

MR. SOO WAH'S NEW YEAR.



TAP, TAP, there came a gentle deprecating touch at my door. It was the familiar weekly knock of Mr. Soo Wah, the Chinaman who did my laundry work, and in answer to my lazy "come," the door was opened just wide enough to admit him, and Mr. Soo Wah wriggled silently in, in the feet foremost kind of a way peculiar to himself.

Soo Wah, or as he was familiarly called "Soo," was not a handsome Chinaman, for his skin was more than ordinarily yellow, and his eyes had a more than ordinarily upward slant; he was much marked with small-pox, and the habitual expression of his countenance was one of such extreme sadness, that, coupled with his habit of looking anywhere but at you, it gave one an uncomfortable feeling that his past had not been as fair as it might have been. He was, however, a very gentle, quiet sort of person.

"Heap cold," remarked Soo, laying the clothes he had brought on a chair.

This was to be expected. It was Soo's invariable remark, made with a happy disregard of the thermometer, and was generally followed by a "good-bye," chirped out in an excessively cheerful tone, ludicrous in contrast to his dismal face, and an instant vanishing in the same gentle fashion in which he had entered.

But to-day he lingered. Outside the sky was grey and overcast, the constant Texas sunshine had played us false for once, and the wind sweeping tumultuously down from the mountains, was cold and drear.

My friend, Gertrude and I, had drawn our chairs close to the open fire, and we plied our needles with an industry born of the desperation induced by the cloudy weather.

Soo glanced at us impartially out of the corners of his almond eyes, then seated himself on the extreme edge of a chair, in close proximity to the fire.

"Heap cold," he repeated, picking up the hem of his long blue cotton sacque, and winding it around his fingers.

"Very," we assented cordially.

"Nice, nice, vellee nice," he said, laying his long yellow fingers caressingly on the bright piece of embroidery Gertrude held in her hand.

"Him cost two bits (twenty-five cents)?" he added inquiringly.

"Indeed it cost more like a dozen bits, Soo."

"Oh, him cost heap much." His sad face lengthened at the thought.

He got up and began making a slow tour of the room, examining all the knick-nacks, photographs, etc., occasionally remarking that something was "velley nice," and invariably asking the price. Finally he brought up at his chair again, and once more seated himself on the extreme edge.

"Bling him early," he said, pointing to the clothes, and shuffling his thick-soled slippers about on the floor.

"Why so you did, Soo. This is only Wednesday. How is that?"

"Day after tomolly China New Year."

"The Chinese New Year!"

"Yes, China New Year."

"No workee allee samee sabe? No workee tree day" (counting the days on his fingers held high in the air) "hab fun, so many fun, eat, eat, allee timee." He went through an expressive pantomime, to show us to what an extent he would indulge in gastronomical pleasures. "Heap fire cracker, big noise." He went through another set of gestures, waving his hands, working his voice, and making queer inexpressible sounds, to indicate the cracking and fizzing of fire-crackers and rockets.

"You come visit me, Sabe? Heintoo," pointing to Gertrude.

"Indeed we shall, with pleasure, Soo."

A pale little smile flitted across his yellow face.

"Good bye." He got up in a relieved way, and noiselessly disappeared, returning, however, to put his head in at the door and say—

"You come certain. China New Year day after tomolly."

The city, a frontier one, had a large percentage of Chinese among its population, all the laundries, market gardens, restaurants and curiosity shops being "run" by these shrewd business people, so that next day, the eve of their new year, the stir of holiday preparation was very perceptible. The Chinese are essentially a conservative people and in whatever corner of the globe they find themselves observe faithfully the customs and