplexity the notes of the music vibrated through the air, and the loud tones of Kung-Ming, heard above the highest strains, reached the listening soldiers as they stood to their arms.

There was something mysterious about these open gates, and the musical entertainment that could only have been prepared for the enemy. Kung-Ming had always been noted for the fertility of his resources, and now he had evidently thought out a deep-laid scheme to involve his enemies in utter ruin.

The general was a man of consummate ability, but he recognized that in military tactics he was no match for the man that was singing so blithely on the walls above him. Fearful lest his army should be involved in some terrible disaster by the wily foe with whom he had to contend, he gave orders to retreat, and every man under his command felt that he was not safe until some miles had been placed between him and the famous general who had been entertaining them in so strange and unlooked-for a manner.

Thus by this famous ruse Kung-Ming saved his town for his master, and at the same time gave him an opportunity of gathering together his forces for a new campaign with his enemies. The story has come down the ages, and to-day is perpetuated in the language in the well-known proverb, “Kung-Ming offered the empty city to his enemy,” which is often applied to clinch an argument about something that is happening in daily life.

Another story is told that is always listened to with wrapt attention, and it is that of a Prince that ruled in the far-off distant times who was often in collision with the Barbarians that lived just outside the frontiers of the Empire. He was a valiant man and greatly beloved by his feudal barons and earls that owed him military service, and who were bound to call together their retainers and follow him to the field whenever they were summoned by him to active service.

After a time he came completely under the fascination of a beautiful concubine whom he had in his harem. Through her influence he neglected the duties of the State, and the greatest disorders prevailed throughout it. The wild and warlike tribes across the border who used to be restrained by the firm hand of the Prince, now made incessant raids into his dominions and ravaged the lands of the people, and murdered or carried off into slavery many of the inhabitants, without any action being taken to punish the marauders or to protect the people against their inroads.

Several years went by and frequent appeals were made to their ruler to take up arms and drive back the robbers into the wilds and steppes of their native land, but the fatal influence of the court beauty had made him careless whether his people were protected or not. At length the predatory excursions of the Mongols and the Kins and the Huns, the roving migratory tribes that found China such a fruitful field for plunder and robbery, became so incessant and so destructive to his dominions that he was compelled to organize an expedition to drive them across the border.

Lighting the beacon fires throughout the State, which was the usual signal for the assembling of the feudal chiefs to repair to the capital with their various quotas of men and arms, there was soon assembled a formidable force prepared to follow their Prince wherever he desired to lead them against the enemies of their country. On the morning of the day on which the army was to start to punish the robbers who were desolating the northern districts of his dominions, a select body of the chiefs had an interview with their ruler, and they declared that not a soldier would obey the orders to march until he had consented to grant them one request, and that was that he should order the instant execution of the concubine who had wrought such injury to the State, and that her head should be handed over to them, so that they might be sure that she had really been put to death.

The Prince, who was desperately in love with the unfortunate woman, at first resolutely refused to do what they asked. As the very existence of the State, as they believed, depended upon its being granted, they were firm in their determination not to march against the enemy until the bloody deed had been carried out. After holding out for several days, and finding that the leaders were inexorable, the executioner was sent into the palace, and soon the head of the famous beauty was delivered to the barons, and the army took its march to avenge the wrongs that the wild and lawless tribes had so long inflicted upon the country.

The story-teller has an inexhaustible store of adventures, and romances, and love scenes, and great episodes in history upon which to draw. He has also the free use of his pictorial powers in drawing the scenes and pictures with which he would stir the imagination and the enthusiasm of his audiences. Many of these men are real artists in their profession, and they can hold their hearers spellbound whilst they give a realistic picture of some stirring event that happened ages ago, or of some great catastrophe in which a dynasty disappeared amidst scenes of carnage and bloodshed, and the new one came in to the sound of music and amidst the rejoicings of a nation. They are, however, a vulgar, dissipated set of men, and though they do occasionally get inspired with their subjects and rise to high flights of

eloquence, there is not a single noble feature about them. It is not love for their art that makes them reproduce the comedies and tragedies of the past, but an irrepressible longing for the opium, which has put its leaden hues on their faces, and its fierce and unholy craving into their hearts.

There is another profession that ought to stand the very highest amongst all the honourable occupations that give men employment in this land, and that is the one that might in a rough and general way be called that of “interpreter of the gods.” This individual occupies the position he does not by any human choice, but by the special selection of the idol for whom he is to act. A vacancy, say, occurs in a particular temple, and a man must be appointed who can report to the worshippers the answers that the god has to give them to the particular petitions they have made to it. Without such a man the idol is dumb. It has a mouth, but it cannot speak; it has eyes, but they look out of wooden sockets, and no tears of sympathy have ever been known to fall from them; and it has a face with human features, but no story, the most pathetic that was ever told in the hearing of man, has ever been known to cause it to be suffused with emotion or to touch the cold and passionless features with a touch of pity.

The man that aspires to occupy this high position must go through a certain ordeal before he can be accepted by the temple authorities as the one whom the idol is willing to employ to be the medium by which it shall communicate its purposes to the people. A certain weird ceremony is performed in front of the god during some dark night, when only a candle or two show the idol surrounded by the mystery of darkness. Incantations are slowly chanted, and invocations made to the wooden image to inspire the man that stands motionless in front of it. The tap of a drum now and again sounds as a kind of bass note to the higher notes of the reciter of the vague and mystic language that is supposed to move the idol to a manifestation of its will.

After an hour or so of this monotonous dirge and occasional tapping of the drum, which is evidently meant to quicken the decision of the god, the man who has been as silent and as motionless as a statue begins to slightly sway from side to side. The taps on the drum now become more rapid and more vigorous, and ere long the wretched man becomes convulsed and falls on the ground as though he were in a fit.

The scene is ended, and the god, it is believed, has entered and taken possession of the man, and now whenever he speaks officially he does so as its inspired oracle, and his utterances are accepted as though they had been spoken by the idol itself.

One would naturally imagine that candidates for this exalted position would come from among men of culture and refinement, and that the highest in the land would eagerly desire a position where they would be so thoroughly in communication with the supernatural and be recognized by their countrymen as worthy of the highest places in the religion of the masses. But this is not the case. No scholar would ever dream of demeaning himself and of rendering himself contemptible in the eyes of the literary classes by consenting to become an interpreter of the gods. No respectable citizen would agree either for himself or for any member of his family to degrade himself by accepting such a position.

The men that actually are employed are opium-smokers who have lost their property in their indulgence of the popular vice, and as a last resort have come to the point of bearing the stigma and the disgrace connected with the office in order to get the gains that come to them when they are doing duty in the temple. If by some accident they should not have acquired the habit of opium-smoking, then it may be taken for granted that they are persons of no moral standing in the community—gamblers, loafers, or hangers-on to the outskirts of society, and such like.

Such are the men that assume the sacred office of being so inspired by the gods that they shall be qualified to carry messages from the invisible world to those who are in sorrow and distress, and who can find comfort only in the thought that the unseen powers are working on their behalf. That their new position does not affect in the slightest degree their moral character is seen by the lives they lead after they have undergone the process of being specially inspired by the idols to qualify for the delicate office of interpreting their very thoughts to their worshippers.

They are lazy and idle and profligate. Their leisure time, which is extensive, is spent in gambling and in occupations entirely unsuited to their sacred character. They have been known to make excursions during the darkness of the night when honest men are in their beds and dig up people’s potatoes, or, if no obstacles occur, to despoil a farmer’s henroost of all the birds in it. There certainly is a Nemesis that attends the irregular lives of these regular clergy of the idols, for they have not only an evil reputation, but according to popular report death invades their families until one after another is taken away and the home becomes extinct. That this happens often enough to warrant the tradition is quite evident to those who have studied the question. It is also a remarkable fact, that whilst these men who are the ministers of the idols are looked down upon with contempt, the gods who select and employ them are never censured by the public or considered to be involved in the evils of their servants.

It is a strange system that allows men of a low and depraved character to be the chief actors in the spiritual movements of a nation, but it is on a par with the fact that in the worship of

the idols, goodness or reformation in heart or life is never required from a single worshipper. The bad man brings his offering without any promise that there will be a change in his life, and it is apparently accepted just as freely as that of another whose reputation stands high amongst all classes of the community. This latter fact is a sufficient explanation of how it is possible for such men as now act as interpreters of the gods to be tolerated in the service of the temples at all.

A TYPICAL VILLAGE.

[Pg 249]

CHAPTER XII

SCHOOLS, SCHOOL-MASTERS, AND SCHOOL-BOOKS

Chinese passionately fond of education—Reverence for printed or written words—State makes no laws for the education of the people—The school-house and the school-master—System of teaching—Boys first learn sound of words—After years of study learn the meaning of each character—Small percentage of readers in China—One set of school-books in every school in the Empire—The *Three Word Classic*—The "Four Books" and the "Five Classics," with analyses.

There is no nation in the world that has a more passionate and earnest desire for education than the Chinese. In the four great divisions into which all society has been roughly divided, the scholar is placed at the head of the list, as the one that is considered most worthy of honour. Outside of official rank, the highest title that the Chinese have in the whole of their language is bestowed upon the school-master. He may be a man so poor that he has hardly enough money to buy food for himself and his family, and his clothes may be of the plainest and the meanest description, and yet he has a title given him that is never bestowed upon any of the three other classes. A man might be a millionaire and rolling in wealth, but if he were simply a merchant or a tradesman, the coveted title that the poorest scholar gets would never be given to him, even by the most loyal of his friends or by the meanest servant in his employ.

The reverence that the nation has for learning has induced a sentimental and what might seem to be a superstitious regard for the mere written or printed word. Even that dead form is held to be so sacred that it may not be misused or treated with contempt or indifference. A very common sight in a Chinese street is to see a man with a basket slung over his shoulder on which is inscribed two large characters which mean "Have pity on the writing." [Pg 250]

His eyes are kept steadily on the roadway, and on any nook or cranny by the side, and he eagerly pounces on any scraps of paper, no matter how frayed or dirty, and places them in his basket. Occasionally he catches sight of a broken piece of pottery or a fragment of a rice bowl on which are some of the precious characters that were burnt into them when they were being manufactured. These also are picked up and reverently laid aside with the pieces of paper that have been rescued from the feet of the passers-by.

You stop the man and you ask him what he means by picking up this rubbish on the street, and he tells you that he is employed by benevolent persons who cannot bear the thought of seeing the sacred characters that were invented by the sages and that had been the cause of China’s greatness trodden under foot of men. And so he is gathering all that he can find on the streets, and at a certain time with due ceremony the whole will be burnt, and be thus saved from the dishonour that had been put upon them.

The devotion to education is not a mere sentimental one, but one that has covered this great Empire with schoolhouses, for in all the towns and cities and in all the larger villages even the people have established the common schools in which the children of the locality may receive an education. There are no such things as Government schools, neither are there private ones. It is true that rich men sometimes engage teachers for their sons and have the tuition carried on in their own homes, but what may be called the common schools of the country are managed and supported entirely by the elders or leading men in the various localities in which they exist.

The State takes no cognizance whatever of the educational efforts of the people, neither is it called upon to spend a cash in upholding the institutions that are in existence for the teaching of the youth of the country. The people have from time immemorial taken these [Pg 251] duties upon themselves, and they have willingly borne the responsibility of raising the funds that have been necessary for the successful carrying on of the schools.

The usual practice is at the close of the year for the leaders, say, of a village to meet together and discuss the question of the next year’s school. They have already canvassed the parents who have sons, and ascertained how many of them will attend and how much they are willing to contribute towards the teacher’s salary. They are thus in a position to know whether they have sufficient funds to invite a first-class man to take charge of the school, or whether they will have to be content with an inferior scholar instead.

This question being settled, the next point is to secure the school-master. If there happens to be one belonging to the village, or one connected in any way with the leading men, the difficulty is then very much simplified, but if an unknown man is to be engaged, then it may mean endless complications for a whole year. He may turn out to be an opium-smoker, or he may be a vagabond and rarely be seen within the walls of the school-house; for when once he is engaged the people have no redress whatever, but must tolerate all his misdeeds and pay him the salary agreed upon without a murmur or a complaint to him personally. Any attempt on the part of the villagers to compel him to carry out his contract faithfully would simply end in their being censured and fined by the mandarin for daring to assert themselves against one of the highly-privileged classes in China. We will suppose, however, that a fairly respectable man has been obtained, and that all the arrangements for opening the school have been satisfactorily made. The usual time for the commencement of the school year is three or four days after the “Feast of Lanterns,” which takes place about the middle of February.

[Pg 252] The school-house is usually situated in a central part of the village, and consists of a school-room capable of accommodating twenty or thirty scholars, a small bedroom for the teacher, and a diminutive kitchen also for his special use. The managers provide him with a four-poster, a high oblong table and a few chairs, and also a mosquito-net to be used during the warm weather when those plagues of the East carry on their campaign with such unceasing vigour against all animal life. They also place a table and chair in the school-room, which are to be for his own exclusive use, but beyond these they leave the furnishing of the place to the individual scholars, who bring their own stools and tables with them on the day that the studies begin. On the table are an inkstone, a diminutive water-bottle, two or three camel’s-hair pens or brushes, a stick of Indian ink, and last, though not least, a good solid piece of bamboo with which the refractory and the indolent will frequently make acquaintance during the coming months of the session. There are also a miniature teapot and Lilliputian teacups, all deftly placed on a lacquer tray, ready for use whenever the master feels that he would like to refresh himself with a few sips of the popular beverage that “cheers but not inebriates.”

The school life of a boy in China would seem to one who has not been brought up in Western methods as a dreary and intolerable one, and such as would take the heart out of any English lad and make him hate the very sight of books as long as he lived. The duties of the day begin at a very early hour, and with certain intermissions for meals last until the evening shades have entered the school-room and blurred the faces of the books so that the strange, weird-looking words cannot be recognized one from the other.

The little fellows have to rise as the dawn begins to fling its grey and trembling light across the darkness that clouds the earth, and to send its kindly messages into the homes of rich and poor. Feeling the terror of the master upon them, they quickly jump out of bed, and with [Pg 253] no time to wash their faces or to brush their hair, they hurry along the various paths that

lead to the school, where they find the teacher waiting for them, and with a frown upon his face if they should happen to be a few minutes late.

The lads never enter the school-room without a feeling of restraint. It is considered that a cold and haughty kind of bearing on the part of the master is essential in order to maintain the discipline of the school. There is, therefore, very seldom if ever any feeling of affection or devotion between the scholars and him. To them he appears to have no kindliness of heart and no human sympathies, nor any lovable thought for any one of them. He is simply there as a kind of living machine to teach these youngsters this huge Chinese language, but as for sentiment or any tender feeling for them, that is utterly out of the question.

The method in which the studies are carried on is the very reverse of what is demanded and insisted upon in the home schools. There the great aim is to secure not only perfect order but as complete silence as possible. When there is anything like noise in the school-room it means that the lads are talking with each other and not studying their lessons. An English lad can best master these by thinking over them, and in silence committing to memory the various thoughts or problems that may be contained in the book he is called upon to study.

Now it seems impossible for any Chinese boy to impress upon his mind's eye the intricate and apparently meaningless strokes that make up the ordinary Chinese word. He seems to be able to do this only by bawling them at the very top of his voice. Efforts have been made to get the scholars in a school to learn them without raising their voices, but failure has always been the result. The consequence is, that silence amongst the lads is most displeasing to a Chinese school-master, and a stern, severe look from him will set them all [Pg 254] off into shouts so deafening that only one great uproar can be heard resounding through the building, each lad seeming only to be contending with all the rest to see if he cannot outshout them all. The drudgery of learning to recognize the Chinese words is something that cannot be appreciated by a Western student. With English words, for example, each one is composed of so many letters, has a definite sound and definite meanings, and after a time, if a boy fails to remember any particular one, he simply spells it, and at once sound comes tripping back to his recollection. There is no such easy process to the grasping of the Chinese characters. Each one is a solemn, hard-featured picture that stands apart by itself and has no connecting link with any other one in the language. You cannot reason out what shall be the sound or meaning of any one word by analogy, for each one is complete in itself and has a solitary entity of its own. A page of Chinese print gives one the impression that one has lighted upon a series of cryptic puzzles that the inventor has made as intricate and involved as the complex and oblique mind of the Chinese could make them.

The Chinese school-masters throughout the country having realized that to grasp the sounds of these weird and unromantic figures and the meaning that lies concealed behind them would be an absolute impossibility for the youth of the country, have divided up the great attempt into two distinct efforts. The first thing, therefore, that a lad has to do when he goes to school is to shout out in all the various tones of the gamut the names of these ancient, hoary-headed symbols, and at the same time to impress upon his memory the picture of each one, with its dots and curves and minute up and down strokes, that it shall be a living picture that his mind can call up at any moment that he hears its name pronounced.

[Pg 255] The primary process goes on for about five years, during which time he has read through most of his school-books. With one's notions that one has got from English school life it is impossible at first to realize the stupendous work that is involved in this dreary way of being educated. The boy comes to school at early dawn, and he is kept at his desk, with the exception of his meal hours, till night is throwing its shadows over the earth. There is no intermission and no racing about the playground at certain intervals to break in upon the eternal monotony of grinding study. The playground is a Western institution that has never found its way into the East. The lads have no time for such inventions that would interfere with work. Life out here is serious and life is earnest, for the school-boy at least, and no frivolous methods must be allowed to stay the studies of this gigantic language.

The whole day, therefore, is spent in acquiring the sounds and the look of each particular word, without having the remotest idea what they mean. He comes the next day and the same grinding goes on. The spring passes into summer and summer into autumn, and one day is like another in its weary monotony, and the sounds in growing numbers clang and ring within his brain, and the weird little pictures are hung up in the picture gallery of his mind, but they tell him no story, neither do they suggest the poetry and romance that often lie hidden within so many of them.

This fearful kind of treadmill education goes on for four or five years with boys of ordinary intelligence, but for three or four with lads of exceptional abilities and fine memories, who have the faculty of remembering both the sounds and the faces of the thousands of characters that they meet with in their school-books. During all those precious years when the intellects of the lads are just in that stage when they are open to development and expansion, they are bound and contracted by a miserable system that has kept this nation [Pg 256] from advancing in thought and from claiming the position amongst the nations of the world that it would have been entitled to had a wider liberty been given it in the training of its youth.

The cruel thing about it is that though of extreme age, having been started in the famous Han Dynasty (B.C. 296-A.D. 23), it is in no sense an outcome of the teaching of the sages.

There is ample evidence from Chinese documents to show that the common schools were conducted in the time, say, of Confucius (B.C. 550) more as they are carried on in Western lands, and that even girls were instructed in the *Book of Odes*, one of the stiffest of the sacred classics, and that books were read not simply in the mechanical way that they have been for two thousand years, but because of the interest of the subjects that were discussed in them.

The years have gone slowly by and nature in successive seasons has poured out of the bounties of an untrammelled heart the riches that have filled men's hearts with gladness, but the school-house has continued to be the prison-house where thought was never allowed to blossom, and where the possibilities of the human heart were crushed and cramped beneath an iron system that made the spirit of romance and fairy tale and adventure die out of the youthful manhood of the nation.

At last the morning came to our scholar when the teacher began to explain the meaning of the strange old-world pictures that stood in columns down the pages of his books. Their names were all known and their faces were very familiar, for with many a sigh, and sometimes almost with breaking heart they had been read and reread, until every lineament in their wizened faces had been printed on the pupil's hearts. And what a revelation was the rendering made by the stern master who had simply been the corrector of wrong sounds, the cold, severe tyrant of the school who had never seemed to feel one touch of sympathy for the young hearts under his control.

Many of the dry and colourless pictures under the touch of this stern and apparently cold-blooded teacher became instinct with life, and human faces peered through them, and the voices of men that lived ages ago could be heard speaking in the language of to-day, exhorting the scholars to a noble and a virtuous ambition. Others, again, exhaled the fragrance of the fields and the perfume of flowers, whilst one could hear the rustling of the corn as the breeze swept over it, and could see in imagination the mountains with their sun-crowned summits and the shadows chasing each other like school-boys along their rugged sides.

The whole of Chinese history that had lain within the cold and lifeless grasp of these square little puzzles which he had looked upon with unutterable loathing for five years, now under the magic touch of the teacher's hand began to tell the story of the past. He now heard for the first time of the great revolutions that had changed the destinies of proud dynasties, and listened to the clang of battle, and the mighty heroes who had figured in the nation's life centuries ago now seemed to march by, and he appeared to be able to catch a glimpse of their faces and to compare the pictures of them that he had imagined in his mind with the reality now before him.

One very unhappy result of compelling the boys to spend four or five years in merely learning the sounds of the words, and in familiarizing them with their look without at the same time acquiring a knowledge of their meaning, is to greatly reduce the number of those who can read any book that is put before them as is the case in the West. Fully sixty per cent. of the lads that enter the common schools leave before they reach the second stage. There are many reasons for this, but the chief one is a financial one. The parents are poor, and so when a boy reaches a certain age his services may be required to help in the support of the family, or a good situation is offered that does not demand much education, and the lad is glad of any excuse that will take him away from the heartbreaking drudgery of simply learning sounds; and so he jumps for joy when his books are thrown aside, and as he realizes that he is never more required to enter the school-room again.

All these boys have acquired a certain smattering of knowledge, which, however, is absolutely useless to them for the purpose of enabling them to read. One constantly meets with men that can read a page of a book who have not the remotest idea of what the meaning of the passage is. This is because they left school before the second stage in their education was reached, and therefore for all practical purposes they are no better off than those who have never received any instruction when they were lads. The mandarins are accustomed to put out proclamations about anything they wish to order or to instruct the people under their charge. These are posted up in prominent places throughout the town, and knots of men gather round them who seem to be able to read fluently the strange mysterious-looking symbols that compose them. You ask a man who is reading one of these to explain to you what the mandarin wishes to be done. He says he really cannot tell you, for when he was at school he never got further than the initial stage of learning to recognize the characters with the names that belong to them, and therefore he is unable to explain to you what the mandarin is forbidding or what regulations he is issuing for the conduct of the people.

A SCHOLAR IN OFFICIAL DRESS.

To face p. 258.

The consequence of this utterly insane plan of education is that for a civilized country such as China claims to be, the people are grossly ignorant and uneducated. Taking the population at four hundred millions, and say half of these are women who may safely be said to have never been to any school when they were girls, that leaves two hundred millions of men to be considered. Sinologues who have been well qualified to deal with the subject, after serious calculations have come to the conclusion that not more than fifteen millions of readers exist throughout the length and breadth of the land. These include men who have a mere smattering of education, but who know enough to be book-keepers and accountants, and doctors who can write their own prescriptions, and shopkeepers who can make out their bills, but in such misshapen and uncouth hieroglyphics that they would make Confucius shudder with disgust were he allowed to visit the earth, and see what caricatures these men have made of the marvellous inventions of the darkest ages of China.

Fifteen millions is to my mind a most liberal estimate of the readers of this country. Why writers on China should have persistently represented the people of this land as being highly educated is a mystery to those who profess to be only moderately acquainted with the subject. The country is illiterate, grossly illiterate, and as a result is festering with pride and with contempt for every other nation outside of the Middle Kingdom. There is just now going on throughout the country, however, a tremendous awakening, and the rush after education on Western lines is one in which all classes of society are united. The old obsolete system is doomed, and the youth of the future will be no more subject to the pain and the weariness and the heartbreaking that countless generations of the young manhood of the country have had to endure in the past.

We now come to the school-books of the nation, for though there never has been an Educational Board in China, and none of the dynasties that have successively sat on the Dragon Throne of this Empire have ever legislated with regard to the teaching of the youth of the land, there has always existed but one set of books that are the text books in every school throughout the country, and which have been used in every scholastic institution that has ever existed in the long ages of the past. The Chinaman is thoroughgoing in his conservatism. He has never weakened on that subject. Even in his smells he is the rankest Tory that ever lived. The odours that reek through the streets, and send their aroma down the alleyways, and gently mingle in the atmosphere of the homes, have nothing modern in them, but are the lineal descendants of a long line of ancestors that vanish from sight in the mist and obscurity of a remote past.

As a result of this national instinct, no teacher has ever had the hardihood to propose that there should be any alteration in the books that should be used in the instruction either of the young or of the more advanced pupils who may be planning for literary honours. This is all the more remarkable considering the wide extent of territory of the Chinese Empire, and of the varieties of languages that are used by the people.

The Chinese are generally spoken of as one race, and so they are in the great outstanding features that constitute them one distinct nation, and yet they are divided off from one

another in many large regions by dialects so different from each other, that the people occupying them cannot understand the languages that are spoken in those outside of their own.

It would have seemed that such radical differences as those produced by what is practically a foreign language would have led to different methods and different ideals as to the management of their schools, but they have not. You pass along the great plains where the fertility of the soil has given prosperity to the people, and you examine the schools and you find one set of text books in every one. You travel over mountain ranges where the people are having a severe struggle for existence and where a language is spoken that needs an interpreter before you can enter into conversation with them. You enter into their village schools and you find the same familiar books, but the names given to the strange weird-looking little pictures are so different from those they call them on the other side of the mountains that you cannot recognize them. You pass up the great Yang-tze, the "Son of the Ocean," and you step out of your boats a few hundred miles apart from the last place you rested at, and you discover that every locality has its own dialect. You make your way to the nearest school, and still the same books meet your eye, with just the same dog-eared, uninviting appearance that they present in any latitude or longitude of the Empire in which you may meet them. You listen to see if you can catch the tones in which the lads scream out at the top of their voices the uncouth metallic tones in which they call out the names of the pictures that fill the pages of their books, but they change in every place you visit, and your mind is filled with a kind of wonder at the immense variety of tones and dialects in which the students of this vast country ring the changes on the books that for countless ages have been the only ones from which they have had to study.

With regard to these school-books it has to be stated that there has never been any attempt made to render them attractive to the children that use them. In England the very reverse of this is the case. They are printed as a rule on clean white paper, and in a type that is so distinct that the pupils have never to strain their eyes to make out the letterpress. In addition to this, most of the books are illustrated with beautiful pictures that give a fascination to the pages, whilst they help the scholars to grasp the meaning of the subjects that they have to study.

Now in China there is nothing done to ease the sorrows of the lads in their grappling with this huge language of cryptic pictures that refuse to have their meanings explored excepting after years of most painful study. The books are printed upon the very poorest paper in order to lessen the cost. The words, too, are often blurred and indistinct, for the wooden blocks from which they are printed are generally so worn by years of use, that the delicate strokes and minute touches with the pen, and the involved and complicated interweaving of straight and waving lines that go to the making up of the old-world-looking pictures, get frayed and broken in the printing, so that it requires a practised eye to distinguish some of them from others that have a natural likeness.

The pages of these books present a most dreary and uninviting appearance. They are never lightened by any pictures, and no artist has ever attempted to vary the dreariness of school life by any sketches from nature or any scene from human life. It is no wonder that the artistic faculty in the Chinaman has been developed in a grotesque and unrealistic fashion, or that nature seems to be made to be conformed to the stiff and formal characters upon which the eyes of the youth of China have to look during the early years when the artistic element is waiting to be moulded into those finer shapes that will produce the great pictures that are seen in the West. Art in China has never had any room in which to play her part in the development of the mind, or in training the fancies and the imagination of men. The artist in this land is a man that draws his scenes by rule and compass, and he would lose caste were he to violate certain canons that must be observed in the drawing of a landscape or in the pose or attitude of the human figure. He never dreams of going out into the fields or of sitting on a hillside and of trying to reproduce the scene that lies stretched before him. There is no freedom and no losing of oneself in the inspiration of the moment, when forgetful of rules and mastered by the subtle forces that have touched his dreams into action, he shall produce something that no man has ever done before him. The chill of the years is upon him, when he was compelled, at the very time when his soul was in the process of formation, to keep his gaze upon those square unartistic hieroglyphics, and crushing down all the poetry and all the romance that lay dormant in his nature, to take these as the highest ideals for all his conceptions of art in the future.

The first book that is put into the hands of the young scholar is called the *Three Word Classic*, because it is written in stanzas of three words each. It would naturally be supposed that this book was of the simplest and most elementary character, and suited for the immature minds and brains of the lads who are called upon to study it. In the West this would certainly have been the case, but the East, with its metaphysical trend of thought and tendency to mysticism, refuses to consider that it has to come down to the level of the young who are just beginning their studies, and whose minds can grasp only the commonest and the most everyday thoughts.

The result is there is not to-day a single child's book in China, and no fairy stories for children, and no household rhymes that can be bought at the booksellers, and put into the hands of the little ones in the nursery. The books in this land are for grown-up men, and demand thought and study and ponderous commentaries in order to be understood; and yet

it is these very same that are put into the hands of a youth of tender years when he begins to grapple with this gigantic system of mystic pictures that contain the thoughts and passions and feelings of the Chinese race.

The *Three Word Classic* is a very admirable instance of the beau ideal kind of book that the educationist of this land puts into the hands of a boy, say, of eight or nine years of age. It begins by saying—

> “Man at birth,
> His Nature’s virtuous,
> All natures alike,
> Vary by experience.
> Formerly Mencius’ mother
> Chose her locality,
> Son refused study
> She severed web,” etc.

The meaning of this passage when put into a little more diffuse language is that when a child is born his heart is naturally good and inclined to virtue. All children in fact come into the world with natures very much like each other, and that it is only as they grow up and come under the influence of surrounding circumstances that they do not all turn out good. It is not men’s natures that are corrupt, but it is the influence of evil companions and bad training that lead so many astray, and prevent men from following the bent that is in every man’s mind towards virtue.

To illustrate this, the case of the great philosopher Mencius is described with some minuteness. It appears that he had a mother who was a woman of great force of character. She was determined that her son should grow up to be a great man, but in order to secure this it was essential that his surroundings should be such as would be helpful to the carrying out of this ambition of the mother’s heart. Three times did she remove from the localities she had chosen for her home, because the neighbours were not up to the moral standard that would qualify them to be proper examples for her son.

At length having found the home that satisfied her, she discovered to her sorrow that Mencius was not inclined to work up to her ideal. He was a high-spirited lad and full of animal spirits, and preferred to be flying kites or spinning tops, or tossing the shuttlecock from one to another with the side of his shoe, to serious study with his books. She was a brave woman was this mother of the future philosopher. She was quite alone in the world, for her husband was dead and her relatives lived far away, and her only source of livelihood was the loom on which she wove the webs that she disposed of in the nearest market town.

At length the crisis came. One day she had been begging and entreating her son to be a good boy and give his heart to his studies. He did not seem moved, however, by her passionate appeals, and in her agony of spirit, and feeling that life had no charm for her, she grasped a knife that lay by and began to cut and mangle the web she was weaving. Mencius was so horrified at this proceeding of his mother, and so cut to the heart that his conduct should have driven her to such an act of despair, that with tears in his eyes he promised that he would never trouble her again with any misconduct of his. From that day he was completely changed. With heart and soul he entered into his studies. He became a distinguished scholar, and finally produced works that have moulded and influenced the thinkers of this nation from his own times (B.C. 372-289) down to the present.

Other examples are given in this famous school-book of men who, desiring to conform to the high principles that lie embedded in the soul of every child at birth, have fought manfully against external circumstances and have come out successful in the end. It is told of one man who subsequently became very distinguished, that when he was a young man he was so poor that he had no money to buy oil with which to study after dark. So determined, however, was he that his evenings should not be wasted, that he hit upon the ingenious plan of catching a number of fireflies, and from the light they threw out he kept up his reading as late into the night as he desired. Another man equally poor used to take his book out on a winter’s night, and by the lights of the snow that fell on it pursue his studies after all the rest of the family were buried in slumber.

The next book that follows hard upon the *Three Word Classic* is the *Classic on Filial Piety*, a book that was written by the great sage Confucius, and is a voluminous disquisition upon the duties and virtues of honouring one’s parents. There is no doubt but that the profound respect that the Chinese have for the doctrine of filial piety has been fostered in the nation by this work having been for so many centuries the school-book of the children in all the schools throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Although in practical life one looks often in vain for a large and general carrying out of the principles laid down by Confucius, there is no doubt that there is such a universal acceptance of this divinely commanded virtue that the effect on the nation has been extremely beneficial. The ideal is in the air and permeates human life at every point, and though men through the infirmities of their fallen nature often transgress the teachings of the sages on this point, there is still a vast amount of restraint that is put upon the passions of men’s hearts in their treatment of their parents.

Before the *Classic on Filial Piety* has been read through, the youthful pupils are introduced to the study of the masterpieces of the great writers and thinkers of the nation. There are no gradual and easy stages that are to land them finally into the abstruse style and profound thinking of the books that have really shaped the life and thought of the Chinese race. In England there are innumerable stepping-stones between the story of Jack and Jill and Macaulay's *History of England*, and boys of ten or eleven would never be called upon to attempt the study of the latter. The lads of China, however, are not treated with the same indulgence, for they are put to the study of books that test the thinking powers of the wisest and the most distinguished scholars in the land. A brief statement of the teaching of these will show what is the kind of studies that the youth in China has for a long course of centuries been compelled to submit to.

The first in order of the "Four Books" that is put into the hands of the pupils is *The Great Learning*. The leading thoughts that are discussed in it are how men are to control themselves so that they may become useful members of society; how they are to manage their families so that peace may be preserved in the home and the sons and daughters turn out well; and lastly, the best methods of governing a state so that the highest happiness may be secured to all its inhabitants. These three points that affect the whole of society in some form or other, may well be considered the greatest kind of learning that any man might desire to master.

The next is *The Doctrine of the Mean*, a book that is insufferably dull and monotonous, but is filled with arguments to show that men should not rush into extremes, but should pursue the middle path in every undertaking in which they may engage. It is one of the most difficult of the "Four Books" to understand, but its main drift is that which has been indicated above. Following on this confessedly difficult work are the writings of Mencius, to whom reference has been made in the previous pages. This philosopher was a most practical and a most genial kind of writer. To him belongs the honour of defining what he calls the five virtues that are eternal in their character, viz. love, righteousness, courtesy, a wise appreciation of life, and sincerity. He dwells, however, more fully on the two first, and shows how in the management of a state they are most important factors, without which it must eventually come to destruction.

The fourth book is called the *Analects*, or it might be termed the Table Talk of Confucius, for it is largely made up of brief and pithy utterances of the great sage whilst conversing with the various characters that appear in its pages. Like Mencius, he has had the distinction of marking out a fivefold relationship that has been accepted by succeeding ages as a very masterpiece of thought and genius. These are the relation between sovereign and people, between parents and children, between husband and wife, between elder and younger brothers, and between friend and friend. These are discussed very fully, and it is shown that the divisions that Confucius made, if properly recognized and carried out, would secure happiness and prosperity to all the people of any country or state.

There are two figures, however, in this interesting work that are of surpassing interest, and that have had a profound effect on the character and thought of the nation ever since. These are what Confucius calls "The Son of a King," and "The Small Man." The former of these is the conception in the mind of the great sage of what he deemed to be the ideal man. It is not, however, one born in a palace and heir to a throne. He might first have seen the light of day in a cottage, and have spent all his life there. The conception was of a man of princely mind, who acted as though he were really the son of a king and was destined one day to rule an Empire. His thoughts were all noble, and no shadow of anything mean or despicable ever fell upon his soul. "The Small Man" was the very reverse of this. He was common and mean in all that he did. No lofty thought ever crossed his mind, and no ambition to excel in the finer qualities that make up the beautiful life ever lifted him up for a moment from the low level in which he constantly lived. If Confucius had never written another word, but had been simply content to have flashed this inspiration of genius in the pictures he has drawn of these two characters upon the coming centuries, he would have done incalculable service to his race.

Following on the "Four Books" there come in quick succession the "Five Classics," which are given to the boys to read. The first of these is the *Book of Poetry*, which contains the national songs that were sung by the fathers of the race, as well as those used on royal and solemn occasions, such as when some great function was being performed in the presence of the sovereign, or when in the ancestral halls the members of the clans were assembled to offer sacrifices to the spirits of their ancestors. From a Western standpoint they are insufferably dull as a whole, for they are wanting in passion and intensity, and never seem to be able to stir men into enthusiasm or to set the blood on fire.

The next in order of study is the *Book of History*, which contains the brief record of some of the leading events that took place in the first five dynasties that ruled over the Chinese race from B.C. 2357, down to the year B.C. 627.[3] Then comes the *Record of Ceremonies*, which contains minute directions how to act with ceremonious politeness to the members of one's own family, to strangers, to those in authority, and to any one that one may meet in society under every and any conditions whatsoever.

It is most amusing to read of the minute directions that are given in this manual of etiquette with regard to the way in which parents should be treated by their children. "Boys and girls

who are still under age ought to rise from their beds at dawn and wash their hands and rinse their mouths, and carefully comb their hair. They should then hasten to the bedroom of their parents and inquire if they are in need of any refreshment. If they are, they must at once proceed to the kitchen and provide something savoury for them to partake of, and they must stand by with heads slightly lowered in token of profound respect whilst they are eating the food they have prepared for them.”

Rules even are laid down as to how the children should act when a father, for example, has been doing something that needs reproof. “When he has been in error the son must point this out in an exceedingly humble manner, in a gentle tone and a countenance on which there must not be the shadow of a frown. If the father refuses to listen, the son must become still more dutiful than he has ever been, until finding that any unpleasant feeling has passed away he must again with great respect point out what he considers ought to be rectified in his conduct, and try and show him the injury he is doing to the department, district, village or neighbourhood in which he lives. Should the father be so enraged at this as to beat his son till the blood flows down, he must not dare to harbour the least resentment against him, but must serve him with increased respect and reverence.”

The fourth of the “Five Classics” is called the *Record of the Spring and Autumn*, and was composed by Confucius. His object in writing it was to give a narrative of events in continuation of the history contained in the *Book of History* mentioned above. He desired also to give the nation a lasting monument of himself, for he seemed to be haunted with an idea that if he did not leave some record of himself, his name and his memory would perish from the face of the earth.

His narrative of events extends from B.C. 722-480, but the whole thing has been done in the most inartistic fashion. The sentences are brief and matter of fact, and whether it be an atrocious murder or a deed of heroism that is recorded, the author is careful to conceal what his own views are with regard to them. No details are given and no opinion expressed, the facts are simply recorded, and that is all; and yet Confucius declared that it would be by the *Records of the Spring and Autumn* that succeeding ages would either honour or condemn him, a prediction that was bound never to be fulfilled.

The last of the “Five Classics” is the *Book of Changes*, the most mysterious and the most unfathomable of all the books in the Chinese language. It consists of sixty-four short essays, and is founded upon the same number of lineal figures, each made up of six lines, some of which are whole and some are divided. From these figures are evolved all kinds of theories on moral, social, and spiritualistic questions. It is the happy hunting-ground of fortune-tellers, who can predict from the peculiar way in which the lines happen to be placed in relation to each other whether prosperity is to come into a man’s life, or whether misery and sorrow are to close it in disaster.

In the above I have given a very rough and general summary of the school-books that the youth of China have had to study from the earliest days down to the present. The common subjects that are taught in the schools at home, such as arithmetic, geography, grammar, and such like, have no place in the schools of this country. The result is that the whole nation is grossly ignorant of every other country outside of their own, and this has engendered conceit and contempt and an arrogant spirit for countries that stand in the van of civilization in the West.

But a mighty change is even now working in this old Empire, and men are beginning to realize that the system of education that has so far been in existence is a radically defective one, and must be displaced by those that are more in a line with the ones that have raised the West to such a high pitch of learning in so many departments of study. There is just now a tremendous thirst for Western education, and the nation seems prepared to abandon the old conservative systems that have been such a hindrance to the advance of thought in the past.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MANDARIN

Mandarins’ great power—Ambition of every father that son should be a mandarin—A famous Prime Minister—Description of a mandarin of a county—His three titles—Clever method of squeezing complainant and defendant—A typical case—Crime not noticed until officially brought before the notice of the mandarin—Violations of law by mandarins for the purpose of squeezing—Methods of judicial

procedure—Torture used to cause confession—Mandarins allowed large discretionary powers in their decisions—Two typical instances.

Any man who is in office under the Government is called a mandarin. It must be understood, however, that he is actually in its service to get this honourable title for whilst many, through courtesy, are addressed as mandarins, it is only those who are in the *bonâ fide* employment of the country that really can be considered as such.

The mandarins as a class are the privileged men of the Empire. They have large and extensive powers. In the exercise of their functions a wide discretion is allowed them, and in their decisions as magistrates, whilst they have to keep themselves within certain general laws recognized as the statutes of the dynasty, they are left very much to their own wit and common-sense as to how they shall reach the conclusions they may finally come to. In addition to the above, the mandarins have almost unlimited opportunities of making money and of enriching themselves and their families.

ENTRANCE GATE
(NANKIN).

This latter has a fascination for the Chinaman, which explains the intense longing that every youth, who has any ambitions for the future, has to some day become a mandarin. I presume there is hardly a son born in this wide Empire, about whom the father does not at once begin to have his dreams. He pictures to himself the time when the little fellow whose cries are awakening new echoes in the home shall have taken his degree and have qualified himself for some Government appointment. His visions widen and he sees him advanced from one post to another, and growing in power and in wealth, until he finally returns to his ancestral home to build a magnificent mansion and to enrich every member of it.

As the mandarins all spring from the people, without any reference to class or social position, the dreams that the parents often have about their sons are not the fairy creations of fancy like those of Aladdin’s wonderful lamp, but in countless instances are real romances that are more marvellous than any writer of fiction has ever conceived. In one of my travels in the interior of China in passing along a great thoroughfare, I came upon a magnificent grave. I saw at once it was the tomb of a man that had been a great mandarin, for only such could possibly have had such a splendid monument erected in connection with his last resting place.

The tomb, that stood high and conspicuous far back from the highway along which a constant stream of travellers passed to and fro, was situated at the end of a great avenue flanked on both sides by huge stone figures larger than life. The whole was intended to represent the official residence and court of a high mandarin. There were stone lions guarding the approaches to where the great official was supposed to be visiting, and granite horses with their riders waiting patiently for the coming of their lord, and stone footmen who had been standing for more than a century for one whose footsteps would never again be heard by human ears.

There was quite a romantic story connected with this grave. Nearly two hundred years ago, the ground occupied by it was a poor little farm, cultivated by a family who could barely get enough out of it to keep body and soul together. A son was born, and as the lad grew up, the

parents seeing that he was a child of uncommon natural abilities, determined that he should be a scholar, and that he should retrieve the glories of his house which tradition declared had in former years been most conspicuous, and should bring back the good fortune which had been vanishing slowly from their home.

He was accordingly kept at school when he should have been helping on the farm or going out as a labourer to earn a few cash to ease the poverty that held the family within its grip. To do this meant a struggle for them all, and ceaseless self-denial both for the parents and for the young scholar himself, but after years of a stern struggle to keep the wolf from the door, the faith and patience of them all were rewarded by the success of the son.

He passed his examinations with such brilliant success, that he was soon made a mandarin, and he was appointed to the control of a rich county where he had ample opportunities of showing the Government how well fitted he was to rule. From this time the shadow that had rested on his home lifted, for he was now in a position to send sufficient money to his parents to enable them to live in luxury. The old house, battered by the weather and falling into decay, was rebuilt and enlarged. Fresh fields were bought and added to the farm, and servants and field hands were employed to gather in the harvests that filled their home with abundance.

In the meanwhile the son had been advanced from one post to another, until finally he was summoned to the capital by the Emperor and made Prime Minister. During these years his wealth had been accumulating, until now he had a large fortune at his command, which, true to Chinese nature and to Chinese traditions, he had sent to his old home, and which he had spent largely in the purchase of lands which he added to his own, and of farms which he let out to farmers, who had lost their own, to cultivate for him. [Pg 275]

At length the time came for him to die, and with the strong passion for his home where he was reared that supplies the place of patriotism to the Chinese, he made arrangements that his body should be carried to the place where he was born, and should be buried in one of the fields in sight of his old home, where his grave could be cared for, and where his spirit could be sacrificed to by the members of his own family.

This meant a journey of over a thousand miles, over great plains and up and down hills and mountains, and across wide rivers, and months of steady journeying for a large retinue that would have to follow the dead statesman in a kind of triumphal march across the Empire.

At length the great procession reached the place where the illustrious dead was to be laid. The whole country round had gathered to witness the proceedings, for never before, in this region at least, had such a magnificent funeral been witnessed by any one. There were civil mandarins of various ranks, dressed in their official robes, with their retinues and attendants and gorgeous sedan chairs. There were also the highest military mandarins of the province, with long lines of soldiers, that had been ordered by imperial edict to do honour to the dead by their presence.

And now the coffin was lowered into the grave amid the blare of trumpets and the loud wailing of the mourners dressed in sackcloth, whilst crowds gazed on the scene from every little rising ground, and the proud and haughty officials pondered with solemn faces upon the honour that had been done that day to a man who had risen from such a humble condition in life.

One would have imagined that as the mandarins, or rulers of the country, are all recruited from the ranks of the people, they would naturally be in sympathy with them, and would do [Pg 276] their utmost to deliver them from the tyranny and oppression from which they too often suffer, but this is not the case. The fact is the mandarins, as a whole, are the great curse of the nation. They are rapacious and exacting. They have no regard for justice or mercy, when these conflict with their own self-interests, and they are the bitter opponents of any plans of reform, knowing that the carrying out of such would endanger their own vested interests, and deprive them of the arbitrary powers they now possess.

In order to give the reader some practical idea of what are the duties and responsibilities of a mandarin, I propose to select one and describe him as graphically as I can, so that one may have a picture of him before the mind's eye. For this purpose, I shall take the "County Mandarin," for though there are many others that are superior to him in rank, there is not one whose duties are so multifarious, or who is so responsible for the order and good government of his district as he is.

He has three titles by which he is equally well known throughout the whole of the Empire. The first of these is the "County Mandarin," because he is the chief official in it, and his authority is the predominant one throughout the whole of the county. Even in cases where his immediate superior wishes any action to be carried out within his jurisdiction, he has to request the county mandarin to see it executed. The second of his titles is "The man that knows the County," from the fact that it is assumed that he is so intimately acquainted with everything that goes on within his district that nothing can possibly happen in it without his being thoroughly cognizant of it. This assumption of course is an utterly ridiculous one, as it would be manifestly absurd to suppose that any mortal man could know what is happening by day or night throughout a large county. The title, however, which has come down from [Pg 277] the past, and which the man accepted when he took office, serves to make him responsible

for all that goes on within his jurisdiction. The theory of the Chinese Government that every one in some way or other is responsible for what may take place in society, enables it to at once put its finger on the person who has to be dealt with in the case of any infraction of the law, though he himself may not be the individual who has committed the offence.

A murder, for example, is committed during the darkness of the night. It was done in some alleyway and there is no trace of those who killed the man. The bailiff of the ward is summoned to appear before the local mandarin, and he is asked if he has apprehended the murderer. He makes the excuse that the whole thing happened during the night when the whole city was asleep, and therefore he could not possibly be cognizant of what all the scamps and ruffians were doing when honest men were in their beds and were fast asleep.

That excuse, which would at once be accepted in England, would be laughed at in China, and the bailiff would be reminded that it was his business to know everything that went on in his ward, and very likely he would receive a hundred blows to refresh his memory, and the promise of as many more if the culprit were not captured within a certain limited time. By this same doctrine of responsibility, “The man that knows the County” is held by the Government to be one that must bear on his shoulders the consequences of whatever may happen in any part of the county over which he rules.

A third title that is given to the official I am describing is, “The mandarin that is the Father and Mother of the People.” This term is a very pretty one and is given to no other official. It is intended to indicate the very intimate relationship that exists between him and his people, and the tender concern that he ought to have for their welfare. As the child runs to its mother in time of trouble and gets comfort from her sympathy, so the people of a county turn to this mandarin, when they are threatened with injustice or oppression, and so he, in the spirit of a father when he sees his own son in distress, bends all his energies to protect and comfort them. This is a beautiful theory, which the ancient legislators of this country in some moment of inspiration conceived, but the actual fact is that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, instead of being a father or a mother, he is more like a hungry tiger that desires to dig its claws into the flesh of a lamb, to satisfy its appetite upon it.

The mandarin whom I am describing has just received an appointment to the county, say, of “Eternal Spring,” for which he has paid the modest sum of a thousand pounds to the high official who had the disposal of the office. He is an ambitious man, and his great aim is not only speedily to recoup himself this initial outlay, but also to lay by a considerable sum to carry with him to his ancestral home and enable him to live in easy circumstances for some years to come. As his term of office lasts only three years and his salary is not more than three hundred a year, it would seem that he would require to be a conjuror to accomplish these two objects in the limited time at his command.

That he can do, and in the great majority of cases actually does perform, such remarkable financial legerdemain is a fact that is entirely due to the vicious system on which the whole civil service in China is based. It is perfectly understood by the Government that when a mandarin is appointed to any official position under it, the squeezes he has to pay for it, and the inadequate salary he will receive for his services, are all to be met and supplemented by what he can wring out of the people. This system is as old as the nation, and has become so inwrought and worked into its very fibre, that a new creation of national life would seem to be essential before it could be eradicated from the body politic. When the mandarin arrives at his Yamen, which is his residence and the place where all the official business of the county is transacted, he is met by the whole staff of men who are to assist him in the arduous duties that fall to him as the chief magistrate in the large district he has been appointed to rule. These consist of a private secretary, an interpreter, a number of writers who write dispatches and conduct any correspondence that may arise, a large body of policemen, or runners as they are generally called in the East, and a dozen disreputable-looking men who form the retinue of the mandarin, when he is called out to settle disturbances in any part of his large field, or adjudicate on cases that have to be tried on the spot.

Nominally he is responsible for all the salaries that this great crowd of men receive, and one wonders how he manages to pay them all out of his three hundred a year. The real fact of the case is, the only man that receives any salary from him is his private secretary. All the rest purchase the privilege of being employed in his service, and give the whole of their time free simply for being permitted to extract out of the people who come to engage in lawsuits, or from those who have fallen within the grip of the law, fees and squeezes and perquisites enough to give them a very good permanent income.

It is very interesting to watch the way in which these gentry carry on their official work, and how as ministers of justice in executing the decisions of the mandarin their one aim seems to be to extract as much out of the pockets of the people they are operating on as it is possible for them to do.

A farmer, for example, comes one day into the Yamen to lay a complaint against a rich neighbour who has taken forcible possession of some of his fields. He produces the deeds of his lands, and shows how they have been in his family for several generations and that they have never been alienated either by sale or by mortgage. The rich man has simply taken forcible possession of them because he belongs to a formidable clan, he declares, and not because he has any right to the fields.

The runners are delighted with this case, for the fact that there is a rich man in it makes it certain that some of his dollars will be transferred to their pockets. The complaint is formally accepted by the mandarin, and the court fees having been paid, a warrant is issued for the arrest of the man who has been accused.

The runners or policemen start out on their journey with light and joyous hearts. The road that leads away from the main thoroughfare takes them through rice fields, and skirts the foothills, and runs through villages, until at last it brings them by a narrow pathway to the house of the rich man they have come to arrest.

The whole village is excited by the arrival of these messengers of the law, for they are always a sign of ill omen, and the only man that can face them without being terrified is the man who knows that he has the means to satisfy their cupidity and to thus avoid being roughly handled by them. A crowd as if by magic silently gathers round the open door through which the runners have entered, and the women from the neighbouring houses collect in excited knots, and with flushed faces discuss the wonderful news of their village life.

The rich man, with as calm and as indifferent a manner as he can assume, though his heart is beating fast, comes out into the courtyard where the runners are standing and politely asks them what is their business with him. They tell him they have a warrant for his arrest for seizing some fields that belong to one of his neighbours, and the mandarin has ordered them to bring him to his court to be tried for the offence.

A POLICEMAN.

To face p. 280.

Whilst the warrant is being read, the accused has had time to collect his wits. He of course denies the accusation, and politely asks the men to be seated. At the same time he calls the cook, and declaring that they must be tired and hungry after their long walk, he orders him to at once get dinner ready for them, and in a whisper he gives him a hint that he does not wish him to spare any expense in providing such a meal as will put them in the best humour possible.

The runners freely protest that they have no time to delay, that their orders are imperative, and that the “Father and Mother of his People” is impatiently awaiting their return. This of course is all put on, for dinner is just the one thing they have been looking forward to; so pretending to yield to the entreaties of their host, they at once make themselves at home. They smoke their pipes and then laugh and chat with the members of the household, just as though they had been invited guests, and not policemen who had come to carry off the head of it to prison.

After a time, when they have got into a comfortable humour with each other, the rich man takes the head runner aside, and after a few minutes of earnest conversation and the slipping of a few dollars into his hand, an air of increased geniality seems to have suddenly sprung up between him and his uninvited guests. They are now most polite and deferential

to him, and the swaggering, bullying manner natural to them is replaced by a childlike gentleness that is really most touching. Dinner over, instead of incontinently grabbing him by the tail and hauling him along the road as their instinct would prompt them in the case of any of the common people, they part from him with smiles and bows and high-flown compliments, whilst the culprit actually stands at his door, and ostentatiously, for the benefit of the man who has accused him of stealing his fields, entreats them not to leave him too soon, and assures them that his heart will be desolated if they do not come quickly and pay him another visit. [Pg 282]

When they reach the Yamen, the "Man that knows the County" demands of them where their prisoner is. They have their story all ready, and they explain that when they reached his home they could find no trace of him, and that without any explanation to his friends he had disappeared and they could not find him. They declare, however, that they are keeping an eye upon the family, who they are convinced are hiding his movements, and that before long they will be able to arrest him and bring him before the magistrate. There is no doubt but that both the "Man that knows the County" and these scamps whose faces are dyed with the opium hue, all had their tongues in their cheeks whilst this fable was being rehearsed. Both sides know that the whole thing is a farce, but seeing that the original idea was devised by the thinkers and humorists that lived when the history of the nation was in twilight, it would not do for their far-off descendants to give the show away, and so with solemn faces they play out the thing, as though a tragedy and not a comedy were being enacted.

The runners have scarcely left the house, when the rich man hastens, as fast as he can hurry, to the city, and enters his reply to the accusation that has been laid against him. He denies that *in toto*, and produces deeds, that have been so deftly manufactured that they have the impress of a hundred years upon them, and which he declares prove decisively that the fields in question belong to him, and have come to him in proper legal succession from his forefathers.

He is careful, however, after he has put in his plea, to find out some relatives of the "Father and Mother of the People" who have followed him from his distant home for occasions like this, with whom he confers. An earnest but not an unduly prolonged conversation takes place, when a certain sum of money changes hands, which is destined to find its way into the pocket of the mandarin, and whose purpose is to give him such a clear and profound grasp of the case that he will have no difficulty in deciding that the accusation against the rich man has been a trumped-up one. [Pg 283]

Ten days go by and no further proceedings have been taken. The complainant, well aware of the cause of this, scrapes together as large a sum as he can possibly afford, and by the same underground method sends it to the "Man that knows the County," with the hope that he will be able to see the justice of his case and give him back his fields. At the same time he enters what in legal phraseology is called a hurrying petition, the object of which is to hasten the action of the mandarin so as to finish up the case without delay.

Upon the receipt of this, an order is issued to the runners to go and arrest the accused with all possible dispatch and bring him to the Yamen so that he may be tried. The previous farce such as I have already described is once more gone through. The runners are received with lavish hospitality and a certain number of dollars are transferred to their pockets, that put a smile on their features that lights them all up and that spreads away to the back of their necks, till it finally vanishes down their tails into thin air. On their return to the Yamen they report that the man is still away from home, and though they have made diligent inquiries they have not yet been able to trace his whereabouts.

And so the case goes on, bribes being paid by both sides that go to swell the gains of the "Father and Mother of his People," whilst fees also are squeezed out of them by the runners, who, as in some difficult cases in Chancery in England, grow fat upon the spoils that they extract out of both the complainant and defendant. Finally, after many months of vexatious delays, when the whole hungry tribe in the Yamen see that no more money can be got out of either side, the case is tried, when some compromise is suggested and the parties leave the court fully convinced that there is no such thing as justice in China. [Pg 284]

The mandarins in this land take a very Oriental idea of what their duty is in regard to crime. They act upon the principle that unless it is legally brought before them, and a complaint is entered in their court, they will take no cognizance of it. Two large and wealthy villages have a quarrel, a very common thing in China. The feud grows and the passions become excited till finally they determine to take up arms and settle the case by a fight. To get the aid of the supernatural on their behalf, each side appeals to the village god, that is the patron of the clan, to know whether it approves of the taking up of arms. Almost invariably the idol does so, and in addition promises to give their side victory in the coming struggle.

All the old rusty jingals are brought out and furbished up; gunpowder is bought, and spears and cruel-looking pronged instruments that have been hidden away when there was no occasion for them, are thrown into the common stock and are served out to the young bloods who have been getting blue-mouldy for want of a beating.

Fighting now goes on every day, and other villages round about take sides with one of the parties, till sometimes as many as thirty, divided into different camps, are at open war with each other. Fields are desolated, and crops are ruthlessly destroyed. All this time the

"Father and Mother of his People" knows exactly what is going on, but as he has never been officially informed of it, he acts on the assumption that the district where men are being murdered is at absolute peace. Not a soldier is sent to apprehend the lawbreakers, and no notice whatever is taken of the fact that combatants are being seized and subjected to the most horrible tortures, whilst they can get no redress from the constituted authorities who ought to protect them. [Pg 285]

The fact of the matter is the mandarin is simply waiting his time, and when that arrives he will come in force and rake in the golden harvest that awaits him. In these clan fights it invariably happens that after a time both sides become tired of the whole business, and mediators are appointed to bring the two sides to terms with each other. This process goes on smoothly until the question as to how much blood-money should be paid for those who have been killed on each side arises. Where an even number have fallen in the struggle the solution of the difficulty is an easy one, but when the number of the slain is greater on one side than on the other, it is in nearly every case necessary to appeal to the mandarin to get him to use his authority to settle the matter. It is then that he finds his opportunity of making a lot of money out of both the belligerent parties. They have broken the law, he tells them, by carrying on war in his Majesty's dominions, and he must fine them for daring to take this liberty. In many cases he has been known to return to his Yamen thousands of dollars richer than when he left it.

In the question of crime, the democracy is allowed a much larger liberty than is the case in the West. With the exception of rebellion, or any overt act against the Government, a Chinaman may commit the most atrocious misdemeanours without being held responsible to the authorities, unless, indeed, some formal complaint has been made against him. Murder, for example, is a crime that in nine cases out of ten is always settled by the families concerned, by a payment of blood-money. They will fight and wrangle, and discuss for days together as to the compensation that is demanded, but when once the amount has been settled and paid the whole thing is finished, and society never dreams that the murderer owes anything to it, or that he ought to atone to it for the injury he has done it in killing one of the members of it. [Pg 286]

It is interesting to observe how the mandarin, with his impecunious staff, who all represent the majesty of law in this Empire, systematically assist certain classes of people to evade the law of the land, in consideration of a regular payment being made to allow them to do so. Take gambling, for instance. The gambling instinct is one of the strongest passions by which the whole of the Chinese race may be said to be moved. There is no class exempt from it. The rich and the poor, the men of learning in common with the coolie who earns his living on the streets, refined ladies and the wives and daughters of the labouring classes, all have this passion in their blood. This is so well recognized by their rulers that gambling is strictly forbidden throughout the Empire. There are standing laws against it which forbid the indulgence of it in any form whatsoever. There is only one exception to this, and that is during the first three days in the new year. Then the nation gambles openly, and tables are placed on the streets, around which crowds of men gather; and in the homes the women, forgetful of their duties, are so absorbed over their cards and dice that until the fourth day, when the gambling must stop, they seem to be driven with as mad a passion for gain as are the men on the streets.

Now the mandarin and his low-class, opium-dyed gang of followers take advantage of this terrible weakness of the people to make money out of it; and so a stranger to the ways of China would be immensely astonished to find that in the market towns, and especially in those where regular fairs are held, gambling shops where games of chance are played openly before the public everywhere exist, and crowds of country bumpkins, drawn by the universal passion, gather round the tables and, forgetful of time, lose all sense of everything else, and become absorbed in the changing figures of the board that bring them either fortune or despair. [Pg 287]

You naturally ask how it is that in a country where gambling is so strictly forbidden, that here is a shop entirely given up to that vice, and that openly and in sight of the crowds that usually flock to a fair, the place is packed with men who make no attempt at disguising what they are engaged in. You will soon discover that the owner of the place pays a certain settled sum into the Yamen that is divided amongst the "Man that knows the County" and his disreputable set of underlings; and should any policeman happen to have official business in the fair, and were passing along the street and saw the eager, noisy gamblers gathered round the tables, he would profess the utmost ignorance as to what was going on in that disreputable place. Should any of the more respectable inhabitants make a formal complaint against the betting and gambling fraternity, the magistrate would appear to be filled with indignation, and runners would be sent to apprehend the lawbreakers to bring them before him to be punished according to law. They would find, however, when they arrived that every trace of gambling had been removed, and only perhaps a young lad would be found, with an innocent-looking face, selling peanuts and candies. The fact is, before they started with their warrant from the mandarin, they sent on a swift-footed messenger ahead of them to warn the men they were coming, and telling them to clear out.

China is a country full of lofty ideas. These are found in the writings of the sages. They are pasted up in crimson strips of paper on the doorposts of the houses and shops in every city in the Empire. They are found staring at one over the temples of the gods, and on the lofty [Pg 288]

doors of the Yamens, so that one would suppose that these latter were churches where the highest morality and the profoundest of theological teachings were being daily expounded. There is no place indeed that is considered so bad that a public sense of decency would demand that they should be excluded from it. Low, miserable opium dens, and houses of ill-fame, and gambling hells, and homes that are the abode of thieves are adorned with the most exquisite sentences full of the highest morality, and seemingly culled with the greatest care from the vast repertory that the language contains, as if to condemn the very vices that are rampant within.

One would imagine that these beautiful and choice epitomes of all the virtues would have made the Chinese a highly moral and virtuous people, but they have not done so. The exquisite sentences that give you a thrill as you read them for the first time, stare down upon the inmates and upon the passers-by without the remotest apparent effect upon any one. The opium-hued runner, and the mandarin whose sole aim is to enrich himself, pass in and out of the Yamen with sentences that extol righteousness and benevolences as the highest virtues, but the Yamen remains unchanged, and continues to be the abode of the greatest villainies. It is an undoubted fact that it has the worst reputation for roguery and cheating and chicanery, and the violation of all justice, of any other place throughout the kingdom.

This is no new development of modern times, but has been in existence from ages immemorial.[4] It is not, moreover, the result of any class legislation, for all the mandarins spring from the masses, and therefore all their vices and defects are inherited from them. There needs a renovation of the whole social fabric to make men honest in life, and to cause them to refrain from the practice of things that would never be tolerated in the common life of the Englishman of to-day. The methods of judicial procedure in China are entirely different from those in the West. There is no jury, no summoning and questioning of witnesses, and no lawyers to defend their clients or to expound the law, so as to deliver them from any penalties they might have incurred. Everything is left in the hands of the judge, who takes whatever view may seem to him to be the best in the case, and to decide without any reference to law books or statutes or to legal precedents.

A case, for example, is going to be tried. A man is accused of robbing a grave, one of the most heinous crimes of which a Chinaman can be guilty. As it is one of the axioms of Chinese law that an accused person is assumed to be guilty, he is brought in forcibly and with brutal roughness by some of the runners, wildly declaring that he is absolutely guiltless of the offence with which he is charged.

This protestation is, of course, taken as a kind of joke that every prisoner is accustomed to make, so he is forcibly bumped down on to his knees, whilst his head is made to strike the ground with a sound that is heard throughout the court. The judge looks on him with a stern and solemn visage, and enlarges on the enormity of his crime. He must be guilty, for how otherwise would he be here charged with this offence? The mandarin calls upon him to confess, but as he refuses to do this, but, on the contrary, adheres to his statement that he is innocent, a signal is given to the runners, who proceed to beat him most unmercifully, till his cries ring throughout the building, and he calls in the most piteous tones to all present to bear witness that he never committed the crime with which he is charged. After a time, seeing that he remains obstinate, the castigation is stopped, and the man, bleeding and wounded, is dragged out by his tail by the runners and thrown into a dismal dungeon, with some dirty straw in a corner, and where he can consider whether he will confess as the mandarin commands him, or whether he will consent to endure the barbarous treatment he will receive till he does.

A few days pass by, and he is again dragged into the court and the same process is repeated, until at last, exhausted by his sufferings and unable to endure the horrible tortures to which he is subjected, he finally confesses that he did rob the grave. This is exactly what the mandarin has been manœuvring for, for according to Chinese common law procedure, no prisoner can be condemned, and there can be no execution of his sentence, until he has signed with his own hand his confession that he is guilty. It would seem to the unsophisticated mind of the Barbarian that has never been enlightened by the civilizing influences of the sages, that criminal law would find itself at a complete standstill, seeing that no man would be willing to sign his own condemnation.

This, however, is an utter mistake. The mandarin has ways and means of persuading a refractory prisoner to make just the very confession that will justify him in punishing him to the full extent that he believes he deserves. There is the prison where a man may be slowly starved, and chains and manacles, and stout bamboo rods wielded by sturdy brawny arms that no touch of pity ever weakens. These can be used with such steady, unfaltering perseverance that life becomes intolerable, and the poor fellow would be ready to sign a hundred criminating documents rather than continue to endure the tortures that are inflicted upon him.

In the above accounts of the methods of judicial procedure in China, I have selected cases that are of constant occurrence throughout the Empire. How a nation with such a system of judicature has managed not only to exist, but also to retain a vitality such as China has to-day, is a marvel that testifies to the law-abiding character of the Chinese race. The mandarin of to-day is about as mean and as ignoble a specimen of a ruler as can be conceived, but he

has always been the same. He is a product of the ages. All the teachings of the sages in which he is an adept, have never been able to produce a better. The people universally hate and loathe him. He is the synonym for oppression, injustice, and cupidity, and yet when a man rises from the ranks and is numbered amongst this aristocracy of power, he never remembers the loathing of the people for this class, whose name is distasteful to all honest men. It is quite true that one does occasionally meet with a high-minded and honourable mandarin, but he is simply an exception that proves the rule. The love and devotion that the people manifest to such an exceptional character as this only shows what a longing men have for those to rule over them who shall exhibit in their lives some of the higher virtues by which human life is adorned.

The mandarin being untrammelled by juries or by precedents or by statute books, and often having to depend upon his own mother wit to find out the truth in some intricate case that comes before him, is accustomed to use independent and original methods that would shock the legal mind of our judges in England. Not so in this land, where they are applauded by those who hear of them as being exceedingly ingenious and as showing the subtle character of the minds of those who devised them. A description of some of these may be interesting to the reader.

On one occasion a farmer was going to market with two huge bundles of firewood that balanced on a bamboo pole he was to carry on his shoulder from his farm to the neighbouring market town. Just before leaving, his wife thrust some yards of cotton cloth that she had woven into one of the bundles, and asked him to take them to the draper's and dispose of them for her at the best price he could get for them.

Arriving at the town, he applied at the house of a rich scholar to whom he had been accustomed to sell, and asked if he wanted to buy any firewood. Finding that he did, he saw that the bundles were duly weighed and paid for; when, walking down the narrow, ill-paved street and congratulating himself that he had disposed of his wood so easily, he suddenly remembered that he had forgotten all about the cloth that had been hidden in one of them. Hastily retracing his steps, he explained to the purchaser that there was some cotton cloth belonging to his wife concealed amongst the wood, and he would be infinitely obliged to him if he would kindly take it out and give it to him.

The man protested that it was quite a mistake to say that there was any cloth in either of the bundles. They had both been taken to pieces, but nothing of the kind was found in them. He must have dropped it by the way, or his wife may at the last have forgotten to put it in.

The farmer, perfectly certain that the cloth was in the possession of the rich man, and seeing no way of obtaining redress, wended his way to the Yamen of the mandarin to ask his advice on the matter. This man happened to be one whose reputation for ferreting out crime was the admiration of all the country round. He listened to the farmer's story very attentively, and after a few pertinent questions he sent one of his runners and ordered the suspected man to come and see him at once. When he came he vigorously denied that the cloth was amongst the wood he had bought, and he declared that the farmer had trumped up this false charge against him and ought to be severely punished. "The Man that knows the County" seemed to sympathize with all that he said, and rather inclined to side with him against the poor farmer. "Is it at all likely, your Excellency," he said, "that I, a wealthy man, would do such a mean and dishonourable act as to rob a man of an article only worth two or three shillings in value?"

In reply to this, the mandarin begged to be excused for a moment, and going into a side room he called one of his runners, and told him to go to the wife of the rich man and tell her that her husband had confessed that they had the piece of cloth in their possession, and that she was to hand it over to the runner, who would bring it to the mandarin. Fully believing this story, she brought the stolen cloth out of the hiding place where it had been placed for concealment, and handed it over to the policeman. It may be easily understood how utterly dumfounded the culprit was when the runner walked in with the stolen cloth in his hand, and how delighted the farmer was when it was handed over to him by the "Father and Mother of his People." Turning to the rich man, the mandarin addressed him in very stern language upon the meanness of his offence. "I do not like to send you to prison," he continued, "for that would degrade you in the sight of the people and the members of your family. My Yamen is out of repair, and if you will call a builder and have it thoroughly overhauled, I shall be willing to let you off any further punishment." As this would cost him fully a hundred pounds, it will be quite evident that he paid dearly for trying to rob the farmer of his cloth.

One day a mandarin was being carried along a certain road in his sedan chair, when a man who had been having a quarrel with another appealed to him to defend him against an attempt that was being made to wrong him. He explained that as he was walking along the road, it began to rain, and seeing a stranger who had no umbrella he offered to share his with him as far as they went together. Now when they were about to part, the man claimed that the umbrella was his, and had forcibly taken it away from him. "The Man who knows the County" declared that it was rather a difficult case to settle, because there was no outside evidence to be got to help him to a decision. There was simply one man's word against the other, so he decided that the umbrella should be cut in two and a half given to each.

There was no appeal against this action of the mandarin, and so the men went off, with the hacked and mangled pieces of the umbrella, much to the amusement of the crowd that had gathered to witness this impromptu trial on the road. They had not gone many yards ahead when the official called one of his runners, and ordered him to follow the two men, listen to their conversation, and mark which one of them was most severe in his condemnation of his judgment. He was then to apprehend them both and bring them to his Yamen, where he would give his final decision on the matter.

In a short time both men were brought into court, when the runner reported that the man that claimed that the umbrella was originally his, and that out of good nature had shared it with the other, was most indignant at what he called the unjust decision of the judge. The other individual, on the other hand, treated the whole thing as a joke, and highly applauded the conduct of the mandarin. “The Father and Mother of his People” addressed the latter in the severest terms. He spoke of his ingratitude and baseness of heart in returning a kindness in such a dastardly way as he had done, and he ordered him to buy a new umbrella and give it to the man he had wronged as a punishment for his offence. He issued also an order that he should be made to wear the cangue[5] for a fortnight, and that he should be made to parade up and down in front of the house of the man he had maligned during the day, and be shut up in prison during the night. This decision gave great satisfaction to every one excepting the man who was so seriously affected by it.

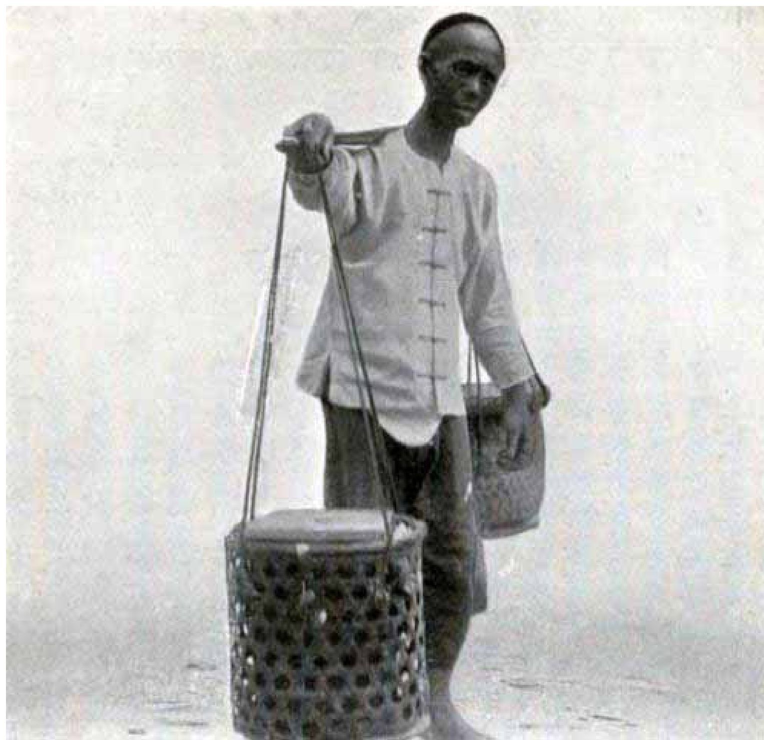
If money could only be eliminated out of the life of a mandarin he would cease to be the despicable character he often is. In their private life they are kind and hospitable and have the courtly manners of gentlemen. In their public capacity, when a bribe is not in view, they have a desire as a rule to do justice in the cases that are brought before them. In some respects they are much to be pitied. As no man may be a higher official in his own province, it follows that he has to live far away from his home and his friends, amongst people strange to him, who often speak a different language from his own. It is true that his wife and children accompany him to his new position, but they never cease to long to be back again at the place where their kindred dwell. To be a mandarin means power and the facility for acquiring a fortune, but it means also exile for the time being from the ancestral home, and constant danger of being involved with the higher authorities should any of his mistakes or his misdeeds be brought to light.

CHAPTER XIV

PEDDLER LIFE IN CHINA

The Chinese thrifty—Nothing wasted—Besides regular shopkeepers, there are itinerant dealers—The “candy man”—His various kinds of sweets—The “sweets and sours man”—The cloth peddler—Describe him minutely—The pork peddler—The jewellery peddler—The fortune-teller.

The Chinese are a thrifty race. Stern necessity and a widespread poverty that has placed vast masses of them on the very borderland of starvation, have compelled the nation to exercise economies such as are absolutely unknown in the richer lands of the West. We get some idea of the narrow line that divides countless numbers of people from absolute want, by the fact that with regard to food there is nothing of that ever wasted in China. “Wilful waste brings woeful want” is a proverb that Chinese in common life would have great difficulty in understanding, or indeed in any rank of society. The famines that have in all ages desolated great regions in China, and the desperate struggle that is constantly going on for simply enough to eat, have surrounded food as it were with a halo, that would make it seem like sacrilege to misuse what we should throw away as useless or positively hurtful.



A PEDDLER.

A SHOEMAKER AT WORK ON THE STREET.

To face p. 296.

On one occasion, I was travelling in the interior, when I was disturbed by a violent explosion of wrath on the part of the captain of the boat. He was evidently incensed beyond measure with one of the members of the crew, and he used the strongest language in condemnation of him. They were all gathered round the great rice pan having their evening meal, and with every mouthful that was taken out of the bowl that contained the condiment to go with their rice, the anger of the captain blazed out in a fresh burst of indignation. "What is the matter," I at last asked, "and why are you making such a row over your meal?" "Matter!" he replied, "there is a great deal of matter, that is quite enough to make one as angry as I am. Do you see this man?" he said, pointing with his chopsticks to the delinquent upon whom his wrath was being expended. "I sent him this afternoon to the market to buy some oysters to eat with our rice this evening, and he had not the sense or the nose to buy good ones. He allowed the dealer to cheat him most egregiously, for the oysters are not simply tainted—which would not have seriously mattered—they are positively stinking, and the taste is so offensive that we can hardly get them down without being sick." "But are you really going to eat them?" I asked, with a look of consternation on my face. "Eat them! of course we are; you would not have us waste the food, would you? We have paid for it, and we certainly could not afford to lose our money," and the whole crew went on popping the unsavoury, unhealthy morsels into their mouths, grumbling all the time at the man who was the cause of

their discomfort, but who in order to cover his mistake pretended to be perfectly satisfied with the almost putrid oysters that one could smell from a distance.

The preciousness of food and the jealous care that is taken not only of what is wholesome and appetizing, but also of what would be rejected by our poor in England as positively uneatable, show unmistakably how near the greater part of the nation is to the ragged edge of destitution and want. The result is that the desire to maintain life in the fierce struggle that the masses have for mere existence has made the Chinese amongst the most industrious people in the world. Mere poverty alone would not have developed this feature in the national character, had there not been a deep instinct of industry in the race which has tended to develop industrial habits that permeate every class of society. [Pg 298]

The whole population of China has been roughly divided by one of its great thinkers into four classes, the scholars, the farmers, the workmen, and the tradesmen. As the last-named produce nothing, but simply deal in articles that other hands have manufactured, they stand the lowest in the estimation of the public, and are deemed of less service to the community than any of the other three. The scholar is the thinker without whom no State can ever rise in intelligence or in civilization. The farmer is the man that tills the soil and produces the food of the nation. Without him the people would perish, or revert to their primitive state when they were compelled to hunt the wild beasts in the forests and live a wretched, precarious life. The workman supplies society with everything that is needed for the necessities or the luxuries of everyday life, and transforms by his skill the raw material into the thousand and one forms that are needed for the comfort of the persons or the homes of the entire nation.

The tradesman is neither an originator nor an inventor, and his contribution, therefore, to the assets of the country is not to be compared to those that the three other classes are continually making for the benefit of the community. In spite, however, of the inferior position that is assigned to him, the tradesman occupies a very prominent position in the public eye, for the Chinaman, in addition to all his other qualifications, is a man who is imbued with a passion for trade.

The towns and cities of the Empire are full of shops, and men with as keen wits as can be found in any country in the world are constantly on the alert as to how they shall make their business boom. The fairs and markets, too, that are regularly held all over the kingdom, are popular gatherings where the farmers can indulge in the national love for driving a bargain.

[Pg 299] Outside of the regular traders, however, who have capital and business places where they can carry on their trade, there is a vast army of peddlers who are everywhere to be met with, and are a recognized institution, supplying a distinct want that the regular shopkeepers are not always prepared to do.

The first of these that I shall describe is the “candy man.” This itinerant dealer in sweets is one of the most popular of all the men that are to be found appealing to the public for a living. His outfit consists of two baskets on which boards are placed, where he daintily arranges the delicacies that are to prove so attractive to old and young, that the stock that he has laid in may soon be turned into hard cash. He will then be able to return home with his heart full of gladness because of the speed with which he has been able to dispose of his fascinating goods. From past experience he knows exactly where to place his baskets with their tempting wares, so that he may be within easy call of those that are likely to become customers of his. It is usually under the spreading branches of a great banyan, where loungers congregate to catch the breezes that are ever wandering about beneath the huge boughs that stretch out almost horizontally as though to shield those that seek their shelter from the great, hot, blazing sun. Or he takes his stand at the junction of two or more roads where people are constantly passing, and near which he may know there are a good many children living.

No sooner has he settled upon the spot where he hopes to commence business than he ostentatiously makes a clanking sound with a huge pair of shears, that are very much like those that the tailors use for cutting in England, but which he employs to cut off lengths of toffy for those who would buy from him. The sound of these jangling shears acts like magic upon all the youngsters within hearing distance, and with mouths watering they gather round his baskets to gaze in rapture upon the array of good things, so temptingly laid out, that he has for sale. [Pg 300]

Most of the lads have a few cash with them, but they delay buying because they have not yet quite made up their minds what they are going to invest in, and besides, it gives them an air of importance to keep the man waiting; which he does with the greatest good nature, knowing that any sign of impatience would drive his customers away, whilst with patience and tact he is sure of drawing from their pockets every cash that they possess.

His stock-in-trade consists of great slabs of what the Americans call peanut candy. This is made, as the name indicates, from a combination of the best white sugar and peanuts. These are boiled together in a great cauldron, and stirred and stirred, till they are thoroughly mixed and the now consistent mixture has been cooked, so that it can be emptied on a board. It is then allowed to cool somewhat, when it is rolled by a wooden roller to a certain thickness, after which it is ready to be eaten.

The combination of the sugar and the peanuts makes a very pleasant and succulent compound. The latter gives a nutty flavour to the former, whilst the sugar imparts some of its own essence to the nuts, and a mixture of flavours is produced that is popular amongst all classes.

In addition to the candy, the peddler has also a very delicate sweet that is less substantial, but none the less popular because a larger amount can be bought for the same money. The material out of which it is made is moist sugar, as white as the manufacturers can produce it. This is put into a large pan and boiled over a slow fire. After a certain time it is turned by the heat into a very consistent and a very sticky substance. At the proper moment this is taken out of the pan and transferred to a board, where it is moulded with deft and knowing fingers into a length of two or three yards.

Then begins a most peculiar process that is to change the whole character of the material before us. It is first of all stretched with a cunning hand just as far as it will go without actually snapping. It is then doubled back on itself and pulled again to the breaking-point, and so on time after time until the work is done.

During this peculiar manipulation, the sweet has undergone a remarkable change. From a dark, almost black colour, it has been turned into a golden hue, and from being dense and heavy it is light and flaky, so that when it is cut into lengths for sale, each one looks like a stalactite that might have been taken out of Fingal’s Cave. A bite from one of these crumbles at once in the mouth and a crackling sound is heard and a beautiful aroma is perceived, and before one has hardly had time to realize it, the sweet has dissolved.

Another thing that the eager eyes of the little fellows catch amongst the dainties is molasses candy, made in the orthodox home fashion, but cut into little squares and sold for just one cash apiece, which is about the thousandth part of two shillings. This is cheap and therefore popular, for it will stand a good deal of sucking before it disappears, which is a consideration with the generality of the buyers, for their finances are not usually in a very flourishing condition.

Besides the above there is real sugar candy, not in sticks, but in lumps as they have come from the sugar refinery. There are also a great variety of sugar-coated combinations that all have their patrons, and as the little knots of purchasers come in from different directions at the well-known call of the peddler, one marks how varied are the tastes of the lads by the way in which they select the articles they like from those laid out so temptingly on the boards that contain his stock.

 Another very popular peripatetic merchant is the man who is popularly known as the seller of “sweets and sours.” Like the man already described, the people that patronize him the most are the children, though a goodly proportion of his sales is made to persons of all ages. His goods consist entirely of fruits prepared in such tempting and fascinating ways that the general public is ready to put their hands in their pockets at the sound of the little bell that announces the presence of this popular caterer to the public taste.

He has quite an assortment of all the most popular fruits that are known in Chinese life. He has the arbutus, which at a rough glance appears very much like a strawberry, though it is really essentially different, for it has a large stone, and even when it is fully ripe it has a decidedly tart taste about it. He has these in several distinct forms, so as to meet the wishes of those who vary in their views as to how the fruit should be eaten. Some have been prepared with the slightest dash of sugar, so that the sour and sweet are so nicely adjusted that both can be distinctly perceived as it is slowly eaten by the purchaser. Some, again, have been so deluged with sugar, that the naturally acid flavour has almost vanished, and there remains but a remnant of the old nature left to modify the ultra-sweetness of the sugar. Others, again, have been dried in the sun until nearly all the juice has vanished. They have then been steeped in brine, and the combination of salt and tart that is the result has a fascination for some that one can hardly understand.

All these are strung on thin slips of bamboo in fives, and the buyer holding these in his fingers can slip them off one by one into his mouth without soiling his fingers. Three or four cash is the usual price for this delicacy.

In addition to these, there are plums from the country districts, and luscious-looking peaches and large fat mangoes all drenched in sugar, which has not only preserved them from decaying, but has also added a new flavour to each of them, which is specially attractive to those that favour any particular kind. Again, amongst the collection there is one fruit that always finds a ready market—the dwarf apples that are brought by the steamers and the huge merchant junks from Tientsin and Newchang in the far North of China.

A PEDDLER.

To face p. 303.

When they are thoroughly ripe they are rosy cheeked, and resemble the Baldwins that come from America and are sold by the barrowmen in London and in different parts of England, only they are diminutive, for they are only about the fourth of the size of the ordinary English apple. These are crushed flat, and the whole are allowed to lie in sugar until they are entirely permeated with it. They are then strung on the bamboo sticks and are always the chief attractions that the “sweets and sours” man has to offer to the public. As they come from a great distance, and have been rendered more perishable by the long journey they have had to travel, they are a great deal dearer than the other local productions, and so it is only those who have a larger command of money that can afford to purchase them.

This peddler has attractions that never fail to draw around him a group both of old and young, who usually enjoy their purchases on the spot. Some stand and chat with each other as they slowly crush the sweet and toothsome morsel between their teeth. Others, again, of a more meditative turn of mind, take the favourite posture of sitting on their heels, and give the whole force of their minds to the enjoying of the flavours contained in their favourite fruits. The buzz of conversation and the ready wit of the peddler, and the passing crowds that would like to join in but have not the time, and the great sun flashing down his rays upon the scene, all combine to make such gatherings as these very picturesque and very attractive to look upon.

Another well-known peddler who is very popular with the housewives is the cloth-seller. His is a form that is easily recognized, as he daily goes his round up and down the district that use and wont has made him consider to be especially his own. It is very possible, indeed, that he may have bought the right from the man that preceded him, just as with us a doctor purchases a practice and becomes the rightful successor to the man who is retiring.

He is distinguished by the fact that he carries all his stock on one of his shoulders. To carry it anywhere else would seem in the conservative eyes of the Chinese to disqualify him for his profession. As the burden he has to bear is usually over one hundred pounds in weight, it would seem an impossibility for any man unless he were a Sandow to continue day after day and for many hours in each to support such an enormous weight as this. But the fact is that they do so, and without apparently any very great effort. The men as a rule are small and wiry, and as they move along at a steady trot, without any panting or perspiring, one is apt to imagine that the goods they are carrying are not nearly so heavy as they really are.

In order to cater for the wants of the women of the houses of his district, he has to have with him specimens of every kind of dress goods that they are likely to require, and in addition a liberal supply of the more common stuffs that are worn by the poorer classes. These stocks he must have on hand, for he must take advantage of the immediate wants of his clients, and the impression that his eloquence makes upon them at the time, to dispose of his wares. Were he to depend upon their taking to-morrow what he has not ready for them now, he might find that their mood had changed or they were short of cash when he returned with the goods, and so his sales would be lost.

This cloth peddler is really a most advanced man, and a true pioneer in promoting liberal ideas with regard to dress. The Chinese one *beau-idéal* with regard to that is the blue cotton cloth. Just as bread in England is the staple article of the food of the masses, so that in China is the one eternal type of what is considered the proper kind of material with which to clothe the nation. The common people everywhere make that the basis of their dress. The farmers

all dress in this distressingly dull-coloured material. The common coolies and workmen of every grade in life, following the national instinct, seldom wear anything else. It is only the well-to-do or the very rich that emerge out of this universal worship of the blue cotton, and adopt silks or satins as their common wear.

The women, it is true, have a few bright colours in addition to the blue in which they appear when they are fully dressed and on holiday occasions, but for ordinary and common everyday life the blue cotton asserts its mastery, and holds its own against everything else.

Now this peddler is slowly causing a revolution in the ideals of the women at least. In order to advance his business he brings the newest patterns and the most attractive goods that enterprising merchants, both native and foreign, are introducing from the West. He has no large stocks in hand that he must dispose of before he can bring in new and fashionable materials. All that he possesses, or nearly so, he carries with him on his shoulder, and when they are disposed of, he simply goes to the merchant and selects other goods that he has found by experience will catch the eye of the younger women and girls that he meets on his round, and induce them to buy from him.

The great aid that this man gets in his introduction of new ideas amongst the women no doubt is Christianity. This has worked a perfect revolution in family life wherever it has been received. Not only is the condition of the women ameliorated, but their position is distinctly elevated. They are not left to the tender mercies of heathen society to be treated with the indignities to which they are constantly liable. The Church is always behind them to stand out in their defence when any wrong is going to be inflicted on them. A new power has come into the land that demands rights for them that no legislation in the past and no tradition has ever dreamed of asking. [Pg 306]

In addition to all this, there are the new methods that a faith in the gospel has developed. The custom that amounts almost to a law in China is that young women shall not be seen on the streets. They must remain indoors till they are married, and afterwards till they are getting on in years. One of the most remarkable features about the streets and roads is the few women that are seen upon them. Elderly women, with perhaps girls under ten, and slave women, are to be met with, but maidens and young married wives are a rare sight either on the public thoroughfares or on the by-ways in the country places.

The morals of China, in spite of the high ideals that have been transmitted by the sages, and that have permeated into every section of the people, are not sufficiently elevated to permit women the freedom that they have in Christian lands. Now Christianity has already begun to work a remarkable change in delivering the women of China from the bondage that an idolatrous system had imposed upon them. Whether young or old they are required to attend church on Sundays. No distinctions are allowed. The young girl of eighteen, that would never be seen out of the doors for years, the newly-married wife, the maiden that has just been betrothed, in common with elderly ladies whose sons and daughters are grown up, and the old grandmothers that travel as they like, all are expected to attend at the regular services, and no dispensation excepting absolute necessity will be given to allow them not to be present.

[Pg 307] Sunday at present is the happiest day in the week for the Christian women. They get out of their narrow, confined houses into the sunlight. They meet large numbers of their own sex in the church. They see new faces and get fresh ideas, and broader views of life. They look at the various styles of dresses, and the result is that on the morrow, when the peddler comes round, he will get orders for new kinds of materials that they would never have dreamed of had they not seen how pretty and becoming they looked on the women they had met in the church.

But listen! there is the blast of a conch shell, blown by a man whose lungs are sound, and who knows how to manipulate it so that he shall produce the greatest volume of noise, and send it echoing along the street. No need to ask who the man is, for every one is perfectly aware that it is the pork peddler who is drawing near, and now every housewife who is preparing dinner begins to count her cash to see if she can afford the luxury of pork to-day.

Pork to a Chinaman is what beef is to an Englishman. Excepting in the ports and in those centres where Europeans congregate, beef is but very rarely seen. In the interior of China, pork shops abound in every city in the Empire, but one would have to look long before he could find a beef shop. By a thoroughly conservative and orthodox Chinese the killing of cattle in order to sell their flesh for food is considered highly immoral. He would tell you that these animals help in the tilling of the soil, that therefore they are the producers of the food of the nation, and as a matter of gratitude for their services they should be saved from the indignity of being slaughtered for food. That is the way in which an orthodox Confucianist would talk when the question of eating beef might be the subject of conversation.

[Pg 308] There are no such metaphysical discussions with regard to the pig, or indeed any other animal that is used for food. Swine have precisely the same animal properties that they have in any other country, and those brought up in this extreme Eastern land might be transported to the cabins of the Irish and they would never discover that a “furriner” had invaded their homes.

As a domestic animal the pig has the same unpleasant habits that he has in the British Isles. He likes to wallow in the mud, and feed on garbage and other insanitary matter that a horse or a cow would absolutely refuse to touch. He is on the whole a quiet and inoffensive animal, and in his restless peregrinations after food he does not care to interfere with the comfort or liberty of his neighbours. But let his usual meal time come round, and if his mistress has neglected to fill his trough with something strengthening, he will squeal and grunt and make such a fuss and a disturbance that for the peace of the household speedy steps will have to be taken to satisfy his hunger.

Were it not for his low and ungentlemanly habits, the pig would doubtless have been the national emblem of the Chinese, instead of the mysterious and inscrutable dragon, and poets would have sung his praises, and artists would have immortalized him in their paintings. There was too little romance, however, about him to allow of such an honour being put upon him, but there is no question that he is the most popular animal in the whole of the eighteen provinces. The only word in the language for flesh meat is one that means pork, and throughout the four hundred millions of people, the one popular dish that makes all eyes glisten about meal times is the one that is composed of some preparation of the succulent flesh of this animal.

The pork peddler, as already intimated, is known by the powerful blasts that he blows from a sea shell. His outfit is of the simplest. It consists of two baskets, on one of which a board is spread, and the pork is laid out in a dainty fashion so as to tempt the intending purchasers to buy what they want. In the other are thrown odds and ends, for the peddler has really no need for it, as its main idea is to form a kind of balance so that he may be able to carry his load with comfort from the bamboo pole that rests on one of his shoulders.

Lying beside the pork is a large chopper, with which he cuts off the pieces that his customers may desire, and a steelyard for weighing his sales. As he rests his apparatus in front of some houses, he is soon surrounded by a little knot of people, some of them with private steelyards of their own, in order to test whether the peddler's has not been doctored, so as to cheat them of their due weight.

Sometimes when the peddler has had his pork watered there is great dissatisfaction, and no one will buy from him unless he sells at a considerably reduced price. This watering is a vicious custom that prevails largely amongst all butchers, and is intended to make it possible to sell the meat at a lower rate to the very poor. The way it is managed is to pump a quantity of water down the main arteries of the animal immediately after it is killed until the whole animal is saturated with it. As this injection of water drives out the blood, the flesh has a pale, anæmic look that tells the secret, and the aim of the peddler is to conceal this from the public by plastering the flesh over with the blood that flowed from the body when the animal was killed. This is the universal practice of the trade, though it does not deceive a single person, nor can it give the healthy look to the pork that the unwatered meat has.

No doubt this wretched system exists because the peddler can sell cheaper, and as cash are few and precious amongst the poor, the national delicacy would certainly be less attainable by large numbers of them were they to have to pay the higher price that is demanded for the unwatered article.

It is very amusing to watch the group that has gathered round the peddler, and to note how keen the Chinese are in everything where bargaining is concerned. The instinct of trade is deep seated within them, and they seem to have a positive enjoyment in the mere chaffering and bargaining, and in the final victory of a few cash that would seem to us such a trifling gain that we would not condescend to spend any time over the transaction. Here is a man that is evidently an important one, for he comes up with a dignified air and with his steelyard in his hand, as though he were going to buy the whole of the peddler's stock-in-trade. After many uncomplimentary remarks about the pork, and declaring that it is of very poor quality and would be found tough in the eating, he selects a piece that seems to have caught his eye, and he requests the man to cut that off for him.

He does so, weighs it with his steelyard, and in doing this he allows himself the liberal margin of the sixteenth of an ounce, so as to add to his profits and to save himself from any loss in the weight. The purchaser has an eagle eye, and watches this weighing with a very suspicious glance. The Chinese are adepts in manipulating the steelyard, so as to make it weigh heavier or lighter according as they desire. Besides, as there is no standard to which the dealers must conform, and no inspectors of weights and measures to help to keep them honest, there is constant friction between buyers and sellers as to the true weight of the article that is being disposed of.

The man says, "Let me weigh the pork," and fixing it on the hook that is attached to his steelyard, he declares after a very careful manipulation of the instrument that it is lighter by two-sixteenths than the peddler was going to charge him for. This results in a wordy contest between the two men, and a weighing and reweighing by each, and an appeal to the crowd, and even to Heaven itself, as to the justice of each man's statement. Finally the dispute is settled by splitting the difference, which probably gives the true weight of the pork, and the people who sided with the purchaser, because of the prospective contests they are going to have with the peddler when they have their purchases weighed, declare that the principles of Heaven have been vindicated, and now every one ought to be satisfied. As the whole amount in dispute amounted to about one-sixth of a penny, and the time spent in adjusting

the matter occupied fully ten minutes, whilst numerous appeals to heaven and earth and to the consciences of the peddler and the purchaser were pointedly made to them by the onlookers, it did really seem ludicrous and hardly worth the candle to go through such an amount of fuss for so small a sum as was involved either way.

After the question is settled amicably, and both parties have saved their face, the peddler ties the pork with a rush, gathered from the banks of some mountain stream, deftly makes a loop to act as a handle, and hands it to the man. Immediately an elderly woman from a neighbouring house selects a piece which weighs exactly two ounces, and for this she hands him cash to the value of about three halfpence. There is no paper needed to wrap it in, for the rush again comes into requisition, and with the loop in her forefingers she bears it away without any danger of violating the proprieties, or of soiling the meat by the dust that might have gathered on her hands.

Another very popular peddler is the middle-aged woman who goes round with a very unpretending-looking basket that contains all kinds of jewellery, such as women in the middle and upper classes are accustomed to wear. All these may be purchased at any of the goldsmiths’ shops in the city, but as the younger women are not allowed to go out and visit these for themselves, they gladly welcome the travelling jeweller, from whose store they can [Pg 312] pick and choose the precise ornaments they wish to buy.

Articles of jewellery hold an important place in the dress of the Chinese women. As they do not wear hats or bonnets in the coldest weather, or when the sun in all his strength is pouring forth his fiery rays in the height of summer, a woman is never supposed to be completely dressed unless she has a certain number of golden or silver hairpins stuck in her hair, and bracelets on her wrists. In addition to these she must have some sprays of flowers, either natural or artificial, before she is dressed well enough to receive visitors or go outside of her own door. The laws of etiquette are very severe on this point, and even amongst the lowest classes, a woman who is old enough to go out on business of any kind must wear her earrings and have flowers in her hair, unless she wishes to be looked upon with a great deal of suspicion.

The articles of jewellery are of a very miscellaneous character. Those used on the head are long, dagger-looking pins, made of gold and inlaid with kingfisher’s feathers. They are meant really to add to the beauty of the coiffure, and not to keep their hair from falling down, for that is tied with red silk and plastered with unguents, so that it needs no further aid to keep it in position.

Next in importance to these are the bracelets that figure very largely in the toilette of the women of all classes. They are chiefly made of gold and silver and jadestone, and vary in prices from a few shillings up to as many pounds.

The rich indulge in very expensive ones and wear several on each arm. The poorer women are pleased if they can afford to get one silver one, whilst those in the lowest ranks never dream of aspiring to any such luxury.

The earrings are things that every woman wears no matter what her position in life may be. When a girl is five or six years old her ears are bored. [Pg 313] This is done if possible on the tenth day of the tenth moon, as that is the one lucky day in the year when it is believed that no inflammation of the ears will follow from the process. In order to fully insure that, however, the needle that has been used for the operation must be thrown down the nearest well.

The fashion of the earrings varies in different localities, and if one is very observant, he will be able to tell the district to which a woman belongs by looking at the shape and size of her earrings. In one particular county with which the writer is familiar, the earring assumes enormous dimensions, being several inches in diameter; so large are they indeed that a child that is being nursed can easily pass its arm through one of them without any inconvenience to the mother or danger to itself.

Now the peddler has a large field in the countless homes in a considerable district in which to carry on her operations. She is usually a woman with a very fluent and persuasive tongue, who knows the foibles of women and their love for finery. She has a large stock of jewellery which she exhibits with such consummate art that women are inveigled into buying what they do not really need, and which they had no intention of purchasing.

The sight, however, of so many attractive works of art proves so irresistible that this clever dealer manages to dispose to those who can afford it many of the articles she has in her basket. The result is that some of these peddlers make in the course of years quite little fortunes, which enable them to spend their declining years in comfort and in comparative affluence.

One of these women, with whom I was acquainted, was the wife of a silversmith who had a shop in one of the principal streets of a very populous city. The business was a prosperous one, for the shop had a good reputation and the master of it was a man who knew his trade well and could produce goods that could not be surpassed by any other shop in the town. [Pg 314] The true secret of the prosperity, however, lay not with the sales that were made over the counter, but with those that were effected by the wife. She was very plain and far from prepossessing in appearance, and utterly uneducated, for the family had risen from very humble circumstances. She was a woman, however, of great natural abilities, with shrewd

common-sense, and she had the power of presenting anything she had to say in a forceful, eloquent manner that was very convincing.

She decided to take up the *rôle* of peddler, so as to increase their trade by disposing of a larger number of goods than could be done in the shop. That she was willing to do this showed her strong and independent character, for a woman that pursues this calling must be prepared for a great many rebuffs, as it is not held in the highest honour by the community at large. She persevered in her intention, and the result was that she kept the business of the shop at high pressure in order to be able to supply her with the requisite amount of goods that she was able constantly to dispose of, and in the course of years from a Chinese point of view they became quite rich.

Another peddler with less ambitious aims than the one just described is the man that gets his living by coming round to the various houses where he has got to be known, and buying the tinfoil that remains as an ash after the paper money has been burned to wooden images. The Chinese believe that the idols in order to be induced to do any service for the worshippers must be bribed by presents of money. A moderate amount of the current coin of the realm they are willing to expend in this way, but it must be limited, and so in order to make the gods believe that they are giving them vast sums, they have invented a system of paper notes, representing ingots and gold coins and common cash all done up in hundreds. Tinfoil beaten as thin almost as it will bear, is used to represent the more precious metals. In its natural colour it is supposed to be silver, and a yellow tinge is given to it when the worshipper wishes to propitiate the idol with gold. These different coloured pieces of tinfoil are pasted on coarse paper of a settled size and are then burned in the presence of the idol, who is credited with not having sense enough to know that it is being cheated. If a hundred pieces representing a hundred dollars are presented, then the god is believed to be so much the richer by that amount, and that it has stored them away in its unseen treasury where countless sums of money are being accumulated. If a hundred pieces of gold are burned, the idol is then supposed to be all the more pleased and to be ready to send down blessings on the worshipper.

After the paper has been burned the tinfoil falls down amongst the ashes and is carefully collected by the priest of the temple, who in time sells the collection to the tin-beater, who can utilize the material for future service with the idols. In some of the more popular shrines, where the gods have the reputation of being able to bestow large favours on those who worship them, the income derived from this burned and shrivelled tinfoil is very considerable. There is one famous temple that at times is visited by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, who all burn more or less of this paper money, and where the sale of the scorched and apparently useless tinfoil brings in thousands of dollars a year.

The peddler I am describing has nothing to do with the buying of the refuse tinfoil in the temples. That is kept in the hands of the authorities in each, who dispose of it to meet their current expenses. Where his business lies is amongst the families that are situated within his round. These are accustomed all more or less to offer bribes of money to their household gods whenever they wish to obtain any favour from them. With the thrift of the Chinese they always carefully pick out from the ashes what the gods were cheated into believing were precious pieces of gold and silver. The next day when the peddler makes his rounds they are sold for a few cash to him, and thus they perform the double service of bribing the gods and of putting money into their own pockets.

Of late this man has added to the original idea of being a collector of burnt tinfoil, the name by which he is popularly known amongst the Chinese, by also acting as a rag and bone merchant. As was remarked at the beginning of this chapter, nothing is wasted in China, and what would be thrown into the dust heap in England and carried away next day by the dust cart, is here carefully set aside and kept to be sold to this peddler. A sardine tin, for example, has been opened, and it seems now to be only an incumbrance and of absolutely no value. The Chinaman thinks differently, for he puts it away on a shelf in his kitchen, and when the cry of the collector of burnt tinfoil is heard heralding his approach, it is taken down and in consideration of a few cash is added to his collection of what seems useless rubbish.

A chicken is killed and all the feathers are sedulously preserved, and even the very bones that are left after it has been eaten are collected and put aside to be sold on the morrow. All kerosene tins and empty bottles, unless carefully watched by the mistress, will disappear mysteriously and no one appears to know where they have vanished to; but the peddler, if he would consent to reveal all he knows about them, could tell exactly where they are and how much he has gained by their sale.

A WAYSIDE KITCHEN.

To face p. 317.

It is a very singular thing that the characters of the various kinds of peddler seem to be influenced by the particular business in which each of them is concerned. The pork peddler has a bluff and breezy air about him, and he sends forth his blasts from his shell as though he were the advance guard of an invading army. The seller of "sweets and sours" is distinguished by a pleasing countenance on which a winning smile seems perpetually to rest. His association with children and his constant effort to win their confidence have no doubt been largely instrumental in giving this pleasant character to his face. The cloth peddler, on the other hand, has a severe and dignified countenance, as though he were conscious of the responsibility that belonged to him in being the interpreter as it were of the fashions, and the introducer of foreign goods into a land that was accustomed to look upon any one as a traitor to his country that had any traffic with anything associated with the "Outer Barbarian." [Pg 317]

The profession of the collector of burnt tinfoil has unquestionably had a demoralizing effect upon him. He is usually pale and thin, with the air of a man of broken-down fortunes. He walks along with a timid, shrinking air, as though he scented a policeman at every turn in the road, and when he looks at you it is with a kind of side glance, apparently fearful lest if he looked you straight in the face you would discover the depravity that is deep down in his heart.

Beside the above that I have attempted to describe there are many other kinds of peddlers who are equally interesting in their way. There are, for example, the vegetable seller, and the fruiterer, and the peddler that deals exclusively in needles and threads and tapes. There are also the peddlers with the travelling kitchen, and the one that may be found on the streets at all hours of the night with pork rissoles for the special benefit of opium smokers, who have a weakness for delicacies of this sort. There are, again, the peddlers who are only to be found from about nine o'clock in the evening up almost to the time when the dawn threatens to disperse the shadows of the night. These men are to be found at street corners with portable stoves and a plentiful supply of hot rice. Some of them attempt to cater not simply to the hunger of the late wanderers on the streets, but also to their fastidious appetites, for they have prepared good stocks of vermicelli, and a very pleasant combination of soft-boiled rice and oysters, so as to tempt those who would otherwise be inclined to hurry on their way homewards. [Pg 318]

There is one man who though he does not strictly belong to the class I have been discussing, yet as his life is spent on the street in his endeavour to make a living, I shall attempt to describe, and that is the fortune-teller. He is to be found in a niche on some great thoroughfare, where the crowds are passing incessantly the livelong day, and where he is just out of the crush of the living tide that surges just outside of him. His stock-in-trade is about a dozen bamboo slips with enigmatic sentences carved on each of them, that to the mind of the man who can read into the mysteries of the unknown land contain the clues to the story of each one that applies to him to have their future revealed to him or her. He has also a Java sparrow enclosed within a diminutive cage, that is believed to be the interpreter of the spirits in helping to unfold in some slight measure the secrets they hold about the men on earth.

Here is a man, for example, who comes out of the crowd with an anxious-looking face and a deep shadow resting upon it that has driven all the sunlight and joy out of it. The fortune-

teller is at once all attention, whilst the sparrow from interested motives of its own cocks up its head and takes a kind of knowing glance at the customer. The man, evidently distressed at the subject that is occupying his mind, pours forth in voluble and vivid language the story of his woes. It seems that he and a neighbour are having a lawsuit about the house in which he is now living. This man he declares to be a thoroughly unprincipled one, who has no conscience and does not know what the fear of Heaven means. [Pg 319] He has claimed the house as his own, though he has not the slightest particle of right to it; but as he belongs to a powerful clan and has plenty of money at his command, he is afraid that might will prevail and he will lose his property, and thus be deprived of his home. He explains that the case has gone before the local mandarin, but as he has not the means to bribe him and the smaller officials under him, whilst his opponent is making lavish presents to them all, he is fearful that when the matter comes to be tried the decision of the judge will be in favour of his enemy. What he would like to know now is, is there any likelihood of his gaining his case. If the fortune-teller could only give him any light on that subject that would relieve his mind he would be infinitely obliged to him.

These fortune-tellers are keen judges of human nature, and they know that men like to have pleasant answers to their requests, and so they manipulate them so that, like the Delphic Oracles, they can be interpreted either favourably or the reverse according as they eventually turn out. This man listens with the utmost attention, with a keen look on his face, and as the story becomes more intense, he sways his head from side to side as though he were deeply moved at its recital.

When it is finished he throws down the twelve divining slips of bamboo on to a little board on his knee, and asks the inquirer whether he wishes to have the assistance of the bird in his case, for this will involve him in a slight extra expense. Having expressed his willingness, the door of the little cage is opened, and the bird, that has been looking with a wistful eye on the whole of the proceedings, hops out and touches one of the slips with its beak, as though the spirits had commissioned it to select that particular one as containing their answer to the man’s request to be allowed to peer into the future.

[Pg 320] The bird waits for a moment whilst the fortune-teller drops a grain of rice in front of it, which it instantly picks up, and disappearing again into its cage, it begins to preen its feathers whilst it keeps a watchful look on the passers-by, in hopes evidently that it may again soon be called upon to earn another grain of rice.

The fortune-teller now takes up the slip, and reading aloud the inscription on it, he declares that there is no doubt but that he will be successful in his lawsuit, that Heaven will intervene to frustrate the malice of his enemy, and that he may go home with his mind at ease. To a Westerner the statement on the bamboo is exceedingly vague. It declares that the river which has been flowing amongst the hills and has been lost to view, is again appearing round the curve of a mountain cape, and will soon flow up to the very feet of the eager onlooker. The river is supposed to be the case that has been giving the man perplexity, and its vanishing out of sight the anxiety he has had as to its ultimate issue. Its sudden turn into sight when it seemed to be lost is an indication that the affair will turn out prosperously.

Should, however, judgment be given against him, the fortune-teller will free himself from blame by declaring that he had misread the sign given by the returning stream, as it really was a good omen that the spirits had given in favour of his enemy, who was finally to remain victor in the contest for the house.

No sooner has this man gone, than a young fellow of about twenty steps up and says that he would like to get some indication from the spirits about a question that is giving him some anxiety. He had obtained a situation in the town with an employer of labour, who had a reputation for ill-treating the people that were in his service. He was very anxious, he said, for some employment, but he would prefer to be without any for some time longer, rather than suffer harsh treatment and be compelled to leave. [Pg 321] Was it safe, therefore, for him under these circumstances to accept the offer that had been made him, or should he reject it?

Again the slips were thrown carelessly on to the board, and the sparrow, that had been watching the young fellow whilst he was telling his story, being let out of its cage, touched one of the bamboo slips with its beak, and then waited for the grain of rice that was dropped in front of it. Looking carefully at the inscription, he once more proceeded in a mysterious and enigmatic way to say what the spirits advised to be done in the matter. This was so vague and unsatisfactory, that the young man declared that he would not risk the trouble that he might have if he decided to accept the billet that had been offered to him, that he would just make up his mind now to reject it; and with a smile on his face and a few pleasant words of thanks, he disappeared in the crowd that was passing and repassing in front of them.

With this man I will close my chapter, though there are many others who get their living in the streets whose stories are just as interesting as his, illustrating the peculiar modes of thought of an idolatrous people, and the strenuous nature of their life in trying to satisfy their spiritual and physical necessities.

CHAPTER XV

[Pg 322]

THE SEAMY SIDE OF CHINESE LIFE

Some of the moral aspects of the Chinese—Their religion takes no cognizance of men's lives—Heaven looks after great moral questions—Objectionable features of Chinese society—Unchaste—Foul-mouthed—Passion for gambling—Instances given—Lawless classes numerous—Opium vice—Evil results.

The comparatively elevated moral condition of Chinese society is very often a source of pleasure and at the same time of perplexity to strangers who have lived long amongst them, and who have narrowly watched them in their social and domestic life. This state of things has not been produced by the popular form of religion that is practised amongst them, for that never seems to influence their lives in the slightest degree. A man, for example, of notoriously bad character will come and make the most lavish offerings to a certain idol in whom he has the most implicit faith. He will stand in a most reverent manner before it, and he will beseech it to bestow blessings upon him and his home, and to save him from calamity and suffering, and when he turns to go home he is just the same man as he was before he came into the temple.

The idols are not supposed to have anything to do with character. The thief, and the prodigal, and the gambler join in the crowd that wind their way up the hillside to the shrine, say, of the Goddess of Mercy, and they burn their incense and make their offerings to the benevolent-looking idol, whilst she, with a smile that seems to be struggling through her gentle features, looks apparently with complacency upon them all alike, and the hardened sinner and the shy, shrinking young wife are both treated as though they were the same in her eyes.

[Pg 323]

There are two forces, quite outside of any of those that are supposed to exist in the common religion of the people, that exercise a tremendous influence for righteousness in all the various phases of Chinese life, and are usually referred to as The Principles of Heaven. This phrase is used whenever any question of morals is at stake, or perhaps some principle of righteousness is involved, and it has a potency about it that nothing in the whole range of Chinese thought could in any way equal.

An idol is never appealed to to confirm some statement about which there may be a dispute, but Heaven is, and it is felt that when this is done, the person who has dared to call upon that great name to be a witness as it were to the truth of what has been said, he is not to be lightly disbelieved. Heaven has eyes, it is commonly asserted, and when a person recklessly holds up his hand to Heaven and asks it to attest to something he knows to be false, it is confidently believed that ere long some signal manifestation of its anger will be witnessed in the disasters that will be hurled upon him and his family.

Any violations of the great law of justice or any injury done to another man's character are things that Heaven is supposed to look upon with a very jealous eye, and it is its part to see that due punishment shall be inflicted upon the transgressor when the proper time comes. The writings of Confucius and Mencius, the two great sages of China, have done much to keep alive this idea, and as these really are a kind of Bible to the nation, the influence they have exerted upon the scholars and thinkers of each generation, and through them upon the people at large, has been on the whole of a most beneficial kind.

Now it is very extraordinary, that whilst it is firmly believed that in cases of conscience, or in matters that involve great moral questions, Heaven always interferes to punish the wrongdoer, no one thinks that any vices that a man may commit for his own personal gratification are looked upon as improper by this great Power, or that it will take the trouble of inquiring into his conduct and of meting out either rewards or punishment for it.

[Pg 324]

The result is a very lax state of morality in regard to what may be called the social virtues. Heaven is a great impersonal Power, that in some mysterious way rectifies injustice, and avenges human wrongs, and at the cry of a city pours down rain upon a district that has been parched and dried up by drought. Life and death are decided by it, as well as the wretchedness and happiness of mankind, but the fatherly instincts that are deep in the heart of the true God are not considered to have any place in this great and dread Force, and unless men come into collision with the laws that it has established for the governance of the world, it leaves them to work out their lives as best they may.

The passions of men, therefore, have a very wide scope for their operations, and the consequence is the Chinese are anything but a highly moral race of people. That they are less so than other Eastern peoples is very seriously to be doubted, for wherever men feel themselves unrestrained excepting by an impersonal Force that does not question too closely the daily life of a man, the home virtues as practised by the true Christian are sure to be neglected and ignored.

With regard to the Chinese, the facts above stated are abundantly verified by the records of the hospitals that have been opened by foreigners throughout the country for the treatment of the sick, and also by the elaborate system that is in existence in every town and city, as well as in the market places and even in the larger villages throughout the Empire, to meet the social evil that everywhere exists.

There is one thing that mitigates somewhat the terrible tragedy of this widespread disregard for chastity, and that is that it is sedulously kept in the background, and the public gaze is never allowed to rest upon it. Day or night one might pass throughout the public thoroughfares, and along the less frequented side streets, or into the lowest slums of a great city, and yet no sign of anything wrong either on the streets or in the dwelling-houses could be discovered by the most critical eye. [Pg 325]

One of the ideals of Chinese life is purity. It is sung about in their ancient songs, and is the theme of the great poets who composed their lyrics and their epic poems in the centuries that have fled. It is the one element that goes to the making of a sage, and no man who is deficient in this beautiful grace can ever hope to win the homage and respect of his fellow-men. It is this ideal virtue that seems to permeate the atmosphere in which men live with its impalpable touch that has made the nation desire to hide the grossness of their lives from one another, and to put on an air of innocence that they do not possess.

The immoral tendency of the Chinese mind is seen in a variety of ways. One very offensive one to a person who is acquainted with the language is the obscene character of the swearing that the people indulge in as a matter of common usage. It is quite safe to say that everybody in China, learned or unlearned, refined or unrefined, lady or gentleman, does habitually use bad language, and it is particularly painful to have to listen to the loathsome expressions that people hurl at each other when they are in a passion and wish to cut into the very soul of the person with whom they may be at variance. In passing along the street, one now and again comes upon a group that has been attracted by a quarrel, say, between two women, who, inflamed by passion, use the most degraded language, and for the time being ignore their sex, and seem to be utterly regardless of the number of people that are silent witnesses of their depravity.

Another insight that one gets into the unrefined character of the Chinese mind is the kind of plays that are popular with the masses. As the theatricals are performed on the streets, in front of some heathen temple, or on some open space where the crowds can congregate to witness the performance, one gets a lurid view of the workings of the Chinese mind by observing the kind of pieces that most suit the popular taste, and which will draw the largest audiences. It is an undoubted fact that, putting aside the historical plays, which from their nature are the very purest that are presented on the stage, the pieces that are most attractive and most sought after are such as would never be tolerated in any of the Western theatres. These seem to have a wonderful fascination for the playgoers, and men and women will sit during the long hours of an evening and right away past midnight, and will listen to the words of a play and to the innuendoes of the actors that any person with a chaste mind would fly from in utter loathing and disgust. [Pg 326]

Another very objectionable feature in Chinese life is the passion that every one seems to have for gambling. There are sections of people in England who are as much addicted to this vice as are the Chinese, but there are vast numbers who have never had anything to do with games of chance, and who would be horrified if they were asked to do so. Now, in this land there is no class of people similar to those. High and low, rich and poor, seem to have the gambling spirit in their very blood, and, like the craving in the opium smoker, that must be satisfied at all hazards, so the cards and the dice must be fingered to allay the passion that is burning within their hearts.

FRUIT-SELLERS GAMBLING.

To face p. 327.

That this vice affects not simply certain classes within the Empire is evident from the fact that the wealthy men who have no need to increase the huge fortunes they have at their command are amongst the most determined gamblers in the community. Gain is not the sole purpose of such men, when they spend days and nights with the cards in their hands, and everything else is forgotten in the mad excitement that the varied fortunes of the game brings to the players. Not long since, the chief mandarin of a district that contained several large counties, and who was immensely rich, became so enthralled with the gambling mania that he utterly neglected his official duties, and spent his whole time with a number of wealthy men in playing the various games of chance that are so well known to the Chinese. The Viceroy of the province got to know in some way or another of his disgraceful conduct, and not only dismissed him from his office, but also got the sanction of the authorities in Peking to decide that he should never be allowed to hold any position under the Government in the future, and so his official life came to a sudden and disastrous termination. That this ignominious close to the ambitions of a life will have any effect in delivering him from the craving for excitement that has got such a grip upon him, is extremely improbable. His curt dismissal and his reduction to the ranks of the common people will no doubt have a beneficial effect upon the mandarins throughout the province, for he was a well-known man, and was a member of a family that had within it officials of the highest possible distinction.

This fatal tendency of the Chinese for gambling is fully realized by the rulers of the country, and the most stringent measures have been adopted by them to repress it. That they have been only moderately successful is not to be wondered at, for the passion within the hearts of the people is like a stream that has been dammed up, and that by and by scatters everything before it, and carries destruction in its mad career. Wherever a vigorous mandarin holds rule and the gambling laws are carried out with a certain amount of strictness, the people are afraid openly to indulge in the national propensity. Where, however, an easy-going official and perhaps a gambler himself holds the reins of office, then the people, feeling the curb removed, plunge with wild excitement into the gambling fray, and neglecting every other business in life, give themselves wholly to the cards and the dice.

On one occasion, in a certain district, an opium-smoking mandarin whose brains were dazed and muddled with his midnight orgies allowed the law to be very loosely administered within his jurisdiction. His runners or policemen took advantage of the situation to earn a little extra money by receiving bribes from the owners of gambling houses, and to wink at the trade that was being carried on by them. Immunity from police inspection not only gave encouragement to these gentry, but at the same time struck as if with a whip the slumbering passion in the hearts of the community and roused it into a fury.

It soon became known that the Yamen was not to be feared, and that there were no penalties against the infraction of the gambling statutes, for the mandarin's soul was steeped in opium, and all his executive staff were gathering in a golden harvest that prevented them from seeing how the people were breaking the laws. One firm, having literally bribed every official, including even the mandarin himself, had the audacity to open a large gambling establishment, and to announce publicly that a particular form of gaming was going to be carried on in it, and to invite the public to come and purchase their tickets from them.

The system that was proposed was one that was exceedingly popular with the Chinese, but it had been so demoralizing in its effects, that it had been repeatedly suppressed at various times by the authorities. It consisted of thirty-six well-known gambling words, one of which was selected by the head of the concern and concealed within a series of small boxes, which were to be opened in the presence of a committee, on a certain drawing day, when all those who had tickets with the lucky word would be rewarded by certain specified prizes in money, far in excess of the sums they had originally paid for them.

The whole country for miles round was in the wildest excitement about this lottery business. The great question with nearly every one was what word should they speculate on, for with the gambling mania strongly aroused within them, every one wanted to take his chance of gaining the coveted prize. Soothsayers and fortune-tellers were consulted to see if by their jugglery they could not reveal the word that had been hidden away so carefully so that none should know its secret. Men and women in large numbers visited the various idol shrines in the region and made vows to gods of valuable offerings if they would but disclose to them the unknown Chinese character that was going to bring wealth to those that should purchase the lucky ticket. [Pg 329]

There was one large temple, famous for the potency of the idols that were enshrined in it, and every evening for weeks before the drawing hundreds of men and women used to repair to it in the hopes that the idols would reveal to them in their dreams during the stillness of the night which word they should select as the right one. Singular to say, some declared that they got such clear illuminations from the idols that they proceeded to buy tickets which subsequently gave them the coveted prizes.

After a time society became so disorganized that the whole thing was put a stop to, and gambling was more sternly forbidden than ever. The Government, however, is conscious that it cannot be absolutely prohibited, and so three days of grace are given, when every one is allowed to gamble to his very heart’s content without any fear from any one. The first begins on the Chinese New Year’s Day, when the whole of the Empire is having a holiday. All work is suspended and the shops are closed, so that for one day at least in the year the towns and cities have a genuine Sunday look about them.

In all the public thoroughfares tables are set up, where the crowds may gather and throw their dice and venture their cash, and look with their solemn, unemotional faces upon the varying fortunes of the games, as their money that they have hoarded up for the occasion passes into the possession of the winner, and they are left penniless. The chances are all in favour of the man that runs the concerns, but an occasional success where ten times the amount risked is gathered in by the delighted winner, so stirs the gambling instincts that they keep putting down their money on the board, hoping in every throw of the dice to woo fortune to their side. [Pg 330]

Another decidedly unpleasant feature about the Chinese is the hazy and indefinite ideas they have generally with regard to *meum* and *tuum*. They are wanting in that straightforward honesty that is the characteristic of the typical Englishman. There is no typical Chinaman that corresponds to him. It is quite true that in certain business relationships a Chinaman’s word is as good as his bond, and that contracts entered into by leading Chinese firms are faithfully carried out, even though they may be large losers by the transactions. This is not the result of a profound instinct for honesty, but rather the carrying out of a commercial code of honour, the infraction of which would cause them to lose face amongst business men, and thus imperil the credit of their firms. These very men that would be willing to bankrupt themselves rather than disavow some business engagement that had turned out badly, will under other circumstances act very much like the rest of their countrymen and take advantage of you for their own benefit, and fleece you unmercifully.

The first and most practical experience one has of this deteriorated moral character in the nation is with one’s cook, who sets himself systematically to cheat upon every article he has to buy for the home use.[6] As he has the purchasing of everything required from the Chinese market, it may easily be imagined what a field he has for gradually making his fortune out of the unsuspicious foreigner. He will charge just as much per cent. extra upon every article as he thinks he can safely do without raising the ire of his employer. He does not call this stealing. It goes under the more euphonious designation of earning, for to steal would mean that he was a thief, and that he would never under any circumstances consent to be. If you were to ask him if in his daily purchases he earns anything upon them, a pleasant smile would flash over his yellow countenance and he could deny that he did, but in such a way as to confess in a shy and ingenuous manner that he did. If, however, you were to ask him if he stole from his master, he would be filled with indignation, and anger would flash from his eyes, whilst he would indignantly repudiate the idea that he had ever stolen from any one in his life. Universal custom and the inbred instinct of the Chinaman to earn an honest penny whenever the opportunity may occur has given the nation decidedly low ideas of morality, and has led the people into huge systems of overreaching each other that have had the effect of dulling the conscience and of lowering the moral standard. [Pg 331]

The transition from stealing in what might be called a legitimate and recognized way into downright theft and burglary is not a very difficult one. The fabled days of the times of Confucius have long since passed away when no man needed to shut his door at night when the family retired to rest, and no one felt any concern about his purse that he may have

accidentally dropped on the road, since he would simply have to go back over the way he had travelled and he would find it on the exact spot where it had accidentally fallen from him. The nation has fallen upon degenerate times since then, for locks and bars and bolts and walls that would seem to be meant to act as fortifications are now all required by those who have any property that would be worth the carrying off.

This fact is most conspicuous in the houses of the rich, who are apt to keep considerable sums of money in them, and who thus tempt the cupidity of the thieves in the neighbourhood, and even of those that live at a distance, who will come suddenly one dark night in considerable force and in one fell swoop carry off all the valuables in them.

The pawn shops, that are known to contain all kinds of precious property that are held as pledges for money lent on them, have to be built strong enough to resist the organized attack of desperate bands of robbers. They are in fact miniature fortresses, with walls of granite slabs that would resist a battering-ram, and iron plated doors, and jingals placed inside the doors ready to resist an onslaught of the thieving mob of ruffians. As these are under the special protection of the mandarins, it shows the lawless character of the Chinese robber fraternity, that they dare to assemble in such numbers to attack such formidable buildings as they are, and yet such things are by no means uncommon.

One stormy, cloudy night when the inmates have retired to rest, and there is no suspicion of anything unusual going to take place, the sudden barking of dogs, that seem mad with excitement, arouses the sleepers from their slumbers. Peering through the narrow stone slits of the windows upstairs, they catch a glimpse of a large number of dark figures moving restlessly about. Immediately the whole establishment is alive. The place is going to be attacked, and now with cries of terror and alarm every one hastens to his post to repel the onslaught of these midnight marauders. The battle is sharp and fierce, and there is none to bring aid to the defenders, for the neighbours, though they hear the sounds of firing, and the shouts of the ruffians and the screams of the terrified women inside the pawn shop that startle the midnight air, dare not come to the rescue, for the robbers are not in a mood to spare any one that dares to interfere with the carrying out of their plans.

After some hours of conflict, the main door is battered in with axes and the robbers intent only on plunder decamp with their huge spoils, that will enable them to gamble to their hearts’ content, and to steep their senses in opium for many a long day to come. They have so effectually concealed their identity that all investigations made by the mandarins or by detectives specially employed by the firm, fail entirely to discover who the midnight thieves were that so successfully raided the wealthy establishment.

The processes of law are so uncertain in China that there is a positive temptation to the criminal classes to indulge in all manner of nefarious schemes that are for the detriment of society. The mandarin of a certain county, who is declared, in the poetic language so often employed by the Chinese, to be “The Father and Mother of his People,” happens to be a weak, vacillating character, or his few senses have been saturated with opium so that he is quite incompetent to see to the government of his district.

The lawless characters within it, who might have been restrained by a firm and vigorous hand, now assert themselves, and the large clans with their powerful followings domineer and oppress the weaker ones. Travellers are stopped on the highways, or carried off and shut up and tortured until they are redeemed by their friends by the payment of a heavy ransom.

The river that may run through this unhappy region is infested with pirates who sally out at night and capture the trading junks that may be lying at anchor in some snug bay where they have taken refuge for safety. They also land their men at the villages along the banks and raid and plunder the defenceless inhabitants, and when the morning comes there is despair in the hearts of those who have been deprived of their all, for they know that no redress will ever be obtained from the mandarin, who is the cause of the lawlessness that prevails on the land and along the streams and away down to the river’s mouth, where it pours its waters into the ocean.

Wherever there is an efficient executive, the men who prey upon society are compelled for the time being to take to honest courses to earn a living for themselves and their families. It is very interesting to watch how a whole district may be kept in order and laws obeyed and confidence restored by the action of one vigorous mandarin. On one occasion a certain region was in a most disturbed condition. Travellers passing through it did so at the greatest risk of being seized and held to ransom. They were compelled to go in companies for the sake of the protection that numbers would give them, and even then they had to pay the headmen of a certain large and turbulent village stipulated fees for passes that would carry them for a few miles on their journey without being molested by other blackmailers. Even the very poorest in going from one place to another were called upon to pay a few cash before they were allowed to proceed, and men were stationed outside the village to collect the toll from every one that passed by.

There were loud grumblings and complaints at this distressing state of things, but no steps were taken by the local authorities to put an end to it. The lawbreakers were rich enough to bribe the mandarins and every member of their Yamens, so that the story of their misdeeds was quietly ignored and they were allowed to grow rich on their illegal exactions.

After a time a new general was appointed to take military charge of the whole district. He was an exceedingly active and intelligent official, and had the reputation of being impervious to a bribe. A tremor of excitement ran through the ranks of the blackmailers when they heard of his appointment, but they contented themselves with the idea, that if he could not be reached by money, his subordinates, whose livelihood depended upon such perquisites as they were prepared to give them, would certainly not refuse the liberal sums they could have for the asking. [Pg 335]

The general soon found what a disgraceful condition his district was in, and he quietly took measures to restore law and order in it. He knew that he could get no reliable information from the members of his own Yamen, so he used to go out every evening after dark in various disguises and mingle with the people. He would sit in the tea shops and hobnob with coolies, or he would enter the restaurants and converse with the more staid and respectable citizens and glean from their conversation information upon all manner of subjects that would be serviceable to him in his government of the people.

He found that the greatest disorders existed and that it would require very stern and decided measures to put an end to them. He got a complete history, too, of the particular village that had become so notorious for its exactions, with the names of its leading men and all their cruelties to the victims that had been seized in order to extract large sums out of them. He knew that these very men had spies even in his own Yamen who were ready to report any action that he might be going to take with respect to them, and therefore he had to keep his plans a profound secret even from his most confidential advisers.

At length after weeks of patient waiting, during which the suspicions of the lawbreakers were lulled to sleep, he decided upon immediate action. He had not informed any of his officers what he was going to do, neither had any of his troops the slightest suspicion that anything special was going to take place. Rousing the camp at midnight, he ordered five hundred men to prepare for instantly marching to a destination that he would reveal to no one. Taking the lead, the troops, who had been commanded to keep the most profound silence, glided like spectres through the dark and gloomy streets till they reached one of the great gates of the city. These were thrown open at the command of the general, and the soldiers trooped along the high road wondering what was the meaning of this midnight march and what scheme was working in the fertile brain of their leader. [Pg 336]

Ten miles had been travelled and darkness still lay upon the land, and the trees and the houses, as they suddenly loomed up, looked like ghosts that had wandered out of “The Land of Shadows,” and were waiting for the dawn to return to their dreary abodes in that sunless world. Suddenly the order was whispered through the ranks to halt, and in tones of stern command the soldiers were ordered to surround the village that lay in the profoundest stillness at their side. They were to see that no one of its people were allowed to escape, and that for every one that managed to do so the life of the soldier on guard would have to pay the forfeit. The men knew too well the temper of their general to imagine that this was an idle threat.

With noiseless tread each man took up the station assigned to him by his officer, and the whole command stood in breathless silence until the dawn in the east lifted up the curtain of the night and revealed the village to them. A detachment of men were marched into it, and half-a-dozen of the leading men of the clan were seized and marched to an open space outside of it, where the general was standing with some of his officers. The executioner with bared arm and gleaming sword awaited but the word of command, and six heads rolled on to the ground and the tragedy was over. The bugles sounded and the men fell into their ranks, and almost before the whole of the village had time to rub their eyes to assure themselves that they were awake, the avengers of law were hurrying back to the city they had left at midnight.

[Pg 337] The effect of this stern act of justice was perfectly magical in its effects. The news spread with the rapidity of lightning through the length and breadth of this famous general’s jurisdiction. With the fall of those heads, every trace of lawlessness vanished from the great clans that had been terrorizing society. Men could now travel freely without any danger of molestation, and even in the darkness of the night no one dared to lay his hand upon a member even of the weakest of the clans. The fear of the general was in the hearts of the transgressors, for conscience made cowards of them all, and stories were circulated about the almost supernatural knowledge that he had of men’s doings, and which every one implicitly believed in.

And so during the term of his office there was an end to blackmailing, and the region became as peaceful as though the gamblers had burnt their cards and had taken to reading religious books, and the opium smokers had become reformed, and the passion for unlawful gains had died out of the hearts of the men who had made it impossible for honest men to travel freely either for business or for pleasure very far from their own doors. But whilst this was the case, there was no real reformation in the hearts of a single one of those who had made society unsafe for men and women who wished to live a law-abiding life. They were simply afraid of the man that had the instant power of life and death, and who without trial of judge or jury, and without the fear of any superior court to call in question his decisions, could hand over a person at a moment’s notice to the man who held the gleaming sword, and who with one stroke of it could decide in two seconds a matter that lawyers in England

would wrangle over for months.

The lawless classes in China form a considerable percentage of the whole population. They are ruthless and cruel, and in the carrying out of their fell purposes they show but little consideration for the lives or property of those whom they may select to be their victims. There is a general impression in Western lands that the idolatrous races of people living in the East are a simple-minded folk, with but few passions and generous and tender-hearted to each other. They are supposed to lead a sunny life, and imitating the luxuriance of nature that the great sun continually spurs into action by his fiery heat, to have the widest sympathies with everything human. This is an ideal picture that could only have been drawn by the vivid forces of imagination. China is no Eden of this kind, and it may be accepted as a general truth that where men have lost the knowledge of God, and are not drawn into a noble life by an impression of His purity and tenderness which He wishes reproduced in the lives of the world, men's own conceptions of what a noble life ought to be will always fall far short of the Divine. [Pg 338]

The best days for China were in the ancient past, according to the sacred books of the nation, when God and Heaven were the prominent words in the religious life of the people, and when the idols had not yet come from India to lower the conceptions of the Divine. With the gradual disappearance of God, as a personal Power, from the thinking of the people there came the lower standard of morality that has its legitimate successor in the types we see in modern life.

We are told that three centuries after Confucius wrote his lofty system of ethics, though even he began to give evidence that he was losing touch with a personal God that the illustrious sages whose writings he professed to be editing undoubtedly had, the nation had practically adopted the worship of nature, and made their offerings to the spirits of the mountains and of the streams that flowed through the land and brought fertility in their train. Morality, however, had in the meanwhile degenerated, and one has but to read the history of China[7] to see how the baser passions that influence men in the present day were very much in evidence in those primitive times. [Pg 339]

An incident in the life of one of the most famous Emperors that lived two centuries before Christ will confirm my statement on this head. Some time before his death he had a tomb built for himself that was constructed on a royal and a magnificent scale. It was really an underground palace and furnished in a style that suited the exalted ideas of the man who was designing it. It was furnished with every necessary for a luxurious life, and vast stores of gold and silver and precious jewels were deposited in strong rooms that no robber bands could break into.

Magnificent suites of apartments were constructed that were fit to entertain a kingly company, for the Emperor when he died and was buried in this great sepulchre did not mean to be the only occupant of it. He had planned that some of his favourites from his harem should accompany him, and that men-servants and maid-servants and hosts of attendants should be shut up with him in the gloomy underground mansion. He could not bear the thought of being alone. He desired that life in some mysterious way should be continued in “The Land of Shadows” very much as it had been in the one he was forced to relinquish.

His one concern in the midst of all this preparation for another life was the feeling that the great wealth that he had stored in the new palace would excite the cupidity of the thieves and the gamblers and blackmailers that had begun to exist in that early stage of the nation's history. He accordingly called in the cleverest and the most cunning artificers in brass and iron and asked them to make locks of such ingenious and subtle designs that no housebreaker would ever be able to open them. They were also to construct full-sized figures of men in metal, standing with bow and arrow in hand in front of the door by which the palace was to be entered. A touch of the intruder's foot on a secret spring would cause the mechanism of these dumb sentinels to work, and in a moment the deadly arrows would be shot into his body and he would fall lifeless on the very threshold. The safeguards against invasion of the tomb after the Emperor was laid to rest in it were complete, for none knew the secret of the locks or of the silent figures that stood ready with their arrows to slay the robber but the artificer that designed them, and in order to secure that none should ever learn it from him, he was quietly put to death one morning after he had fully explained to the Emperor the details of his wonderful invention. [Pg 340]

Another feature about Chinese life that is sadly illustrative of its seamy character is the prevalence of the opium habit, and the saddest feature about this is the fact that it is not a native vice, one indigenous to the soil, that has grown up as the result of some peculiarity of temperament of the Chinese, but is an import that was first brought into the country and made an article of trade by an English company of merchants, viz. the East India Company.

One of the most unfortunate days for this old Empire was that on which the ships of that famous Company sailed up the Pearl river with their consignment of a drug that was to prove more disastrous and more fatal to its people than all the revolutions that during the past centuries have deluged this land with blood, or all the epidemics that have at various times swept like destroying angels through the ranks of society.

People who have been jealous of English honour have tried to prove that the opium was in

common use amongst the Chinese before the ships of England appeared before Canton with their deadly cargoes, but this is an absolute mistake. Isolated travellers from India may have brought some for their own individual consumption, but the drug was unknown and unused by the Chinese people. That this statement is true is proved by the fact that there is no word in the language of this people for opium, for the only one that has ever existed is the one that attempts to give the sound of the foreign name that those who produced it in other lands gave it. If the thing had been an indigenous product, the Chinese would have had a name for it that would have had no flavour of a foreign land.

It has been a most disastrous thing for China that the one nation that has championed opium and has made treaties for its sale in this land, and that in the interests of its merchants and for the sake of its Indian revenue, insisted upon these treaties being carried out, should be England. If it had been a smaller Power the Chinese Government might have successfully resisted the attempt to force upon it a trade that was inevitably bound to degrade and demoralize its people. But England, the mighty power of the West, whose guns had thundered over Canton, and had waked the echoes of the Yangtze, and had even sounded through the capital of the Empire, was one that China dared not contend with, and so it has come to pass that the country that has always professed to be the refuge of the oppressed and the freer of the slave, has been the one to bind the shackles of opium on a people that, whilst they have fallen under its spell, yet feel the profoundest indignation against the Power whose legislation has helped to enslave them.

Opium in China is sometimes compared to the drinking habit in England, and terrible though the latter is, men have become so accustomed to the sight of it, that it is apt to be looked upon with considerable leniency. People in the highest positions in the land have drink upon their tables, without any one commenting unfavourably, except perhaps the members of the temperance party. Clergymen, highly respectable heads of families, philanthropists, and men who are prominent in society for their benevolence, all feel that they are doing no wrong by using in moderation wines and spirits themselves, and by offering them to their friends or guests who may be visiting them. Many honestly believe that a moderate use of wine is not only allowable, but is also highly beneficial for the health, an idea that is largely believed in by the medical faculty, who are apt to recommend their patients to use it, whenever their health becomes impaired.

Now, supposing that the moderate and daily use of liquors for, say six months, would so enchain and bind a man or woman that they must, at all costs, have their daily allowance of drink that they have been accustomed to, and that if they were denied it they would be mad with pain, and so racked with agony that they could neither rest nor sleep until the awful craving had been dulled by a draught of wine or spirits, how would society look upon the use of beverages that in so brief a time would bring about so terrible a tragedy? It is quite safe to say that in a vast number of homes where to-day they are used with the utmost lightheartedness, they would be excluded with the most feverish and jealous care as enemies with whom there could be no compromise.

Let us suppose, for example, a family of six, the father and mother, two sons and two daughters. Every day, twice a day, at lunch and at dinner, one or two glasses of wine are drunk at each meal. This goes on steadily for six months, and then it is proposed that for the future there shall be no more drinking. This is agreed to; but, as the evening advances, it is found that a strange and mysterious restlessness has taken possession of the whole family. They cannot sit long, but are impelled to move about. Gnawing pains rack the bones and render life intolerable.

Retiring to rest for the night is absolutely useless, for it is found impossible to remain for more than a few minutes quiet; and besides, the mental faculties are so active and the eyes so wide awake, that sleep is the very last thing that the imagination can think of. It is soon discovered that the only thing that will restore the normal tone to both body or mind is a copious draught of wine or a bumper of brandy and soda; when, after a few minutes, the restlessness gradually vanishes, the pains and aches slowly subside from the bones and muscles of the body, and a perfect peace reigns where before mind and body were both racked in a fierce conflict with an unseen foe.

Now this is an imaginary and highly impossible picture with regard to the effects of alcohol, but it is one that is extremely applicable to the opium smoker. Let a Chinaman steadily smoke opium for six months and he can no longer call his life his own. He cannot let a single day go by without taking the amount that will relieve the tension and the strain that are put on his physical forces at a certain hour every day when the craving for the drug creeps over him. He must then have the pipe to inhale its fumes, or the agony and oppression will be so great that he will be in the greatest torture.

There is no such a thing as temperance in opium as there is in the indulgence of intoxicating liquors. Unless a man is a confirmed drunkard he can abstain for a longer or a shorter time from them without any very serious inconvenience, but such liberty is never accorded to the opium smoker. After a daily use for six months, he may never have a day off, but as the hours pass by he is reminded by the enemy that creeps over him, and that fills him with pains and languor, that he must light his pipe. Sometimes in cases of severe illness his usual dose must be doubled before his torture is relieved, and when it comes to pass that he does not wish to smoke, it is then known that a stronger than opium is going to claim him as its

victim.

If a man has plenty of means he lays in a supply, and when the time comes round for him to take it, which it does with the inflexibility and cruelty of fate, he reclines on a couch and fills and refills his pipe, and draws in one volume of fume after another until the pains that have gripped every bone in his body loose their hold, and the craving that has brought a shadow over his life, and blotted out sun and moon and stars, and that has shut out of his heart his home and his wife and his children, and has given him a vision only of his own wretched self, slowly disappears, and he finally drops into a childlike sleep. He rises perfectly free from pain or weariness, but he is oppressed with the thought that twice every day he has to go through this terrible experience, and that never as long as he lives will he ever be a free man again. There is a release for every one that desires it; but the price to be paid is so great and the agony to be endured so intolerable that but very few of those upon whom opium has laid its grip would dare to attempt to free himself from its shackles. [Pg 344]

If the opium smoker is a poor man, then indeed the lot of the home is a miserable one. At all costs he must have his pipe at the regular time, no matter who else may suffer. His wife and children may go without food, but he must be supplied. One article after another is sold to buy the opium, until the house is so bare that there is nothing left to be disposed of. Then one of the children disappears, for a childless man in another part of the city has bought it, and it now belongs to him. One after another vanishes in the same way, till no one is left except his wife. At last when all the funds have gone and there are no more little ones to dispose of, negotiations are entered into with a middle-woman, and his wife too is no longer to be found in her wretched home, for she has become the spouse of another man, and the miserable opium smoker is left alone, content with the thought that for the present, at least, he has got the funds to enable him to satisfy the craving and to keep off the horrors that would make his life one long torture.

In the middle classes where the husband is an opium smoker, and where the means are at hand to supply the daily needs of this cruel and exacting tyrant, things go on tolerably smoothly, for opium does not send men into wild and insane fits such as alcohol does, but it deadens the senses and puts them to sleep, and it tends on the whole to repress the fighting passions of a man. [Pg 345]

The indirect influence of opium is very disastrous in its results, for it is in a large measure the producer of some of the dangerous classes that prey upon society. When a man has spent all and sold any little property that he may have possessed, he then joins the ranks of the thieves and of the gamblers, and henceforth he seems to live only for the one great purpose of grasping from any quarter that may be ready to his hand, the means of satisfying the inexorable craving that comes upon him twice every day.

This terrible evil exists throughout the length and breadth of the Empire, and there is no power outside of Christianity that seems to be able to cope with it. Human affection, and sense of honour, and pride of race, all succumb before the touch of opium. The Church of Christ in China alone possesses the one motive that will enable the victim to bear the agony of giving up the habit, or that will restrain the man that is tempted from indulging in it, and that is supreme affection and fidelity to Christ his Saviour. The same mysterious power that has touched the men of other lands into the most intense and unwavering devotion to Him, has in countless instances kept men in this old Empire of China from the seductions of the pipe, and has made them bear heroically and without flinching the bitter pains that opium makes its victims endure before it will loose its grasp upon them.

CHAPTER XVI [Pg 346]

A TRIP THROUGH THE COUNTRY

Preparations for the journey—Headman of sedan-chair shop—Fares settled—Morning scene—Chinese disregard of time—Start on journey—Scenery—Rice-fields—Great roads and small roads—Refreshment places by roadside—Villages on line of travel—Crops—Arrive at river—Description of a famous bridge—River boat—Gorges—Sugar canes—Sugar factory—Anchor boat.

Two of us had for some time been planning a trip into the interior. We were anxious to see the tea growing on the mountain sides and to travel up some of the rivers that for ages have been pouring their waters to the plain, and up and down which the tides of life have for long centuries flowed incessantly. The day had at length arrived when we could carry this purpose into effect, and we were looking forward with pleasure to the varied scenes and

experiences through which we should have to pass.

The preparation for a journey differs essentially in this land from the same thing in England. Here we have to provide plates and cups and saucers as well as knives and forks, for such things are never used by the Chinese, as a few bowls and chopsticks are all that are ever seen in any home in China. We must also take our own bedding and blankets, as the Chinese ideas of cleanliness are such as to make us chary of using any of theirs. It is also necessary to lay in a moderate stock of tinned meats, so as to provide for certain contingencies when anything beyond potatoes and rice may not be procurable in some of the districts through which we shall have to pass.

CHINESE LOCOMOTION.

Having stocked our provision basket with the various articles that were absolutely necessary for our comfort by the way, and having seen to our bedding and inserted amongst the blankets a few choice books to enable us to while away some of the dull hours that we were sure to have on the journey, we had to arrange for the chairs that were to carry us for the next few days.

We accordingly sent for the headman of the nearest chair establishment to settle with him the rates we were to pay for the chair-bearers. This is a question of no small difficulty, for these men have an evil reputation for being dishonest, and unless they are carefully watched, one is certain of being cheated by them. The man who shortly appeared in obedience to our summons well sustained the character that his class have everywhere obtained. He had a frowsy look about him as though he had been sleeping all night in his clothes and had not washed for many a long day. That of itself would not be a very serious indictment against him, for the disregard of soap and water is no test whatever of a person’s character in China. There was something about the man’s face that led us to form no very high opinion of him. In the first place he was an opium smoker. That could be seen from the leaden hue that had driven out nature’s colours from his face, and also from something nameless in the eyes that the opium with its subtle alchemy had put into them. In the next there was a low and cunning look about him that made you feel that you were in the presence of a man whose ideas of morality had never been fashioned on the high principles of Confucius and Mencius, or indeed of any of the other sages who have been models to the people of this Empire.

After a considerable discussion and beating down of prices, it was finally settled that we were to pay for one chair with its two bearers at the rate of about five pence a league,[8] with a specified sum for the days when we rested by the way, either because it was Sunday or for any other special reason that might induce us to loiter on the journey. As we were anxious to start early in order to reach a certain stopping-place where there was a well-known Chinese inn, we stipulated that the bearers with their chairs should appear next morning at daylight, when we would have everything ready to make an immediate start.

True to this arrangement we had packed up and had breakfasted before any sign of the coming sun could be seen in the eastern sky, and we kept looking out to see when the dawn would disperse the darkness that lay on the earth, and we could start on our journey. By and by the great banyan-tree near by that looked like a weird and uncanny mass of shadow, denser and blacker than those that concealed everything from view, suddenly and as if with the touch of an enchanter’s hand began to assume a tangible shape, and great boughs swung into view, and countless branches with their evergreen leaves came out of the night

as if to greet the day with their smiles. Soon the light had flashed across the fields and on to the tops of houses, and had touched the summits of the hills with its glory and had driven away the last lingering shadows from the landscape, and another day had broken on the world.

Impatiently we waited for the coming of the chairs, but the minutes passed by, and the sun rose higher and higher, and his rays flashed amongst the forest of leaves that sprung from boughs and branches of the venerable banyan, but still no sign of them or the bearers. We had been long enough in China to realize that time to a Chinaman is of no importance whatever, and that the difference of an hour or two in any engagement that is made is a matter so trifling as not to be considered worthy of mention. Still with true Occidental pertinacity and training we clung to the idea that because the daylight had been mentioned and had been agreed to as the time when the men should put in an appearance, the men, of course with the same exact ideas of time that we had, would promptly appear as soon as the first flush tinged the sky in the east.

The foreigner in dealing with the Chinese always forgets that they are usually accustomed to look at things from a different standpoint from ourselves, and that their minds are more turbid and less keen than ours. Daylight, for example, with us has a definite meaning, but with a Chinaman represents a time that begins with the dawn and with the indolence of the East may extend to seven or eight o'clock.

By and by, and just as the clock was striking eight, the men came sauntering up the street smoking their bamboo pipes and chatting and joking with each other. They seemed to be perfectly unconscious that they were fully two hours late, and they tossed the chairs on the ground with an air as though they were in advance of their time and were anxious to be on the road.

They seemed to be mightily taken aback when we asked them, with a good deal of indignation in our tones, why they had not kept to the agreement of coming to us at daylight. “But we have come at daylight,” they replied, with amazement in their looks; “what is it now but daylight?” We speedily showed them from the current use of the word daylight, that that event happened more than two hours ago, and that by this time we ought to have been at least five miles on our journey.

They all seemed really surprised that the present moment could not be fairly called daylight, but with the readiness of the Chinese in repartee one of them said, “We really had to rise before daylight to be here now, for we had to cook our rice and have breakfast, for the work before us is no light one, and we dare not undertake it on an empty stomach. Then we had to smoke our usual quantity of opium. Until we had done that we dare not attempt the long journey that we have before us to-day. You blame us for being late, but just think of what we have had to do before we could come here. We had to cook our own breakfast and eat it, and that took up some time. Then we had to get our opium pipes in working order, and slowly manipulate the opium, and that you know is not like tobacco that you can take a few whiffs of and the thing is finished. We had then to lie on the opium-bench for some time till the drowsiness passed away and we had recovered our senses. How could we come earlier with all these things to do? You decided that we should come at daylight, and here we are. Did you expect us to come without having had our breakfast? You are no slight weight to carry, you know, and if we had done so, we should have had to drop you on the road before we had been an hour on our journey.”

The Chinaman has a wonderful facility for putting the best face upon a bad argument. He has the most ingenious ways of presenting his view of the matter, so that by and by he will have turned the tables, and he will make it appear that he has been altogether right whilst you have been absolutely in the wrong. His favourite method is to confuse the issues, and the Chinese, with their turbid way of looking at things, continually fall into the snare, and having accepted his premises they must perforce accept also his conclusions. Here were these rough, noisy chair-bearers insisting that they had acted upon our agreement to come at daylight, though the sun was high in the heavens and it was getting close upon nine o'clock. They ignored all our attempts to prove that the hour of daylight had passed some hours ago by simply insisting that we were wrong. The hypnotic influence of assertions made confidently and persistently began to have its effect on our mind. Were we really labouring under a mistake, and were the broad daylight and the great sun that glared down upon us simply visions of the imagination? We felt that if we did not stop the discussion we should soon be consenting to all they said, so we got into our chairs and with a peremptory wave of the hand ordered them to go on.

With smiling faces and with an air of victory in their voices, they lifted the poles on to their shoulders and commenced the long journey of twenty miles that lay before us. When the bearers are strong and know their work, and when they have got into step with each other, the motion of the chair is a very pleasant one and the time passes by very quickly.

This latter is in a great measure due to the constantly changing scenes that meet one by the way. After leaving the city we emerged into the open country, where we had ample evidence of the skill with which the farmer cultivates his fields. He seems, indeed, to have penetrated into the secrets of nature and to have learned how to manipulate his fields, and how to coax and win the various kinds of seeds that he plants that they shall all respond to the efforts he puts forth and gladden his heart with their fruitful harvests.

The Chinese farmer is a most unæsthetic, most uninteresting looking character, and strikes one as far inferior to the rosy-cheeked, jolly-looking specimens that till our lands in England. He has altogether a mean appearance and does not at first sight induce us to have any high respect for him. His dress is against him. It is made of sombre-looking blue cotton cloth, slouchily made, and usually anything but clean. He absolutely neglects his toilette, and his face and hands show an ingrained dislike to water. Whether as the result of hard work or of exposure to the sun, which burns like X Rays into his skin, his countenance in a [Pg 352] comparatively early stage becomes furrowed with wrinkles, and in time he gets prematurely old looking.

It is when you become acquainted with him, and chat with him, that these external disadvantages seem to vanish from your thoughts, and you realize that here you have a man who has held deep communion with nature, and who knows her so well that she responds to his touch, and pours with no unwilling hand out of the abundance of her treasury the riches that are to fill the homes with gladness and content.

The fields that we are now passing through are an evidence of the skill and ingenuity of the farmers. They are all covered with luxuriant crops of rice, and as the sun shines down upon the heads that have just issued from their leafy enclosures, and his rays flash upon the water at their feet, making it to sparkle and glisten as so many diamond points that reflect his glory, the sight is one that the eye never gets tired of looking upon. One is led to reflect in gazing upon these fields with what exquisite beauty and with what marvellous detail God fashions the growing grain so that it shall come with as perfect and divine a form as His great Master Mind can devise it.

As far as the eye can reach there is little else to be seen but rice. One sees it down in the hollows where the little rivulets flow, and where they have left their trace in the deeper green and the ranker growth of the crops near by. On the rising ground one’s eye is caught with the lifelike, graceful motions that the passing breeze with the art of a master makes the stalks that stand so thickly side by side perform. Like the waves breaking on the shore, one never wearies looking at them, for they vary with every gust of wind, so that they never become monotonous.

The only exception to this universal growth of the rice are fields of sweet potatoes that occupy grounds where the water cannot reach. As this is an essential for the cultivation of [Pg 353] rice, which must stand in it during the whole time of its growth, until within a few days of its being harvested, other kinds of crops have to be planted in what are called “the dry fields.” These are mainly sweet potatoes, though various others are also cultivated in them.

Here, for example, is a small plot of land that we are passing by, which illustrates not only the ingenuity of the Chinese farmer, but also shows the varied purposes to which “the dry fields” may be put. There are no fewer than three distinct crops growing harmoniously side by side on it. There are peanuts with their short, insignificant growth and their tiny yellow flowers that seem the very embodiment of retiring modesty. Out of their very midst there spring up the sturdy millet-stalks, with their lofty ambitions that would make them stretch far beyond the humble leaves and flowers at their feet; and last, but not the least important, there is a crop of sweet potatoes that will quietly survive when the other two have been gathered, and will gladden the hearts of the farmers after the others have been garnered.

As we travel on, we notice how very bad the roads are. We are on what is called the “Great Road,” for it is a great thoroughfare, and for more than two thousand miles it runs over great plains, and winds up and down hills and mountains, and crosses great rivers and countless streams, and penetrates great and populous cities, and yet, excepting at occasional places, it never averages more than ten feet wide. It seems, too, to be in a chronic state of disrepair. The rains fall, and the storms and the typhoons spend their fury on it, and try their very utmost to obliterate it. The countless feet, too, of weary travellers, and of coolies with burdened shoulders, and chair-bearers with their weighty fares tread it down and fill it with ruts, and wear away the stones, and disfigure its surface with heights [Pg 354] and hollows that make travelling in the rainy season a serious trial to those who have to journey along it.

If this be the case with the “Great Roads” it may easily be imagined what the character of the “Small Roads” must be. These latter are practically but footpaths that exist like a huge network throughout the Empire, and are reserved for the local traffic that goes on between village and village, and between market town and market town, and whilst on the whole they aim at being as straight and as direct as possible, they are from the very nature of the case generally very winding and roundabout. Fields have to be crossed and private property has to be invaded, and so the traveller has to accommodate himself to the necessities of the case, and follow the windings and the turnings by which the least damage may be done to those whose farms or homesteads have been invaded by those who never dream of paying any compensation for the liberty they have taken.

In travelling on these “Great Roads,” one finds that about every two miles or so apart there are recognized stages or resting-places where refreshments of a very primitive kind may be obtained, and where men wearied with the strain of walking, or oppressed with the great flaring, scorching sun may find some respite from the strain that has been put upon them.

But here is one of these stages, and as the rule of the road demands that the chair-bearers shall stop at it, we shall be able to see for ourselves exactly what they are like. At first sight it has a very tempting, picturesque appearance. Several magnificent banyan-trees send out huge spreading boughs, which, with their great forest of leaves, cast a most refreshing shade over the road and over the eating-houses that stand by the wayside. These latter are of the simplest and most elementary kind, and consist of one large room that is practically a kitchen, where the rice and the sweet potatoes are cooked and where the owner and his wife carry out the orders that their customers may give them. [Pg 355]

In front of this are small tables and rough wooden benches for the accommodation of those who wish to have refreshment. No sooner do our men drop their chairs on the road, than they stagger to one of these tables, and, at a kind of masonic sign that is easily read, a bowl of smoking-hot rice is put into the hands of each, a pair of chop-sticks are grasped from a hollow bamboo receptacle on the table, and without a word it is quickly being shovelled down their throats. It is not until at least half the basin has been emptied that signs of contentment escape from them, and the innate humour, which has been crushed by the pain and weariness on the road, finds expression in laughter and in humorous conversation that fills the air with merry sounds that linger among the branches and wander down along the road into the great glare beyond where the shadows of the banyan lie.

In order to ease ourselves from the cramped position we have had to maintain in the chair, we get out and stretch our legs, and finally sit down on one of the benches and watch the moving life that passes and repasses in front of us.

Here is a young fellow that has just staggered out of the sunlight into the shadow, and he lets down his burden from his shoulder as though he were tearing off the skin and places it carefully within a few feet of us. He must be about twenty-five, and is as good a specimen of a man as one would find in a day's journey. His face is flushed and excited, and he has a strained look upon it as though he had been bearing a pressure that had become simply unendurable.

"How far have you travelled with your load?" we asked him.

"One hundred and fifty miles," he replied, "and I have thirty more before I reach the end of my journey."

"What is its weight?" I inquire of him.

"It is a hundred and fifty pounds at the very least," he said, and he cast a wistful, anxious look upon the huge burden that he had carried so far. [Pg 356]

"But why engage to bear so heavy a load? A hundred pounds ought to have been your limit, for so long a journey," I continued.

"I could not afford to carry less," he quickly replied; "I am paid so much a pound, and I have to pay my own expenses. I have to eat often," he explained, "or I should break down. I have to pay for my bed at night, and I must have a certain amount over to take home to my wife and family. If I were to reduce the weight I could not do that, and so I am compelled to put every pound into my load that I can possibly carry in order that my family may not suffer."

But here comes a sedan chair that has come in with a rush whilst we have been talking. The bearers are both young strapping fellows, and we can tell from the hot flush on their faces that the strain upon them is a severe one. They are too proud, however, to acknowledge that, and instead of letting the chair down gently, they give it a toss in the air as though it were a plaything, and with a jaunty air they drop it on to the ground. They then begin to chaff some of the other bearers that are seated on the tables, and in a leisurely, easy way saunter to a seat as though it were a matter of perfect indifference whether they had any refreshment or not. The keeper of the eating-house, however, knows exactly the requirements of these two brave young fellows, and so he quietly slips a bowl into the hand of each, and, in spite of their feigned unconcern, they are soon shovelling down great mouthfuls of the hot savoury rice.

As we sit looking at the shifting scene that passes like a moving panorama before us, we are impressed with the pathetic side that seems to us to be the prominent one. The passers-by are nearly all representatives of the working classes, and even they come from the poorer stratum. Some of them are men from a distance, as may be seen by their dust-soiled garments and their air of weariness. Others are farmers who have been to the neighbouring city to dispose of their farm produce, whilst not a few are nondescripts, the waifs and strays that heathen society tosses up, whose hold upon life is always a precarious one, and who may any day be landed amongst the beggar class to fight and struggle for existence as best they may. [Pg 357]

Now and again a man in easier circumstances may be detected by the independent swing of his walk, and by the jolly look that illumines his broad, but unæsthetic features. There are young fellows, too, who, full of exuberant spirits, lark and joke with each other, and make the air ring with their laughter, but there are only too many with a shadow on their faces that tells of an inner life where the heart throbs with a hidden pain. For one thing, at least, the Chinaman is a man to be greatly admired for the patience and the heroism with which he bears the ills and the disappointments of life. It is not because he is of a callous nature, or

that he is insensible to the human touches that sweep over the spirit of other races, and make the heart break down in tears. It is simply because he has a wonderful power of self-restraint; and because pain and distress are inevitable as he considers, he hides within his bosom, under a face that absolutely refuses to let out his secret, the sorrow that amongst us we could not disguise.

The chair-bearers have had their bowl of rice. They have seized a handful of peanuts which lie in little mounds on the table, and are hastily cracking their shells, and as they pick their kernels out they propel them with a jerk into their mouths. Finally they fill their diminutive bamboo pipes with tobacco, and after three or four good long whiffs, they call out in a cheery voice, “Now let us go.” The chair is swung up on to their shoulders, they shuffle their feet until they get into step, and then, with a steady trot, they start for the next stage that lies two or three miles ahead.

Our way lies across a plain that is thickly dotted with villages. These at a distance have a very charming appearance, and remind one very much of similar places in the homeland. They are nearly always embowered amongst great stately trees, that the forefathers planted when the foundations of the new home were laid. They have grown since then, and now beneath their spreading branches only a pointed roof or a whitewashed gable can be caught sight of through the rifts in the foliage of the trees.

The plain is a populous one, and the road on which we are travelling being a great thoroughfare, little market towns have sprung up on it. If there is one thing more than another that these impress upon a stranger from the West it is the absolute want of taste that the Chinese show in the building of their houses and in the laying out of their streets. Broken-down shanties, badly kept houses, streets that reek with smells, people dressed in an untidy and slovenly manner, and with hands and faces that very rarely become acquainted with soap and water; these are the common sights that meet one wherever he travels in this great land of China. The country has an old and worn-out look about it, and seems as though it needed whitewashing and renovating; whilst the people as a whole require washing and scrubbing and a liberal use of “Sunlight Soap,” to remove the grimy, dusty accumulations that rest upon them wherever you meet them.

Our journey so far has taken us through a very fertile district, and luxuriant crops of rice testify not only to the excellence of the land, but also to the skill of the farmers in the wise methods they have learned to employ in the cultivation of the land. That they succeed so well is no doubt due to the long and assiduous care that the nation has given to agriculture. From time immemorial the farmer has held a high position in the estimation of the nation. One of the most honoured amongst their ancient kings was a man that was taken from the plough, and was made a co-ruler with a man that, for the probity of his reign, has always been spoken of in the annals of the empire as a sage.

The Chinese, therefore, have had long experience in the art of cultivating the soil, and out of this has been developed the touch in their fingers that nature recognizes and responds to so readily. They seem to have no trouble in making things grow. Apparently without any effort they plough their land and scatter their seed with careless hand, and granting that the rain falls with tolerable regularity, everything springs up just as they have planned.

After passing through a number of villages and hamlets, and small market towns, all frowsy and slattern-looking, and pervaded with the Oriental bad smells wherever a human habitation exists, we came late in the afternoon to the mouth of a wide river, where our land journey was to end, and where we were to continue it by boat until we should reach our destination.

In order to get to our boat, which we had arranged should meet us at this place, we had to cross the bridge that spanned the river here to get to the other side where it lay awaiting us. This bridge is a famous one, and is a very fine specimen of what the Chinese builders can do in the construction of such. It consists of about twenty-five spans, the widest of which is sixty-five feet, whilst the others vary somewhat in their measurements.

As the river flows here with a very rapid current, and moreover is liable to sudden rises after heavy rains in the interior, it was essential, in the erecting of this bridge, that it should be built so strongly that it would be able to stand not only the wear and tear of the ever-flowing river, but also the mighty strain of the deluge of waters that comes roaring down the gorges that lie above it either after some tempest, or in consequence of an unusual downpour during the rainy season in the spring.

The great width between each pier was not a matter of choice but of necessity. To have placed them any nearer to each other might have risked their being swept away by the river tide, which when swollen by the storms of summer rolls down with prodigious volume and force over the very spot where the bridge had to be built. It was also equally necessary that the slabs of stone that composed the roadway of the bridge should be enormously heavy, so that they might be able to resist the impetus of the flood that would at times roll over them and yet not be strong enough to lift them from their positions and hurl them down the river.

It was a bold design and one seemingly impossible of achievement, and yet it has been done. Many of the slabs are seventy feet long, six feet in thickness and about four feet in width. As you slowly tread your way over them and try and pace out their length, they appear Titanic

in their dimensions, and the question that is most often in the mouths of the visitors who have come to witness this great engineering feat is how ever did the builders manage two hundred years ago not simply to cut such huge blocks of granite from the mountain side, but also to place them in the position they have occupied for two centuries at least.

This question is one that was easily answered by the untaught architects, who, without any other guidance than their own common-sense and their general knowledge of building, had undertaken to throw a bridge over a stream that depended for its moods on the changeful, fitful temper of the elements. They first of all built their piers in the river when the water was at its lowest. They waited till the winter months, when the north-east monsoon had driven the winds in wild confusion far down into the South, and the mountain streams were dry, and the current flowed in a sluggish, indolent stream.

[Pg 361]

A FAMOUS BRIDGE.

To face p. 361.

They then began to quarry out the mighty slabs that were to make the roadway of the bridge, and that should be so weighty as to be able to resist the fierce onrush of waters when the river, maddened by the storms, flung itself down the gorges and, flecked with foam, careered in wild confusion towards the sea.

The hills near by that ran down to the very edge of the water abounded with stone exactly suited for the purpose, and as the proper lengths were chiselled out of the hillsides, they were deftly slid down on rollers and placed on rafts that were moored by the edge of the shore. Here they were allowed to rest in peace and quietness until some great downpour filled the rivulets and the mountain streams and the thousand and one tributaries that sent their gurgling, gathering forces to swell the waters of the main river.

Men with keen and eager watch marked the rise of the tide, and when it was found that the flood had risen higher than the tops of the piers, the huge rafts with their mighty cargoes were skilfully guided down the flowing river, and the slabs having been moored in the position they were to occupy as parts of the roadway of the bridge, the workmen waited for the fall of the waters, when they each subsided into the exact place they were intended to fill. The river itself was thus made the engineering force by which at a comparative little cost and at no very great expense of labour, those huge masses of stone, that no hydraulic power in the world could have lifted into position, were placed in the very simplest manner where they have remained for more than two hundred years.

[Pg 362]

We found the boat we had ordered waiting for us by the river side, nestled under a great clump of bamboos, that stretched their feathery, graceful branches right over it as though they would cast their protecting shadow over the place where it lay.

At this point our land journey ends, but before going on board we have to settle with our chair-bearers, and, as is universally the case in China, to part with these usually demands a little diplomacy. In spite of the fact that we had agreed upon the sum we were to pay them at the end of the journey, they were very insistent that we should make them a present in addition. This is one of the traditions of the profession, that “wine money,” as the tax is called, should be demanded from every fare they carry. If the day is stormy and the roads bad, amidst the loudly expressed complaints of the bearers at their sorrows and miseries, there will be continually heard the comforting assurances uttered by themselves, that at the

end of the journey the present of the “wine money” will be a very liberal one. They repeat this so often that they finally come to consider that they are entitled to the sum they have mentioned, and when the stipulated fare has been handed over to them, they will assume an injured air as though they were being defrauded, and they will demand the “wine money” as a right which may not be denied them.

As they had been very nice during the journey, we made them a present of one hundred cash, equal to about twopence halfpenny, with which they expressed themselves highly pleased, and declared that we had hearts that knew the sorrows that chair-bearers had to endure, and that we were tender-heated enough to sympathize with them in a way they could understand.

It would have seemed from this that our parting from these men was going to be a very pleasant and a very amicable one, but those who are acquainted with the wiles of this class of men will easily understand that this outward expression of good-will did not mean that they were not going to try and squeeze some more money out of us. The usual way in which payment is made is in copper cash. These are made up in hundreds, and ten of these are so strung together that they form a string of a thousand. In ordinary transactions these are accepted at their full value of nine hundred and ninety eight, two being deducted to pay for the string on which the whole are strung. [Pg 363]

The chair-bearers for private reasons of their own refuse to accept these strings of cash until they have all been counted over and the five per cent. of bad ones that custom allows have all been eliminated. They insist, too, that the counting of these unwieldy coins shall be done on the ground and by themselves. Each string of one hundred was accordingly unloosed and cast upon the ground, and with the deft fingers of these unscrupulous bearers not only were the spurious cash spotted and laid aside in a heap by themselves, but a few of the really good ones were also abstracted in such a clever fashion that no one could catch the motion of their nimble fingers. In the dispute about the disappearance of the cash, one of the men was observed putting his bare toes on two or three that lay together and grasping them with them. He then quietly and naturally drew up his leg behind his back, and in an easy, unsuspicious way removed them and concealed them in his hand.

We felt that there would be no credit in disputing about the stolen cash, for the whole amount did not come to more than a little over a penny, so the men departed highly pleased with the cumshaw (present) that had been given them and with the few cash that they had been able to abstract under our very noses.

We had no sooner got on board than the large sail was hoisted, and the men taking to their oars we were soon speeding away at a tolerably quick rate on our journey up the river. Our boat was a very comfortable one, and it was quite a relief after being cramped up in the chair to be able to stretch one’s legs and to indulge in a lounge or sometimes to take a walk along the bank of the river. [Pg 364]

The boat was about twenty feet in length and five or six in width at the centre. It was divided into four sections. There was the bow, where the men stood when they rowed or hoisted the sail. Next to this was a room that was used as sitting-room, bedroom and dining-room. Further aft was a diminutive space where the servants could lie, and in the stern was the section where the steersman stood and guided the boat. It served also as a kitchen, for all the meals were prepared here, and at night, after the boat was anchored, the crew of four men lay upon the planks of the deck, and covering themselves with their wadded quilts, slept soundly till the dawn called them again to their work.

As the wind freshened our boat rushed through a narrow gorge, where the hills, beautifully wooded down to the very water’s edge, presented a most charming and picturesque view. It was not an extensive one, and so we soon emerged from it into an extensive plain which was in the highest state of cultivation. This was rendered possible by this noble river that flowed through the very centre of it. The farmers had taken advantage of this, and with great ingenuity had managed to train the waters so that they should flow into the fields far beyond the banks on either side of the river, and flood the fields of rice.

The effect of all this was seen in the luxuriant crops of rice that could be seen stretching far into the distance. It would seem indeed as though they were conscious of the boundless supply of water that ran on in an endless stream close within sight. There was a deeper colour in the dark-green hue with which they were tinged, and a sturdier and more independent growth, than where the grain was dependent on the rainfall or on the ponds that had been filled during the rainy season and that were intended to be the supplies from which they were to draw when there was a dearth of rain. [Pg 365]

There is one feature in the cultivation of this plain that is but rarely seen in any other district. You might travel for fifty miles in any direction you please, and you would never be able to catch a trace of it. I refer to the numerous clumps of sugar cane that occupy every little bit of rising ground, where the water would not lie so as to bear a crop of rice. Scattered over the great area of this extensive valley, they seem like sentinels placed to guard the growing grain that looks so beautiful in the great sheets of water that gleam and glisten in the sun’s rays at its feet.

There is something special in the soil of this region that is favourable to the cultivation of

this plant, for the sugar that is produced in this district is famous, and it finds a ready market not only in far-off distant places in China, but also in countries beyond the limits of the Empire. The amount of sugar actually raised is large enough to form an industry that is of sufficient importance to give employment to considerable numbers of the people in the towns and villages on the plain.

But here is a village, right on the water’s edge, that is evidently a centre of the trade, where we shall be able to get a good idea of the processes through which the sugar has to go before it is ready for the market. We stop our boat, and climbing the grassy bank and crossing the path that runs close along the river side, we come at once into a scene of the greatest activity. Men and women and young lads are gathered round the sugar-crusher, which is being turned by a huge water buffalo, which with slow and ponderous tread and with a look of oppression in its large liquid eyes travels round and round in a perpetual circle, causing the pair of huge stones to revolve in the same direction and to crush the canes that are thrust in between them by the feeders.

Underneath the crushers is a drain into which the juice from the canes drops and which conveys it into a large vat that stands ready to receive it. The liquid in this is of a very dark colour, very sticky, and has a strong resemblance to treacle. So intense has been the pressure of the crushers upon the canes, that after they have come out from between the revolving stones, not a particle of moisture is left in any of them, and they are no longer of any use except for firewood.

This treacly substance is then put into earthenware jars of the shape of a pyramid with a slight perforation at the apex and turned upside down and allowed to drain. The sugar at the broader end is covered with a layer of damp mud from the river, and the moisture from it is allowed to soak through the mass. The result is the whole becomes refined, and there remains, after a certain time has been allowed for the process to work, a light-coloured specimen of soft brown sugar.

A further stage is reached by boiling the brown sugar in huge iron pans and pouring the liquid into coarse jars, the whole of whose interiors have been threaded backward and forward with coarse string. By the wonderful alchemy of nature these have the power of crystallizing the boiling liquid, and the result is a brown sugar candy, that whilst it is wanting in the golden hue and the delicate fascinations of the English article, it is just as toothsome and a great deal less expensive; for a catty (1⅓ lb.) of the very best can be purchased in any of the shops that deal in such articles for about three pence halfpenny.

We leave the sugar factory, and proceed up the river, but as the sun has gone down beyond the mountains, and the shadows fall thickly upon the darkening waters, the captain chooses a place where he will anchor for the night. Just ahead of us there are a number of junks that have already lowered their sails and let down their anchors, and towards them our boat is steered. In a few minutes we too have joined company with them, and form part of the little fleet that will safely defy any attempt of river thieves to molest us.

The scene on the river is just now a very pleasing one. Boats of various sizes and descriptions are making vigorous efforts to reach their destination at villages on the river. The glory of the setting sun that tipped the mountains in the near distance is gradually dying out, and the deep shadows settle on their sides, making them look grand and gloomy. The crows that have wandered far during the day in search of food, warned by the waning light, are hurrying in flocks up the river and from across the plain in the direction of the great tree upon which they are accustomed to roost during the night. The sounds of human voices from the boats anchored near us come to us with a pleasant sense of companionship as the night deepens on the river. The laughter at some side-splitting joke, the noisy discussion of some disputed point—for the Chinese never can talk in a low voice—the voice of some mother hushing her little one to sleep, all fill the air with a music of its own, and seem to be a pleasant ending to the events of the day. A spice of mystery, too, is added, for some of the crows that have been abroad, heedless of time, have delayed their return till darkness has almost settled on the land. Attracted by the lights of the boats they fly close over our heads so that we can hear the whirr of their wings, and then with a rush like an arrow from a bow they dash with the speed of lightning into the night and are gone, leaving an uncanny feeling in our minds, as though we had been visited by spirits from the vasty deep.

Supper ended, the Chinese sit for a short time smoking their pipes and chatting indifferently upon any subject that may turn up, but before long the captain takes a look at the sky to see what weather may be expected. He then examines his cable to see whether the anchor is holding or not, and having satisfied himself that there is no danger of his boat drifting during the night, he utters the welcome order, “Now let us sleep,” and in a few minutes the crew are in the land of dreams, from which they will not return until the dawn with its silent touch brings them back once more to a busy working world.

We do not feel inclined to retire so soon as these boatmen, who have been trained to early hours. The evening is too young, and besides the beauty of the night scenery has an attraction for us that banishes the thought of sleep from us. We sit out on the bow of the boat and become absorbed in the beauty of the scene, which is lost to the sleeping world. The clouds that had been flying across the sky during the day have all vanished, and now the heavens are bright with stars that seem to shine with unwonted brilliance. The mountains on which we have gazed all the day long look now like sleeping giants hiding themselves in the

gloom of night and invested with an air of mystery as we try in vain to catch an outline of them. The people on the boats are all asleep, and only an occasional sound from a restless child can be heard coming from them. Everything is silent but the flowing river, and this ebbs on with ceaseless motion, and as if to remind us of its presence swishes up against us, and with inarticulate language gives us a cheery hail and then passes on. We go on dreaming, for the stars and the land lying in the vague mystery of night, and the undefined forms of the mountains and the ceaseless voices that nature utters all night long lay their spell upon us. By and by a dreamy, drowsy feeling creeps over us, and we retire to our cabin, and soon with the lullaby of the river that murmurs its music alongside our boat, we lose all sense of the world outside.

THE END

Richard Clay & Sons, Limited, London and Bungay.

Footnotes:

[1] See Macgowan's *Imperial History of China*, where T'a Ki is discussed, in the chapter on the Chow Dynasty.

[2] For an account of these see Macgowan's *Imperial History of China*.

[3] See Macgowan's *Imperial History of China* for fuller information on this book.

[4] See Macgowan's *Imperial History of China*, passim.

[5] The cangue is a huge wooden collar which is fastened about the neck. It is so broad that the man cannot feed himself, neither can he frighten away a mosquito that may settle on his nose, nor can he sleep comfortably whilst he wears it. He is usually made to parade near the place where his offence was committed, as an object lesson to others.

[6] See Chapter on "Servants" for a disquisition on this point.

[7] See Macgowan's *Imperial History of China*, passim.

[8] A league in China is equal to ten Chinese miles. With the want of precision, however, of the Chinese in their weights and measures, a league is a very variable denomination. On what are called the "Great Roads," that is on a great thoroughfare, the length is as stated above, but on cross-country roads, where the farmers are great walkers, a league may sometimes extend to as much as ten English miles. The fact is, as we have often found by experience, the length of a league depends very much upon the measuring capacity of a man's mind, for it is a rare thing to get a number of people to agree as to the exact distance between one place and another.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SIDELIGHTS ON CHINESE LIFE ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright

law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

> This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs

1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary

Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation’s EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state’s laws.

The Foundation’s business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation’s website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.