

like rats in the hold! However, I expect there aint anybody that can tell you the whole of that story. It's one of them mysteries that rests with the dead. The new mate—the young fellow he brought on from New York—he married the Cap'n's daughter. None o' the Harbor boys ever seemed to jibe in with her; I always had a notion that she was a touch above most of 'em; but she and her mother was as good as a providence to them shipwrecked men when they was thrown ashore—strangers in the place and no money; and it ended in Rachel's takin' up with the mate, and the whole family's leavin' the place. It was long after all the talk died away that the widow came back, and lived here in the same quiet way she always had, till she was laid alongside the old Cap'n. There wa'n't a better woman ever walked this earth than Mary Green, that was Mary Spofford!"

Captain John rose from the bowsprit, and rubbed his cramped knees before climbing the hill. He parted with his young listener at the top, and took a lonely path across the shore-pasture to a little cabin, where no light

shone, built on the edge of high-water mark, like the nest of a sea-bird.

On the gray beach below, a small, dingy yawl, with one sail loosely bundled over the thwarts, leaned toward the door-latch, as if listening for its click. It had an almost human expression of patient, though wistful, waiting. It was the poorest boat in the harbor; it had no name painted on its stern, but Captain John, in the solitude of his watery wanderings among the islands and channels of the bay, always called her the *Mary Spofford*. The boy from the main-land went home slowly, along the village street, toward the many-windowed house in which his mother and sisters were boarding. There were voices, calling and singing, abroad on the night air, reflected from the motionless, glimmering sheet of dark water below, as from a sounding-board. Cow-bells tinkled away among the winding paths along the low, dim shores. The night-call of the heron from the muddy flats struck sharply across the stillness, and from the outer bay came the murmur of the old ground-swell, which never rests, even in the calmest weather.

*Mary Hallock Foote.*

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## IN A CHINESE THEATER.

OF the objects of interest in the Chinese "quarter" of San Francisco which appeal most strongly to the stranger's curiosity, the theaters occupy a foremost place. Formerly play-houses were numerous, but an internecine strife among the rival companies lately reduced the number to two. These were installed in ordinary houses which had none of the appointments of an American theater. It occurred to an enterprising manager to build a spacious new house with a large auditorium, and to import "stars" from the Royal Theater of Peking. The venture was a success: these fresh dramatic attractions ruined one of the old play-houses, and brought the other to the verge of bankruptcy. As a last resort, one of the conservative managers also brought out a troupe of high-salaried actors and covered the dead walls with flaming placards, but his efforts were unavailing: his doors were closed, and his leading men went over to the hated rival. Dire threats of vengeance were uttered, and one night, when the new house was crowded, pots of burning phosphorus were thrown upon the stage from the sky-light, and fires were lighted in all corners of the place. Audience and actors vanished like magic, and the fire was only

extinguished with much effort. There was intense excitement for several days, but soon the theater was opened again, and now quiet reigns once more in this dramatic world.

The front of the new Chinese theater on Washington street resembles the gable end of a Pennsylvania Dutch barn. It is three stories in height, and has the architectural finish of a country variety store. In the front, on a level with the sidewalk, is a small room shut off with glass doors and windows. Here sit several delicate-featured Chinese repairing watches and jewelry, while about the window, where massive gold rings and ornaments for the hair are displayed, several sight-seers are always gathered, flattening their noses against the panes—metaphorically, of course, for the Mongol nose is beyond the power of man to flatten. To the left of the shop is the main entrance, over which is the sign in gilt letters, "Grand Theater," with four hieroglyphics a foot tall, which express the same thing in more florid style. It is Saturday night, and business is "booming." The box-office is besieged. The foreign barbarian pays "two bits" (twenty-five cents) to the American door-keeper. Opposite is the Chinese ticket-taker, who attends to

the moon-eyed patrons. Pass up a short flight of steps, push aside a thick cloth curtain, and one suddenly emerges into the theater itself. An ancient smell of things Chinese greets the nose before a glimpse is caught of a single pig-tail. Here is a moderate-sized amphitheater, with an open stage at the farther end, and the intervening space packed with Chinese. Packed is the proper word, for they are sitting on low benches, and each bench accommodates as many persons as the seats of a horse-car when the rush for home and dinner has set in. It is a dark-looking crowd, covered with black, low-crowned hats. Only four white hats may be counted, and these are the huge, umbrageous, cream-colored *sombreros* for which the Yuba Bills of California mountain roads show so strong a partiality. No line separates orchestra from dress-circle. The floor rises by regular gradations, and at the rear of the room two flights of steep stairs lead to the balcony. This is also packed, and with a crowd as like to the one below as one Chinese is to another—a strong comparison, for *Dromios* are numerous, and a "Comedy of Errors" could be arranged from Chinese life with very little trouble. On a level with the balcony, and running forward to the stage, are two narrow galleries, the private boxes. One of these is reserved for the women, of whom several are always in attendance, usually accompanied by venerable-looking children. To-night they are out in great force, and their bright dresses furnish the only relief to the prevailing somberness. One damsel is conspicuous by her position. She half reclines on the hard bench, with her bare feet tilted on the front rail and visible to the entire house, which gazes with approval upon the nonchalance of her attitude and the grace with which she throws out rings of cigarette smoke. It is a broad oriental caricature of the foreign conception of the American in dignified repose.

The upper balcony is a good place for a view of the house, but a bad place for comfort. The temperature is like that of the second hot room in a Turkish bath. The odor is more powerful than below; but by this time the sense of smell has become blunted, temporarily paralyzed. The manager says there are three thousand people in the house. They sit in stolid quiet, the greater number smoking cigars or cigarettes. In among them moves an old man with a tin dish on his head, its many compartments filled with oranges, limes, nuts, sweetmeats, bits of sugar-cane, and pea-nuts. He worms his way in and out between the rows of men, occasionally finding a customer, and shows by his skill that he is several grades above

the awkward species of the same nuisance who haunts the galleries of American variety theaters. There is continual conversation among the audience in a low tone, and continual restlessness among those standing at the rear of the room, while two streams of incoming and outgoing patrons keep pouring through the narrow door-way.

But over all the murmur of conversation and the shuffling of shoes on the bare floor rises the unearthly noise of the orchestra. The musicians, seven in number, are placed along the back of the stage, facing the audience. In the middle is the leader, a tall, gaunt Chinese, who plays a diminutive fiddle with one string. This string is composed of many strands of horse-hair, and over it is drawn a bow of similar material. The sound produced is as shrill and ear-piercing as the high notes of a bagpipe. The leader is usually the sole accompanist to a mournful chant. When the sad and sentimental "business" is on, he devotes himself to this instrument. When the action begins, he drops his fiddle and seizes a pair of cymbals as big as a wash-tub, and brings them together with a crash which shakes the theatrical firmament. Next to him sits a melancholy-looking man, who pounds mechanically a brazen gong, pendent by a wire cord and on a level with his head. Beyond him one musician beats a disk of burnished brass with a small metal drumstick, while another sits astride of a small hobby-horse and plays a tattoo upon its head of polished wood. On the other side of the leader are three men who "pick" diminutive banjos, and alternate this discord with performances on a species of horn. The latter produces the only sound that, to English ears, bears the remotest kinship to melody. The devoted musicians remain through the entire performance of six hours, unbroken by a single "wait," and for the greater part of the time they work like galley-slaves. The speeches are delivered to slow music; all the combats, counter-marching, and pantomime which fill out their interminable dramas have their musical accompaniments. The stormy tirades of rival potentates are emphasized by the clash of cymbals and the clangor of gongs, while in mortal combat the entire band aids in spurring on the warriors to deeds of valor. The orchestra smokes almost to a man. It is separated from the actors on the stage by a long table, which serves as a convenient block for decapitating an enemy after a ferocious combat. Both sides of the stage are fringed with spectators, who stand about, as was the custom in Shakspeare's time, and until Garrick asserted the right of actors to undisputed pos-

session of the stage. Occasionally the Russian who acts as stage-manager comes on the boards and forces back the eager crowd, in order to give the "supers" a better opportunity to go through with their evolutions.

There is no scenery, no stage illusion, save what may be effected by picturesque costumes. The actors enter at the right by a door-way which is covered with a curtain, and make their exits on the opposite side. All the female characters are personated by men, and the green-room and the dressing-rooms are comprised in one apartment, about thirty feet long by ten feet wide. The narrow space is half-filled with huge, iron-banded trunks, packed with many choice properties, while the walls are hung with costumes. High up on a row of pegs are hung the helmets and head-dresses of the "stars" who play the parts of mandarins and governors of provinces. Many of these look like the burnished copper kettles of the careful New England housewife. The flowing robes of rich silks and satins are heavily embroidered with beads, gilt, and spangles. The room is crowded with performers in all stages of undress. Near the right-hand door stand the actors who are soon to receive their cues, while a file of guards is ready to move upon the stage at the word of command. Other performers are naked to the waist, and are rummaging in the chests to find their costumes. Cigarette-smoking is general, and all seem to be talking at once to no one in particular. The din is tremendous, and is only exceeded by that of the orchestra, which makes the thin partition tremble. The leading tragedian is smoking a cigarette and indulging in some good-natured badinage with my American companion, who speaks Chinese like a native of the Flowery Kingdom. Suddenly, an actor bursts in, there is a wailing cry from the man at the stage door, the guards file upon the stage, with the cigarette-smoking hero at their head, and a moment after we hear his strong, resonant voice, between the crashes of the cymbals, breathing threats of vengeance against his foes.

The drama that was presented on this occasion is known as "The Dragon Disputing Pearls." It is a play of intrigue, in which diplomacy takes the place of love. In fact, the tender passion, which lends the main interest to the dramatic literature of other nations, is almost wholly ignored by the Chinese playwrights. The majority of the national dramas turn upon the quarrels of petty dignitaries, and the arbitration by which these differences are settled. The mimic combats on the stage form a delicate travesty of the national method of warfare—full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. They also serve to show

another Chinese trait, common also to Homer's warriors—the braggadocio of the combatants, the unconscionable amount of brave words exchanged before a blow is struck.

In the drama referred to, the scene opens on the household of an Emperor, who is blessed with two wives. Each spouse represents a favored province that has shared in the honors and rewards of the royal choice. Each wife has borne a son, but to the son by the first wife belongs the inheritance of the throne. The fierce jealousy between the partisans of the two wives is communicated to the two brothers, and in a quarrel the younger slays his elder brother, throws the body into the river, and gives out the report of an accidental drowning. The truth of this domestic tragedy reaches the ears of the Emperor. He summons the younger wife and her son. In the mother's presence he kills her boy, but not before she has bruised his forehead in her struggle to save the youth. Injury to the Emperor's person is a capital offense, and the wife escapes death only by declaring that she is with child. A short time after she gives birth to a boy. The Emperor has a great desire to get possession of this infant heir to the throne. He succeeds in palming off a spurious infant on the nurse. The mother detects the fraud, ascertains where the genuine child is hidden, dons male attire, and at the head of an armed force (six "supers") marches to the province and demands her child. A long *parlèy* is held with the governor of the province, but when the imperial flag is shown, this functionary delivers up the infant, and the militant mother returns in triumph. The Emperor is struck with her ability, recognizes the child as his heir, and peace broods over the imperial household.

The performance of this play—one of the shortest in the theatrical repertory—was begun at six o'clock and ended at midnight. It was relieved by not a single sparkle of wit, not a solitary gleam of humor. The nearest approach to pleasantry was furnished by the speech of the Emperor when he killed his child. The mother exclaimed, "Alas! you have slain our son." To which his answer is: "Well, console yourself: I'm not going to kill him again." This brought out a burst of laughter from the audience; all seemed to regard it as a finished bit of humor. They looked on unmoved, however, when the gory corpse rose and retired from the stage, while a member of the orchestra handed to the murderer a false head, which he apostrophized in blood-curdling terms. The only other expression of enjoyment was elicited by the disguise of the mother in man's attire. When she stroked her long false beard, several of the spectators

laughed heartily, while a ripple of smiles passed over the stolid faces of the others. The rôles of the two wives were played by Chinese men with fine soprano voices. One was a skillful actor, and imitated many peculiar feminine traits and gestures with much nicety. The leading man, who was brought over from Peking, and whose salary is \$10,000 a year, has a face brim-full of fun. He succeeds in leavening with a comic element some of the heavy plays, and his command of all the stage "business" is consummate. When engaged in combat with a foe he whirls about like a spinning dervish, crosses long spears with marvelous rapidity, and, at the end, accompanies his triumphal song with a jig that would do credit to the burnt-cork brethren.

The amount of exertion required of the leading actor is amazing. He plays seven days in the week, and the performance each day lasts from six to eight hours. The theater is open at two o'clock every day, and short farces and comedies are given during the afternoon to audiences largely made up of women and children. At seven o'clock begins the regular evening performance, which does not end until after midnight. Frequently the same actors appear in both performances. Chinese actors evidently do not believe in the effectiveness of subdued intensity in histrionic art. They rant like a Bowery tragedian in a "b-loody" border drama, filling the stage with bluster and braggart airs. Nearly all their speeches are delivered in sing-song chant, enforced with facial contortions and lavish gestures. Defiance is hurled against an adversary to the full power of the speaker's voice; his distended eye and ferocious frown typify the workings of inward rage; his mouth betrays a capacity undreamed of at a casual glance. After this tension of the facial muscles has been carried on for some time, one fears that the actor will never be able to

regain command of his features. But though he may disappear in a whirlwind of wrath, his face showing demoniac rage and his voice husky with strident bellowing, he will come back in a few moments with a placid smile on his flat face, gay, jaunty, debonair. A horrible expression is given to some faces by a coat of white paint, streaked with black, while others are covered with equally hideous masks. All the grades of official life are represented by costume or head-dress. Governors of provinces are provided with small flags fastened by sticks to their shoulders, which give them a resemblance to martial cherubs. From their helmets also hang two long, drooping plumes, looking as though they were the antennæ of some gigantic cricket. The American who attempts to learn the significance of all these decorations soon gets lost in a hopeless tangle.

The theatrical customs of Peking, dear to the heart of the exiled Chinese, are sadly restricted by the local authorities of San Francisco. It was the fashion several years ago to begin performances at nine o'clock at night, and protract them far into the small hours of the morning. But the Americans who live in the vicinity of the theaters did not relish this method of making night hideous. Their slumbers were rendered fitful and uneasy by the penetrating squeak of the one-stringed fiddle and the clamor of the gongs and cymbals. An ordinance was passed closing the doors of the theaters at midnight, to the deep disgust of the fashionable Chinese. For the American, however, two or three hours of the noisy spectacle are enough. One emerges from the smoke-laden atmosphere into the fresh night-air with the same sense of relief felt in escaping from a railway-car, after an entire day spent amid the dust and grime and clatter of the train. The confused sound of that awful orchestra still rings in the ears, and its barbaric strains tyrannize over one's dreams.

*George H. Fitch.*

## WILHELMINA.

### A PORTRAIT.

A PATIENT sadness in the lovely face,  
That melts to tenderness within the eyes,  
Now dark, now bright, as in the dew-drop lies  
A shadow brightening in a sunny place;  
Deep dimples in the cheeks that overflow  
When laughter rises from the brimming heart;  
Soft folds of lustrous hair; lips half apart,  
As if a kiss escaped and left them so;  
One fair hand thrown aside in careless gesture,  
To grasp the rose down-fallen in her vesture:  
The rose is passing sweet, yet lacks it grace  
To keep me longer from that sweeter face!

*Clifford Lanier.*