

# Episodes of Chinese Life in British Columbia.

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ENT to their well marked accretive character in the accumulation of wealth is the philosophy which teaches the Chinese to tide over the rocky places in life under a determination to accede to a limited knowledge of English or the Indian jargon, even

when masters of the pigeon English style in language which they have in common use. This phase in their manners leads them also to abruptly end a disliked conversation or criminal evidence by the ejaculation of their curt "no savvy," accomplished with a well-assumed blank stare.

"You savvy," a Chinaman related when in a discursive and philosophic mood, "you good man; I good man; money him bad man."

The reason of this ambiguous preface was made clear, as follows:—

"One time I work up country; white man come camp, say he heap hungry. 'Velly good,' I say, 'sit down, take dinner;' he eaty dinner. 'Velly good man, you, John, you come town some time, I see you.' 'You see velly good,' I say. Long time go by, no go town. Bossy man he say, 'You go town, John, no more stop.' Velly good, you see, I go town. I walky up stleet, who I see? man I give dinner. Good clothes him, now. I looky him all e time. He looky me. I likey talkey him. He savvy me. Son of a gun, he looky up window. You see money heap bad man."

Thus this race finds indirect modes of apologizing for the meanness of ingrates, through the natural bent of their minds in philosophizing. Who ever knew the history or on what theory their music is founded? This peculiar semi-wailing aggregate of sounds, interspersed with staccato lights, performed on the double-stringed Chinese violins, accompanied by different sized zithers and vocalism, as well as metallic drums, the clinking sounds of which are drawn from it by the vocalist, who accompanies his exercises on it with a seemingly falsetto voice, which rises and falls in the peculiar enunciation of the song common to this nationality. Whether founded on mythical or historical events, physical or metaphysical in its foundation, even Peré Amiot, the missionary of long residence among them in their own land, failed to thoroughly elucidate. A semicircle of musicians is to be observed at many of the stores whiling away the evening hours, while the bystanders load the air with the fumes of tobacco, which savours strongly in appearance and flavour of cow hair. No people appreciate the leisure hours of eve more than do these representatives of the nation which comprises one-fifth of the population of the world. Let their employment lay in saw-mill or cannery, clearing land or tilling the same; as the stone-cutter is facetiously said to drop his hammer over his shoulder at the stroke of the quitting hour, so do the Chinese on the blowing of the time-whistle or other means of warning the employees of an industry that a cessation has arrived, drop anything they may be carrying and scamper pell-mell towards their dens. The idea of a Chinaman trotting along the road under a heavy load is well promulgated, but this trait in his character he exhibits more in his native country. The object evidently is to ease himself as quickly as possible, at the expense of a little more exertion, as his philosophy again crops up to suggest; the sooner unburdened the greater the rest. In this country, in following out the avocation of vegetable peddler or slop-collector, they have no great distances to travel at a time. This idea stands good as a national characteristic, for post one's self in a place of vantage, about laying-off time, close to where they may be employed in any numbers, and a surging rush of oblique-eyed individuals obtrude themselves on the vision, almost simultaneous with the first blast of the whistle. Those thronged industries, such as the canneries and saw-mills, have a large percentage of their employees drawn from the China-towns, and their influence is not only apparent in the usurpation of the labour field of an equal number of white labourers, but also in a scale of wages that is not at all commensurate with the charges of living. It is not too much to say that the influences of their lives do not rest here, but that they imbue those in immediate contact

with them for a considerable time, with some of their own traits of character, and a deterioration in the wages of white labour is a natural outcome of those circumstances. Not unlikely though that the Mongols shall drop off, displaced by the incoming tide of a better class of people from the congested European countries. Those of them who can penetrate the advantages of a knowledge of the English language, and who are not content to remain labouring at hard work, show a nervous desire to attain the mastery of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. Once they attain a slight knowledge of the first two R's they are content to think they have entered the mystery of elucidation far enough, with few exceptions, which stamp themselves conspicuously from being so uncommon in the general routine of Chinese life on the coast. A young Chinaman, who studies after his domestic duties are through for the day, shows the usual feverish wish to conquer English construction, but after reading through the alphabet, with few mistakes, on pointing out letters here and there throughout it, he has become so excited in the process that he will persist in calling every letter v. When a nation becomes habituated to a certain style of dress, through long usage, it cannot be an easy matter for its people to discard it, but although the Cantonese, who infest the coast cities, have been in the habit of wearing the usual loose style of garb affected by the nation at their home, still they very readily take to clothes more fitted to the labours which they are called upon to perform, and after a time some of them go far enough too, to change their 'all same's' 'Mellican man' overalls to don a European cut suit of tweeds. The store-keepers, of course, make no change; they dress as they might do in Hong-Kong or Canton, and most of the workingmen, after their day's labour has been done, prefer the comfort of the loose garments they have been accustomed to than the strait confines of the 'Mellican wear. A migration of the Chinese from one quarter of a city to another, periodically, and the application of the torch to their late quarters, is one feasible way of extirpating the diseases which they breed by crowding and residing for a length of time in any one spot. Fumigation in their case proves a failure, and the removal of their habitations from one place to another would mean, to those most conversant with their way of living, the stalking around of the scythe armed skeleton which it would take them no great stretch of imagination to see, in the event of such a course being pursued. The accretion of germs of disease, from year to year, in their unventilated houses taking wings, would be a mortal menace to any community in which they are allowed a firm foothold. In some of the cities their 'towns' impinge their ugly visages on the incoming immigrant or speculator, and do not tend to impress him at first sight with the beauties which later on become apparent to him in many of the features of the Pacific coast cities. Although under the supervision of the sanitary official they will not act until 'drawn over the coals' and fined; even then it is necessary for this official to take action and send in a man to carry out his instructions in scavenging and white-washing the crowded quarters in which they live. So, for these features of Chinese life, their star is waning on these shores. A solution of the immigration difficulty will naturally resolve itself into their non-employment as a greater influx of Eastern Canadians and Europeans tends westward. Very little is seen of Chinese women in this province; as far as they are regarded they form a veritable rara-avis, although farther south they pose as the base of some interesting cases in the law courts. When young they—in many cases—are as marketable as any commodity, and are reared by the purchaser until more mature age gives them a much greater value. Several slaves of the gentler sex exist here, and merchants of means procure an entry for them to this country, where they not unseldom become the wards of the rescue home officials, or get married as an alternative to being the guests of the government when trespassing on the inexorable laws which finds its victims, or those it is supposed to extend its protection to, in all nationalities whose representatives comes under its pale. In dress they are not easily discernible from the men, at first glance, as they affect the same wide, baggy trousers.

It seems contradictory of the generally accepted theory that the Chinese believe in the power of spirits to partake of solid matter supplied them on being placed to rest in

their burying grounds by their friends still existent on this mundane sphere, that they have discontinued the practice of offering food by leaving it at the grave of the departed. One would think that their priests would take advantage of the disappearance of the victuals in the shape of pork and wines to impress upon the heathen members of the community the doctrine which they adhere to in the rites for the dead. But credulous as they may be in regard to the will of the spirit in partaking of refreshment, they have become alive to the fact that the (Siwash) Indians have a much keener appreciation of the food left at the grave to appease the appetite of the departed than have the Mongols who flit about in extra-mundane space. If food is not deposited on the last narrow cells in which the bodies of the celestials are enclosed, before proceeding to the cemetery a table is placed in the road opposite the deceased's house bearing the weight of several pigs roasted whole, flanked by confections, of which all may partake. On a rest, slightly above the level of the ground, lies the casket, in which is the body, the features of which are visible through a square of glass let into the lid, as it lies in state, before being conveyed to its future resting place, where it remains through decomposition, the bones being shipped later on to their final resting place in the kingdom of flowers. The ceremonies connected with a funeral vary in proportion to the position occupied by the defunct while abiding here. Some of the poor coolies receive scant homage on their departure, and a dry goods box is deemed a fitting receptacle for their mortal remains. In the ceremonial phase of the proceedings a priest recites the Chinese service for the dead, in the intervals rising and kneeling, while he accoutres his head and body with string-like emblems, and robes or unrobes himself as the rites dictate. During this part of the ceremony the Chinese advance to the head of the table where they kneel on mats spread on the ground. From a dish, standing on the table, they take water and cast it over the ground, after which they salaam a few times in the direction of the departed, and retire to allow others of the heathen to go forward to salute the dead. Some funerals are conducted on an extravagant scale, when spear-men, on horse-back, conduct the procession to the cemetery, where the defunct has been of high degree in the Chinese societies. The ambition of a Chinaman is said to be to attain a grand funeral at his demise. If this be so, many of them must die content to think that the Indians have made it impossible to carry out one item in the usual programme of ceremonies contingent on the event of entering the shadowy land of spirits, where they must suppose themselves ill at ease from hunger.

## In Meditation Near Ouitachouaniche Brook and Lake St. John.

(DEDICATED TO MISS A.E.M., QUEBEC.)

Splashing and brawling on its way,  
The brook rushes by,  
Heedless, past banks where flowers gay  
Bloom fragrantly.

Noisy and fierce, and turbulent,  
And yet so small,  
Downwards tumultuously it went  
Towards the fall;

While flushed with sunset, far below,  
Calm, strong and grand,  
The mighty lake, with ebb and flow,  
Rolled on the strand.

I would not that my life should be  
Like that poor brook,  
Turbulent, noisy, hurrying me  
Past each still nook.

Nay, rather grant, my darling, good!  
A fuller life;  
A larger heart, a gentler mood,  
Not given to strife.

And like the majestic Lake St. John,  
Obedient still;  
I would, both as I go and come,  
Obey your will.

A. G.

The custom of flying a flag half-mast in token of respect for a dead person originated from the way at sea of showing the pre-eminence one ship had over the other in time of war fare. The vanquished always had to lower its flag, while the victor's would be raised as high as possible in exultation. To lower a flag is an act of submission, or betokens respect to a superior, or is a signal of distress. The hoisting of a flag half-mast high came to be used, therefore, as a sign of mourning and respect.