



IN THE FLOWERY LAND.

IN her travels "Among the Sons of Han," Mrs. Hughes gives some agreeable reminiscences of her river trips in and out among the Silver and Golden Islands of that far-off land—Formosa. Some of the native customs are very curious. She thus describes the strange devotions of a native woman at a roadside joss-house:—

"Whilst I was noting the peculiarities of the place, a Chinawoman, accompanied by a little boy, approached. The woman, if not pretty, had nothing repulsive in her appearance; she was young and clean-looking; her costume consisted of a loose light-blue jacket or tunic extending to her knees, and a pair of loose trousers of the same material and colour; her feet were of the natural size (not dwarfed and deformed like those of even the poorest Northern Chinawomen), and were encased in white stockings and shoes with thick white soles. Her costume, as well as her simple and becoming

coiffure, proclaimed her to be a native of Southern China. She was the usual height of Chinawomen, about four feet six inches, and her feminine vanity was evinced by the large gold rings which decorated her ears. The woman had evidently come with the purpose of going through some religious ceremony, and I immediately resolved to watch her movements without disturbing or embarrassing her.

She first took four 'joss-sticks,' lighted them, and stuck them round the stone figure outside the door; then entering the enclosure she advanced to the altar, lighted four small pink candles, and placed them in the small hollow place above the altar; then she lighted more 'joss-sticks,' and placed them on the altar, repeating some prayers in a plaintive tone the while. These preliminaries completed, she knelt down and repeated more prayers for the space of about three minutes, when she performed the 'kotow' by knocking her head three times on the ground in front of the altar. Having thus completed what may be termed the propitiatory part of the ceremony, she proceeded to make her petitions by unfolding a sheet of paper covered

with Chinese characters, and spreading it on the ground in front of the altar; she then handed a corresponding sheet of paper to her juvenile attendant, who stood on her left, and again knelt before the shrine.

Pausing for a few seconds in a suppliant attitude, and murmuring more prayers, she named aloud one of the characters on the paper in front of her, and let what appeared to be a couple of small copper coins drop on the ground, and immediately afterwards the boy with a lighted 'joss-stick' burned or singed one of the characters on the paper which he held.

The dropping of the coins and the burning with the 'joss-stick' having been several times repeated, the woman rose from her kneeling position, satisfied no doubt that her petition had been granted, and then commenced what appeared to be the thanksgiving or concluding portion of the rites. Holding in her left hand a quantity of 'joss-paper'—which is a kind of roughly gilt or silvered paper, cut in small squares, and which the 'joss' is supposed to accept as real gold and silver—she applied a light with her right hand, and after holding the burning treasure for a few seconds, threw it blazing to the right of the altar. Then with a final bow to the presiding deity she took her departure.

On entering the building afterwards, I found the candles and 'joss-sticks' still burning, and I noticed for the first time a bush in one corner of the enclosure almost covered with pieces of rags, the relics, no doubt, of former worshippers; and I could not help thinking of the holy wells of Ireland, overhanging which the traveller often sees trees bearing similar traces of the visits of pious pilgrims.

I am sorry to have to add what I subsequently learned, namely, that the female whose pious devotions I had witnessed had no more worthy object for her prayers than the assistance of 'joss' in some gambling speculation. The

Chinese are perhaps the most inveterate gamblers of the world; the lower classes seem to have packs of their tiny cards ever ready to produce, by way of varying the monotony of their lazy, idle existence. The itinerant pastrycooks and fruit-sellers always, or nearly always, dispose of their wares by the throw of the dice; and gambling-houses are everywhere to be found."

Mrs. Hughes gives a lively account of a Chinese dinner:—

"A gentleman who was acquainted with the provincial treasurer of Foo-chow—next to the governor the highest mandarin in the province—invited the Europeans (and amongst them Mrs. Hughes) to a dinner in the Canton Club. I had often desired to partake of a Chinese meal, and I was glad to avail myself of this, the first opportunity which presented itself of testing the virtues of an Oriental *ménu*. At the appointed hour about forty Europeans, fourteen of whom were ladies, assembled, and as the great man who was the principal guest on the occasion thought it necessary to keep us all waiting, we had quite an hour at our disposal for the purpose of inspecting the beauties of the place.

On the arrival of the Fantai, accompanied by two smaller mandarins (one a Taotai, the head of the local Board of Trade, and the other the well-known Tong King-Sing, the head of the new Chinese steamer company), we took our places at the long table prepared for us, and the long-expected Chinese viands soon began to appear. No sooner were we seated than the servants set about filling the little cups which stood in front of the guests with a decoction which was described to us as Shao Hsing wine; it was poured from earthenware pots which looked exactly like teapots, and it was intended no doubt to whet our appetites for the good things that were to follow.

Whilst we were all amusing ourselves with efforts at manipulating the 'chop-

sticks'—two narrow pieces of ivory about nine inches long, which, held between the fingers of one hand, were to do the duty both of knife and fork—the first course came on, a gelatinous-looking substance served up in little Chinese bowls; and now who has courage enough to try the uninviting morsel for the benefit of his neighbours? One intrepid individual, after eyeing his bowl for some time, boldly plunged his chop-sticks in, extracted a tiny portion, tasted it cautiously, and pronounced it to be excellent birds'-nest! Stimulated by his example we all swallowed a small quantity, and then we discovered that our first course consisted of sharks' fins and lobsters—a revelation which shook our confidence in our first informant terribly. The second luxury was Szechuen fungus and shred fowl; then came a sort of omelette made of pigeons' eggs; then soup, flavoured with the brains of the dog-fish; then a kind of minced dumpling; and then came a dish which made some of us almost jump from our seats—sea-slug, known generally by the more euphonious name of *bêche-de-mer*.

Up to this point the dishes were, as a rule, removed untasted by the foreign guests, and we amused ourselves with picking up by the aid of our chop-sticks the water-chestnuts and other miscellaneous things left permanently on the table. The sea-slugs were followed in succession by pork sausages, fowl served with spinach, and fried shrimps, and these, too, were passed by in a manner hardly complimentary to our host's culinary artist. We were next tempted with almond tea, but without success; then came more fungus, and then, to the joy of many, some plain roast fowl, which, though rather oily, was, to anyone with an appetite, eatable. At this stage of the proceedings some kind Samaritan introduced iced champagne, which, in a crowded room, on a Chinese summer day, proved a welcome addition to the native feast. At the same time another

gentleman, who was probably guided by previous experience, cautiously produced and passed along secretly under the table, from hand to hand, a box of sandwiches, which were thoroughly appreciated by a chosen few; and our Chinese friends at a little distance from us, seeing that we were enjoying the smuggled food, thought, no doubt, that we were showing a due regard for the flavour of some of their own cherished dainties.

But the long list of dishes was not yet complete; the roast fowl was succeeded by stewed loquats (a kind of fruit); next came some greasy mutton, then a roast sucking pig—which was appreciated—and the sixteenth course consisted of sliced roast duck. If the numerous dishes were not freely partaken of by the Western barbarians, the Celestials who were present did ample justice to everything. The Fantai had prepared himself for the onslaught by divesting himself of his state robes, and between the courses he generally indulged in a pipe, which was handed to him by one of his attendants. A further specimen of Chinese etiquette was exhibited to us at the close of the repast, when a servant brought a dirty-looking wooden pail full of steaming hot water, and a dark coarse cloth, which latter the mandarins, whilst seated at table, each in turn dipped in the water, and then mopped their unctuous faces in the most unconcerned manner!

On the whole I rose from the Chinese feast, pleased that my curiosity had at last been satisfied, but with the firm conviction that I should never again be tempted to go through such a trying ordeal. I ought, however, to add that my experience, as narrated above, is hardly a fair test of the merits of Chinese cookery in its highest branches; for I have often been told of the refined little dinners which many Chinese officials know how to give to their European friends, at which every dish is served in a manner to satisfy the most fastidious."