

A TINSELLED DEATH-TRAP.



INTERIOR OF AN OPIUM DEN.
(From a Drawing by W. SIMPSON, R.L.)



URELY this is not what you call an opium palace?"

We were on our way one August night to visit some of the notorious opium divans in Shanghai, and, to my surprise, our first halt in the crowded thoroughfares was in front of a low, rough archway, within which some shabby fruit-stalls were spread out. Here, however, our guide led us in; and a few yards beyond the entrance, the passage opened upon a large, square, lofty hall, on each side of which were counters covered with opium-pipes for sale or hire. Very handsome many of these were—large, flute-like objects, in ivory or carved wood.

This large hall was partitioned off from the space around, to which we passed on, and found it was divided into compartments about the size of a square church-pew, each furnished with broad wooden couches on two sides, and between these a low table bearing a small lamp and tea-drinking apparatus. Two men, or sometimes a man and a woman, lay one on each couch, their faces towards the table; most of them were heating, over the lamp, the opium in their pipe-bowls. In all directions attendants were carrying about trays laden with small metal cups filled with

opium of the treacle-like consistency used by the smokers.

Every inch of ground, save the narrow passage running between the central hall and the smoking-chambers, was occupied by the latter, and all of these were tenanted. Besides the inmates reclining, men and women visitors were in many instances seated on the couches, some of whom, we were told, were transacting business with the opium-smokers; but this surely could not come to much, judging by the sleepy stupefaction manifestly overtaking the latter, some of whose faces were ghastly from habitual indulgence in this poison-process.

A winding staircase led to an upper storey arranged like the ground-floor, with galleries running round and overlooking the great entrance-hall. Here also all available space was occupied by well-filled smoking-boxes. An official told us there are on an average 1,500 visitors a day at this opium divan—by far the larger proportion between the hours of eight and twelve at night.

Very elaborate, costly, and even artistic were the fittings of the place. Every partition was composed of beautifully carved open-work in dark polished wood, with panes let in of richly coloured or finely graven glass, whereon were depicted birds, flowers, stars, and other devices; while the great hanging lamps in all directions displayed the same rich carving and fine glass, and were decorated with innumerable tassels of brilliant-coloured silk and beads. Yet the whole effect of the scene was squalor; and every attempt at adornment seemed like gay trappings on a corpse. Most incongruous of all were the sweet flowers here and there growing (or surely perishing) in great porcelain vases;

while, most painful of all, there were little children among the throng, some sadly crying—one pretty little girl fast asleep, her face resting on a smoker's table.

Visibly the fumes were fulfilling their fell office, and faces growing dreamy, glassy-eyed, idiotic; while the atmosphere of the divan had become so foul, so stifling, we had to retreat, and breathed with keen enjoyment the outer air, which half an hour before had seemed so oppressive that still, sultry summer night. We went into three other opium divans, all exhibiting the same features in the main, though none so showy as that above described, which is said to be the largest and grandest in China. Indeed, the opium-smoking houses of Shanghai (of which there are over two hundred in the foreign settlement, and many in the native city) are of every degree of grandeur and griminess. To-day two were pointed out to me which were mere boarded-in, windowless shanties, through whose narrow doorway we peered into a dark, loathsome, and, alas! thickly peopled den. Great also is the diversity in the quality of opium smoked by various classes. The poorest of the people buy a kind of refuse, of which about 80 cash- (threepence-) worth serves them the twenty-four hours. The rate at which opium-smoking injures health and shortens life depends largely on the victim's means of counteracting its effects by nourishing food; but so notoriously demoralising, as well as stultifying, is this indulgence, that an habitual opium-smoker is rarely employed in any office requiring intelligence and rectitude—or even in the smoking divans.

Deaths, both accidental and suicidal, from overdoses of this drug are frequent. A few days ago I saw in our native hospital a stalwart-looking man just brought in unconscious on a stretcher, who had poisoned himself thus because of some dispute with a relative. The native doctor said he had little hope of saving him, and in a few hours he died.

Strangely different was the scene witnessed in the opium divan from that exhibited in a London gin-palace, with its uproar ever faster and more furious, more wild and frenzied the infatuated guests. Here all grew strangely quieter as the victims subsided into their dreamful slumbers. "After all," remarked the leader of our party, one who has spent forty years in labours of Christian love among this people, "what are the poor Chinamen to do with their evening hours? Home-life, in our sense, has no existence for them; of intellectual resources the mass of the people have none, nor harmless amusements in the way of games." And as to their waste of time, health, substance, in this deadly dissipation, what can be expected of a people ignorant of responsibility towards the Giver of all, and of the eternal considerations, the heavenly hopes, which lend such vast import to the life that now is: when we see hundreds of thousands in our own enlightened lands also, according to God's solemn Word, "dreamers," "defiling the flesh, and walking after their own lusts," and needing no less than these poor heathen the heavenly call, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light"?

ALICE JANE MUIRHEAD.

"TUNE ST. ELWYN'S."

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.



NCE again, children! From the fifth line —'and e'en though long.'

"And e'en though long and far we roam,
Thy love, O Saviour, is our Home!"

sang the bright young voices, while Miss Tremellen stood before them, erect and animated, her fair face slightly flushed with excitement as

she beat time for the little group by rhythmical passes of her white hand through the air.

"It goes well, doesn't it?" she cried, when the last note died away, and turning as she spoke towards a young man who was seated at a small organ at the other end of the class-room.

He started slightly, and raised a pair of dark, thought-filled eyes, with the expression of one suddenly recalled from a dream of far away. "Yes;

oh yes—I think it will do," he replied, without enthusiasm; and Pearl Tremellen's radiant face shadowed as she met his look.

"You may go now, dears," she said, addressing the children. "If we practise with as good a spirit from now until the anniversary Sunday, we shall do well. You like the new tune, don't you?"

"Yes, teacher, it's pretty!" replied several, in a breath. One bright-looking boy adding, "And we like the words too, miss! Father said you must be a real genius to be able to write a hymn like that."

Pearl coloured, and laughed. "We are fortunate in having such an organist as Mr. Adair to set them to music," she said. "A dull tune would have killed it."

"Good-bye, Willie! Good-bye, Kitty! Good-bye!" And with hand-shakes and kisses Miss Tremellen bade good-night to her little choir.

Ten minutes later, Laurence Adair was escorting her homewards along the undulating cliff path that led from the school-house to the village. He still seemed sad and *distract*.

"What are you going to call the new tune?" asked Pearl, in an endeavour to break the strange silence that seemed to be settling down upon them. "It ought to have a name."