

Episodes of Chinese Life in British Columbia.

II.

By the Chinese, the advent of a new year is proclaimed with a fusillade of fire crackers, the continuous reports of which—like unceasing volleys of musketry—are pointed by heavier detonations, as larger crackers are added at intervals to the general din of the explosions by the revellers. Tons of explosives are imported from China prior to the day on which, not only courtesies are exchanged by the pro-tem expatriated Celestials, but also on which every queued subject of the Sun feels it incumbent on him to stand a free man—from debt. In several of the Pacific coast cities where the Chinese form not a small portion of the population, it has been found necessary to frame by-laws restraining them at this festive season from unlimited and untimely discharge of explosives; although the age honoured habit of welcoming the incoming year has the countenance of the civic authorities sufficient to save it from being placed in the category of nuisances and suppressed entirely as such. Their ages being dated from this day renders it all the more great, and several days only of noise and festivity suffice to satisfy the Chinese that due honour has been accorded so important a period.

Ordinarily, even in the wash houses, wherever a recess allows of it, an image in statuary, a picture or one of the philosophical formulas of the saints, printed in perpendicular columns on a red ground is worshipped religiously day by day. Thin reeds partly enveloped in the dust of odoriferous woods and termed joss sticks are burnt in front of those symbols. Whether the worship is devoted to the sainted memory of Confucius, the promulgator of the ethical doctrines which he raked up from disuse, and so religiously adhered to; or to Laon-tye, the founder of the sect of reason, a more spiritual doctrine, which held sway as great as that of the great sage with whom his life was contemporaneous is difficult to arrive at, elucidation merely going as far as "Velly good man, him," when the query, Who "him," John? is ventured at the owner of the concern. The mythical time that history allows has elapsed since the appearance of the last Boodh, and the prolonged coming of another uplifter of the human race is fast eradicating the last vestiges of their belief in Buddhism, although one would think the state of Nirvana after 'saluting the age' would commend itself to their philosophic minds as a most fitting consummation of their brief struggling life on this mundane sphere. If their worship is of the founder of the great code of morals, and their observance of the rites conducted in a true spirit, then they are a much abused race; for if a chicken is lost to an owner, the theft is placed to the credit of a Chinaman. But to the class who, as a rule, enter this country with the intention of attaining a certain amount of money, afterwards returning home, too much honesty has never been attributed. An intelligent Chinaman who was asked as to the object of worship in many of the lower order of houses here, asserted that it is a picture of a good man, who lived to a very great age, and whose name is Took-luk-Shou, but the English rendering of the words was without his knowledge. Where worshippers have so many patrons, however, it may be inferred that various saints and ancestors are accorded the homage.

During the days on which high holiday is maintained, hospitality is at a discount. Not only do the Chinese pass from house to house, and den to den, saluting the honourable head, and leaving their cards on which their names are printed in the hieroglyphic characters peculiar to their language, receiving in exchange that of the hosts, who, smilingly supported by a host of previous callers, welcome the visitors warmly; but also to the white population their doors are wide open, and the sweetmeats and wines of China, and home manufactured cigars are dispensed with no niggard hand. Every Chinaman from his braided queue to his peculiar footwear is groomed for the occasion, and is evidently in his happiest mood, his smile unceasing, proclaiming his peace at this time with all men. Many white men call in on them and leave their cards with the host in American promiscuous fashion; but the callers who receive most attention from the Chinese are the small boys, the posthumous growth of the nineteenth century, whom they especially wish to propitiate and cultivate the right side of, pending next snow-ball season.

On entering any of their business places at this time, the most striking object presented to the eye is the framed and bedecked picture in front of which are slowly being consumed a number of joss sticks, the perfume of which hangs heavily about the shop, the close, incense laden air visibly affecting a person not accustomed to those usages, soporifically. Hardly has the idol been noticed, and its flanking of Chinese lilies placed in shallow vessels, when the host advances bowing, and asking in pigeon English if you'll have "Samshoo, or a cigal." "Take some candy? velly good, all same." In offering the spirit called Samshoo, which they seem to pronounce Sam-su-i, one recalls the monosyllabic character of their language, and the illusion a person is apt to get under on hearing the tonal measure, in strong emphasis on each vowel, suggesting a tri-syllabic word. The spirit, like the men who emigrate to the Americas, is a native of the Province of Canton, and is distilled from a much weaker wine of very nice flavour which is a product of the rice forming such a large proportion of the solid nourishment on which they exist. The lilies which are in blossom, having sweet smelling flowers, are carefully tended previous to the auspicious time in which they deck the houses, where their bright petals and sea-green stalks add beauty to the surroundings where already cleanly, and brighten up the dingy dens forming the smaller stores and living houses. A peculiarity of this lily is that it draws solid nourishment and grows and blossoms when placed in water alone. Small stones are placed in the vessels in which they are grown to allow the roots to cling to—octopus like—as a support for the stalks and flowers. A very pretty legend is connected with its origin, in which it is said a farmer left a half each of his estate to two sons, the eldest receiving good land in which he planted tea, and prospered; the younger son having only land of a swampy character, nothing would grow in it, and he was sorely moved to grief. But a white elephant presented him with a bulbous root which he placed in the water and the result was, through time, grief changed to joy and a paradise of flowers. Through the outcome of this incident which brought him great wealth, he became a mandarin, and attained to the third degree of state in the Kingdom, the Emperor planting the yellow flag with golden dragon on his horse. (The moral to be deduced is obvious.)

Accompanying the outside discharges of crackers there is in progress inside the ceremony of scaring his Satanic Majesty, and if his sable highness is susceptible of din and clangour, there is little doubt if in the vicinity, as they suspect, that he shifts his camp in such quick order that he must neglect to withdraw his tent pegs. This unmusical and tiresome part of the ceremony is kept up unceasingly for long periods at a time by the agency of drums and immense cymbals, an oval metallic instrument clinking out its quota to the general din. There is plenty of laughter during this phase of the performance, and the continuity of it is maintained by one celestial stepping in as another retires exhausted, with renewed force attacking the peace of the devil. It is amusing to observe the manner in which they throw up their heads and strain their eyes ceiling-wards, as they take up the large cymbals in relieving each other as they tire of crashing the instruments together. While so engaged some of their countrymen standing around waggishly light fire-crackers, which they throw opportunely enough to cause the explosion to take place about the performer's ears, on which the lookers-on set off on laughter. The whole ceremony is attended with great hilarity, and good humour prevails among them, enough to make one believe they conceive the joke of the rite themselves.

The joss houses in British Columbia are of no great magnitude, neither are they the repositories of grand examples of carving or furnishing, at least not on the mainland; but a room is dedicated to the worship of the Joss, who is supposed to influence the devotees, after their offerings to him, in steering clear of bad transactions in business or suspected evils about to take place in the household; while they are guided by signs for good, which they sincerely believe the Joss has the power of manipulating. To a Christian person, toss-copper seems as serious a mode of deciding on entering or keeping clear of an uncertain transaction.

When the new year arrives all those of the Chinese who are in outside employment quit work, if they at all can, and remain idle at least during the first few days of the festival, it appearing almost incredible, on entering the stores or houses, to believe so many of them can be packed into their den-like habitations. The confections which they hand around on the entrance of their guests, are for the most part fruits preserved in sugar, and of agreeable taste, while the tray in which they are temptingly laid out is compartmented, and is of some China grown hard wood. Many of the white visitors retain those confections and also one of the double slips of thin red paper which the Chinese use as visiting cards as mementoes of the peculiar rites and memorable manner in which they celebrate the most notable day in their calendar. (One would suppose that the grand display of the paper lanterns, in the manufacture of which they are the world's greatest experts, would form a striking feature of the festival; but no, there is not a dozen visible during the celebration, and those only of large size, and usually pendant from the ceiling of the better class stores. Chinese lanterns at once suggest themselves in conjunction with Chinese festivities, but they are not conspicuous at this season, and the feast of lanterns not being observed by that portion of the Cantonese who reside here it is left to the white and aboriginal (Indian) population to make periodical displays of the handicraft of the Chinese. (Quite a few devotees of Bacchus find this a favorable opportunity of indulging their passion, and consequently make stated rounds time and again throughout the towns, enjoying to the full the hospitality of the brother whom they otherwise affect to despise. The Chinese are too philosophic, are too thoughtful to be swayed or affected seriously by their white brothers' sneers and taunts as long as they 'savvy' they are under the protection of the law, as are their tormentors themselves. They have left unfavourable circumstances of life at home to do battle in slightly better conditions of living and weather, and nothing will make them swerve from their object in obtaining a competency on which they may recline in future years when they will hail the approach, and enter on the first day of the new years to come with a still more pleasant smile if possible than they wear when welcoming all—Chinese, Indian and white man—to partake of the hospitality which they so agreeably and unstintingly bestow upon those who enter their doorways to wish them 'many returns of the day,' whether always sincerely is plainly dubious, but none the less heartily comes the response,

MELLY NEW YE'.

JAMES P. MACINTYRE.

Incidents of the Emperor's Visit.

There were one or two little incidents in the reception of the German Emperor that will remain stamped for ever on the memory of those who happened to observe them. The first was the evident embarrassment of the Duke of Clarence when his Imperial cousin planted a manly kiss upon his cheek. The Prince of Wales had gone through this ordeal with practised firmness, but it looked as though his son was unprepared for such an accolade; and, whether spontaneously or in accordance with the programme, the Kaiser bestowed no osculatory greeting on the Dukes of Edinburgh or Connaught. Then there came rather a pretty and natural scene when the Royal and Imperial party came ashore after luncheon, and Miss Benson, the youthful daughter of the Vicar of Hoo, timidly stepped from the little crowd and offered the Empress a bunch of Marshal Niel or tea roses, exclaiming: "These are English flowers, Your Majesty." The Empress took them with a ready smile, and replied at once in English: "Thank you so much. It is kind of you to give them to me." Another interesting sight was the face of the Mayor of Windsor and of others in the audience when the Emperor, in answer to the long-winded address of the Corporation, artlessly referred to Her Gracious Majesty as "Grandmamma."—*Picadilly.*

A POETICAL SHOEMAKER.—A poetical shoemaker hung up the following remarkable effusion on a board over his shop:

"Blow, oh, blow, ye heavenly breezes,
Underneath these leafy trees;
Sing, oh, sing, ye heavenly muses,
While I mend my boots and shoeses."

—*Chambers' Journal.*