

# FRAGMENTS OF CHINA.

BY G. W. WARD.

*Illustrated from special Photographs.*



THE title isn't original, but it is the most appropriate that I can think of for these piecemeal reflections. Frankly, I dislike the yellow race: deceitful, inhuman, obstinate, they always remind me of those jungle-vines which are ever sending out shoots in fresh directions intent on strangling the freemen of the forest, the aboriginal monarchs. From Sydney to Peru, from Callao to Calcutta, you find them extending their influence silently, if not yet so crushingly as the author of "The Yellow Invasion" predicted. In Dresden one finds highly-educated Germans working for the Mongol, in Whitechapel he owns rows of houses. His is the richest class in the Philippines, in the Malay Peninsula, in Siam or the Pacific Slope. He is a power to be reckoned with, although the battle of Armageddon in which he will conquer will be one in which wealth will be the weapon, even as the Jew has found his strength. He has his good points too, has John Chinaman—the Chow, as our American cousins despitefully term him. White women who have tried the experiment declare that he is an ideal husband. On the other hand, I have known more than one Celestial "Mrs. Jackson"—so that there are evidently both sorts, good and bad.

The untravelled Englishman depends mostly for his views regarding China and its people upon the heathen whom he sees around the East-End. I had read some accounts of Chinese life there—some very lurid and others extremely interesting. So I spoilt a night recently in visiting that classic region to verify all these impressions. I was disappointed, I confess. To thoroughly comprehend the peculiar surroundings of the inhabitant of a large Chinese town—his methods of work, of amusement, of worship and all else that goes to diversify his existence—one must discard any preconceptions derived from observation of the sprinkling of Celestials who are to be found in this country. I vainly sought some fairly typical scene—something even remotely resembling one of the corners of a city like Canton or Chao-chao-fu—but the compara-

tive cleanliness and silence and absence of true squalor banished the possibility of illusion. From the "copy" making point of view Limehouse was a failure and Poplar a delusion.

The difference between the Limehouse idolater and the Chinaman when he is upon his native heath partly lies in the fact that the latter doesn't have to wear oily dungarees, redolent of a steamer's stoke-hole, or have his *queue* tucked away beneath a slop-shop cap, and engage in swear-duels with drunken drabs under the flaring windows of a gin-palace. Not that he smells any sweeter, or dresses more gorgeously—though his national head-gear is certainly more picturesque—or displays greater refinement when he has a row in his country; the distinction is, that in the latter case he is "the real Chinaman," whilst on the Thames-side he is simply a sophisticated imitation of Ratcliffe Highway civilisation.

Let me elucidate my meaning by an instance. On the next page is an excellent illustration of an opium-smoker—a Canton trader—enjoying his pipe in one of the many places of entertainment which exist in that huge city. That he is of the better class is evident from his wearing stockings, and silk trousers tied around the ankles, and letting down his *peen*—for it is offensive to describe his greatest glory as a "pig-tail." The ancient in the background, extracting another modicum of opium, in readiness for the next pipe, from the little box which he handles, is of a similar social grade; whilst the individual seated on the stool—probably a clerk getting half-a-crown a week and his food—is simply dressed in glazed calico. Reclining there on the quilt, with a picture of the great Li Hung Chang and half a dozen Confucian mottoes brightening the apartment, and a tea-pot alongside him, which the shop-lad perpetually replenishes, the smoker is dissipating in a decent, dignified way, between which and the mixed debauches of their compatriots in our dock slums there is practically no comparison. I witnessed several of these latter during my recent wanderings in Whitechapel. They were all of a pattern: an open doorway in a



row of cottage-houses admitted one to a scantily-stocked little shop, with a Chinkie or two behind the counter. "Wanthee smoke opium? Aw lite, go topside." Topside, in a room ten feet or so square, would be a couple of small iron bedsteads, with undraped mattresses and pillows, on which sat or sprawled half a dozen angle-eyed firemen from some China liner. As many more would be seated on rickety chairs around the blazing fire, smoking short tobacco-pipes or consuming stewed tea, whilst a conversation in Puntí—the Cantonese dialect—consisting chiefly of the oaths and vicious phrases with which the lowest-class Chinaman garnishes his gossip, was fitfully kept up. Only one or two preferred opium to liquor and "My Lady Nicotine," as a rule; the rest would not even accept a pipe when one was offered by their visitor, although they pressed me to try it myself. And it cost a shilling! Under conditions such as are depicted in the illustration on this page I had occasionally experimented in bygone years, but there one had at least some local colour in his surroundings to support the lotoseating illusion (for opium-smoking is about as delusive and unsatisfactory a method of dissipation as could well be devised), whereas the Docks divans were absolutely destitute of anything ornamental, either Oriental or European. An advertisement of Old Tom gin was the nearest approach to the aesthetic that I could discover.

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I had been tempted to this comparison between the Chinaman at home and the Chinaman abroad by the resurrection of a batch of far Eastern pictures which I had

accumulated during my sojourn in Cathay, the reproduction of a few of which may convey a faint idea of Chinese social life as it actually exists. Take, for example, the little feast depicted on the next page. Pictorially the scene suffers through the inappropriateness of the stage-setting, which is obviously that of the photographic studio. To be absolutely accurate the tables ought to be of a ruder type, the seats heavy square stools, innocent of support for the back, and a servant, handing round a single hot, wet,



OPIUM SMOKERS.

dirty napkin, wherewith the guests may wipe their hands and faces, should be in attendance. If possible, too, the picture ought to emit a strong mixed odour of cooking and tobacco-smoke, mingled with the shrieks of a native orchestra. Nevertheless the group is marvellously faithful. In the saucers are a few of the innumerable courses which go to make up a Chinese dinner—duck, or fish, or *olla podrida*, probably, for the feasters are hardly of the bird's-nest-and-shark-fins class; the bowls have contained rice, and in the



bottles is that evil-smelling rice decoction which is commonly called *samshu*, but is really *chao*. It tastes like sherry, and smells like sulphur. At intervals during a ceremonial meal some of the guests retire to a neighbouring divan to enjoy a pipe of opium; others while away the time by playing a game something like the "Buck, buck, how many fingers do I hold up?" of our boyhood. Only both players display their digits simultaneously, and it is easy enough to tell when a feast is being held in your neighbourhood by the incessant shouts of "see," "shap"—four, ten—and so on, which the players utter in their excitement. Whoever guesses

their eyes become bloodshot, their volubility knows no bounds, and by the thirtieth course their apathy has vanished totally. Yet they rarely create a breach of the peace, such is their uncivilised nature.

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To see the ceremony of worshipping the ancestral tablets is not easy in the case of a European. As the illustration shows, it is performed with a good deal of dignity, the worshipper donning his best clothes before approaching the shrine and depositing thereon a miniature feast, wine included, for the benefit of the spirits of his forbears. It will be noted that a basketful of paper, folded to



A CHINESE DINNER-PARTY.

the total number of fingers exposed, wins; the loser has to drink a thimbleful of the *chao*. It seems to me that a game of that sort ought to become popular in this country. It is amusing for a time—though wearisome in the long run—to watch the demeanour of a crowd of these revellers. They arrive at the restaurant stolid and apathetic, and careful of etiquette, saluting one another with clasped hands and respectful genuflections. The first dozen dishes or so moves them somewhat; after a few puffs of opium and a couple of games of "buck" their complexions change from yellow to ruddy, after the peculiar manner of all Asiatics;

resemble "shoes" of silver, stands on the right of the altar to serve as pocket money for the ghosts, whilst a youthful member of the family prepares to ignite a bunch of crackers for the purpose of exorcising such unfriendly devils as may be hovering about ready to contest the possession of the oblations with their rightful owners. The picture on the wall is that of the God of Plenty; in front of him are wax candles and incense-sticks stuck in a bronze jar, and the worshipper is receiving *chao* from his servant to complete his offering.

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The Chinaman is *facile princeps* among



gamblers. Immense sums are raised annually by the viceroys of the various provinces by the farming of lottery and gaming-house monopolies. They do not bet on the time the monsoon will burst, as in the Indian *bursati* sweeps, because they are not interested in rain much; they never organise a horse-race within the Imperial boundaries; games requiring "bluffing" powers they are unacquainted with, as Ah Sin pretended to be; but the simpler and older forms of skill or chance, from lotteries down to dominoes, afford them the keenest pleasure. At the

dependent simply upon one of four numbers turning up, are equally popular, but as a percentage of from seven to ten per cent. on the winnings is charged, a steady course of play usually ends disastrously. Indeed of late years the Hong-Kong Government have had to practically compel the Chinese authorities to interdict these forms of gambling at Kowloon city, a point some few miles distant, on account of the extensive losses sustained by the British community—or rather by their servants. The Chinese card games, as a general rule, are beyond explanation



WORSHIPPING THE ANCESTRAL TABLETS.

triennial examinations of students half the Chinamen in the world probably back some competitor or other as *Optimus* or *Prox. Acc.*, and large sums are won by the fortunate selector, there being a "field" of some thousands. The reason of the popularity of the event is the absolute inability of the gambling farmers, who practically represent our book-makers, to control the result. In the daily lotteries, such as the *Pak-ko-piu*, or "White Pigeon," it is notorious that the least-backed number is infallibly drawn. *Fan-tan* and *po-tsz*, both of which are games

—I never knew a European yet who had fathomed their mysteries. My firm belief is that the Chinese themselves only make believe to understand the rules, as somebody once said the Basques pretended to comprehend one another.

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Considering that the inhabitants of the Middle Kingdom use the razor more than any other nation in the world, it is passing strange that they have never discovered the advantages of lathering first. Dabbing a warm wet cloth on the chin or the scalp is



a poor substitute for soap. Hair-cutting, as we practise it in the West, is to them "all unknowe," except in the few localities where foreigners are numerous. I remember once, when in the province of Kwangtung, sending for a man to shear my leonine locks, and he who came, after borrowing my nail-scissors, began nibbling away at my scalp without troubling about such a trifle as a comb. At the third snip I stopped him, and asked him if he had ever cut a foreigner's hair before. "Oh yes! When was that? Oh, last year, when he cut the hair of a German Customs' officer, who had died!" But in the matter of shaving there are few more deft—considering the latherless way he does it, and the fact that he uses a little three-cornered soft iron knife as a razor—than the



A CHINESE BARBER AT WORK.

Chinese Figaro. Was not the chief of all his tribe ennobled by an emperor, ages back,



A GAME OF CARDS IN PROGRESS.



for dexterously cleaving a mosquito that had settled on the imperial nose? One advantage gained by patronising the Chinese barber—in the case of Europeans—is that he doesn't mind coming to your room every morning and shaving you before you wash and dress. But the native also generally waits to be *rasée* before washing, even if he has to wait a week.

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The lightest punishment Chinese justice inflicts is that of the *cangue*—though why *kang* should be spelt that way has always been a mystery to me. It is a wooden board, weighing anywhere between five and fifty

ment permitted by the Chinese code the number is legion—some idea of a few of them will have been gathered from the report of the recent trials before the Kucheng Massacre Commission. In the United Service Institution, Whitehall, too, may be seen a narrow cage in which an English lady was long confined; it will speak more eloquently than could any picture we might publish.

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Space will not permit even still briefer references to many more of my pictorial souvenirs, but it may be interesting, in conclusion, to compare some of the methods of travelling which one has to adopt when



THE PUNISHMENT OF "CANGUE."

pounds, which locks round the culprit's neck, and prevents him scratching his nose. We in England used to apply the same principle to the ankles of evil-doers, which was a good deal more unpleasant, I should imagine. It is very common to see a file of offenders in the Maloo at Shanghai, looking like so many sandwich-men with their paper-covered boards—only in their case the placard makes unpleasant references to their characters, and they have to cart it about for a month or so. They are free to sit and talk to a friend, or to smoke, if their friend will light a cigarette and put it in their mouth, but lying down is inconvenient, and to have a cold must be awful! Of the severer forms of punish-

journeying in various parts of the great Eastern empire. In point of antiquity, perhaps, the mule-litter has precedence—it undoubtedly has no claim on any other ground. It is called a mule-litter because an aged pony and a little under-sized Neddy are yoked fore and aft, so that the comfortable shade afforded by the palanquin is more than off-set by the heaving and jolting. But if the litter is the oldest, the wheelbarrow is the most degraded of Chinese vehicles. You can use it for anything—the barrow-coolie will either wheel you on it, or all your family, or a letter, or half a ton of the most objectionable cargo. And he only charges about a halfpenny a mile. He will take you a

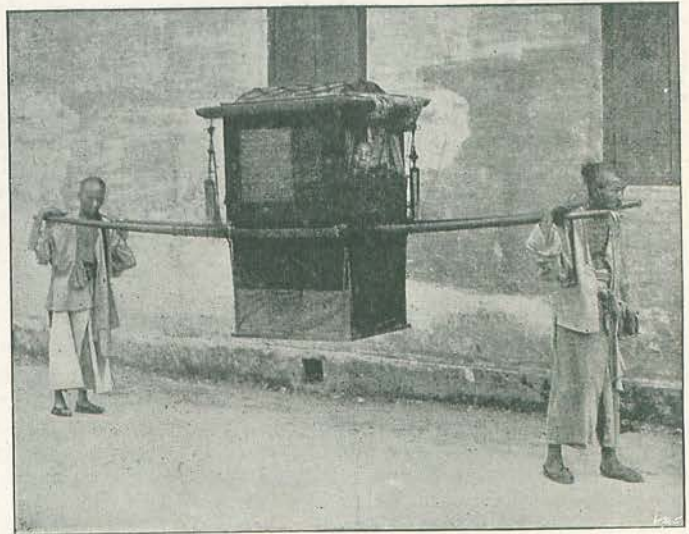




A RICKSHA.

hundred miles, if you are not in a hurry, and don't mind other fares sitting with you from time to time; long practice has enabled him to wheel his creaking old truck within an inch of the edge of a steep river-bank and not overbalance more than once in ten tries, and even when that does happen you can always kick him unrestrainedly, and walk off without paying the wretched, broken-spirited old fool. The ricksha—so called from Yokohama to Simla “because that's the Japanese name,” although no Japanese ever dreams of calling it anything but *kuruma*—is hardly known in China, outside the various ports, for the use of rickshas involves roads, and, as a high authority wrote recently, “no road, in the European acceptation of the term, as an artificially constructed viaduct, laid out with engineering skill even of the meanest description, exists from one end of China to the other.” Carts—lumbering springless wagons, with hobnailed wheels—are principally used

for heavy traffic, and steer about over the face of the country in the most free-and-easy way, only restricted by the pitfalls which each farmer digs to keep them from driving over his land. The aristocratic method of getting about, however, is by chair. Unlike our old sedans, the Chinese chair-poles are borne on the porters' shoulders, which are pretty callous, even under such a weight, after the thousand years of breaking-in to pole-carrying which former generations have bequeathed to them. The passenger is accommodated inside a small cottage, comfortably screened and ornamented, and with a far from unpleasant swaying motion as its bearers stride swiftly along with swinging arms and antiphonal grunts. It was in such a chair, but borne by eight coolies, that Li Hung Chang was being carried along the main street of Shimonoseki when the attempt to assassinate him was made.



A COMFORTABLE MEANS OF TRANSIT.