

JOHN CHINAMAN'S DRINKS.

Numerous Spirituous Tipplers of the Middle Kingdom.

Of the many odd features of life in China, none is more remarkable than the way in which the people treat the liquor problem. It is startling to one who has lived in New York and seen the endless trouble about excise and internal revenue and police.

Here is a vast empire with four hundred millions or more of population. It has no saloons, no meliorate homes, and no chronic drunkards. There is no excise or internal revenue or tax. In no excess wholesale and retail wine and liquor is his heart's content as freely as he can sell potatoes or kindling wood. The pauper can get drunk, if he choose, with the greatest ease, for nowhere on earth is the product of the fermenting tub and the still so cheap as here. Sam-shui or rice wine can be bought as low as two cents a quart, and no-majou or rice gin for fifteen cents a gallon. European sailors come ashore and get fighting drunk at an expense of five cents. It is cheap and its use is universal. It is served on every table, no matter how humble, and at every meal. Nevertheless, the heathen Chinese do not drink to excess. The drunkard is practically unknown, excepting where he is a civilized Christian, and the diseases resulting from the abuse of alcohol have no place in Chinese pathology.

There are no restrictive features as to drinking in the religious system of China, and the laws do not punish toppers so much as those in force in England and America.

There are no sparkling wine or crystal brandy lodges, and no cheap instructions in the primary schools about the affects of alcohol upon the human stomach.

It was not always thus, however. Long before the Christian era in the times of the Chou dynasty, John Chinaman was wont to whoop it up with the wine bowl.

The grape vine flourished in those years, and over a hundred localities were famous for the wines they produced. There was the same variety in China in 1894 B. C. that there is in Europe in A. D. 1894.

There were white wines and red, sour wines and sweet, light wines and heavy, and there was a wine which effervesced, a sort of champagne. There were good housewines in those early days, and made gooseberry wine, current wine and other home-made tipplers.

There were starchy farmers, who had learned to ferment wheat and barley in the north and rice and millet in the south, and who turned out a very respectable ale or beer; only where the English farmer flavored his brew with hops and barley the Chinese employed fruits and flowers. There were herdsmen in the north who made kumys out of mares' and goats' milk.

There were small distilleries which made brandy, spirits and whiskey, and made them so well that they were sent into foreign lands and sold as medicine.

But wine was the prime favorite, and Bacchus was king. Everybody used it, and in some parts of the land used it to excess. The vice was more prevalent in the upper classes than in the lower. Nobles and great scholars too often got full and painted the town red. One or two sovereigns yielded to the same temptation, and would have made Rome howl if Rome had been in existence at the time. Innumerable there were lots of lecturers and professional orators who went around the country denouncing the juice of the grape, and a larger lot who made fortunes by retailing and wholesaling it to this day. Humanity. There is a sudden rule of the wine cup passed away.

In after years the bull against the grape was amplified and the culture started again. But it had never amounted to much, and does not to-day. Neither did the Chinese ever make grape wine again to any perceptible extent. The decree against wine was repeated also, and with various laxities, but from other lands. But the Chinese, in the mean time, had invented hundreds of other drinks, a few weak, but most of them very strong, and had lost the taste of the juice of the grape.

At the table of a Chinese gentleman the standard wine is shoo-shing. It is of a pale brownish color, a pleasant taste and bouquet suggesting ripe hickory nuts. It contains a small percentage of alcohol and a minimum of organic matter and of lime. It is served at all official and State dinners, as well as at private banquets and family festivals. Frequently it is the only stimulant served at a meal. It is still flimsier when cold. When heated it is flimsier before service. The warmth brings out the flavor and perfume, and makes it much more appetizing. At banquets it is the wine in which the first toasts of good wine is invariably drunk.

After this opening round the guest has the option of continuing with shoo-shing, or can pass on to all of the different wines on the list.

When shoo-shing is to gentlemen sam-shui is to the masses. Sam-shui, by the way, is not a Chinese name, but two Chinese words meaning "third water" or "third fluid," and means what we call a "triple extract" or a triple distillate. The early Europeans who first visited China liked strong liquor, and in the triple distillate of rice beer found a fluid exactly to their liking. The fact that it was practically cheap raw spirits did not lessen their appreciation. They used it with avidity, and used its name for all Chinese stimulants. Many Chinese have adopted the name for its convenience, so that the term is in general use in the far East to express all the various kinds of intoxicants, and more especially rice wine, rice beer, rice whiskey and other distillates of that class.

A popular form of sam-shui is rice wine, which is cheap and insipid when fresh, and very strong when aged. When well barreled and put away in a cellar or loft it improves slowly to two years, rapidly for three years, and then slowly again for two, when it reaches its best form. It is not crystal clear, aromatic and about as sherry. This kind is very difficult to obtain in the open market, the cost, risk and trouble of keeping it making it too expensive for ninety-nine buyers out of a hundred.

From the Mongolian millet, known as koo liang, is distilled a liquor of the same name. It bears a strong relation and a family resemblance to the rye, wheat and bourbon whiskeys of America. John Barleycorn of Scotland and the korn branvin of Denmark. It is a plain, raw whiskey, uncolored and unsweetened. It is employed as a beverage seldom in south China, but quite largely in the northern parts.

Its chief use is in the fabrication of liqueurs and medicines. These are made by digesting in koo liang all sorts of fruits, herbs, leaves, roots, flowers, grass and drugs. Under the official list compiled by the authority of the Government there are over a thousand enumerated. As a matter of fact, it may be questioned if five hundred of these are ever employed except by doctors. The medical faculty in Cathay prescribe many medicinal liquors. They correspond closely to such preparations as "beef, iron and wine," "wine of peppin" and "maltese and beef extract," and are for similar ailments.

Of the koo-liang or wo-chia-pi is the best known. It is thick, oily and yellow,

about half-way in appearance between yellow chertcase and benedictine. It owes much of its color and flavor to turmeric, a popular East Indian root, which is familiar to the American palate in the form of a pungent powder and curry paste. The taste of wo-chia-pi is sweetish, aromatic and cloying. It is not attractive at first two or three times it is used, but is said to grow upon a person with practice. Beyond its customary virtue the Chinese set great store by it as a tonic, stomachic and appetizer. They employ it in many forms of gastritis and choleric disorders, and regard it as a specific for stomachic ailments upon the leading mandarins of the place to which he is accredited, and they in turn must call upon him. According to Chinese etiquette, these official visits are held at a luncheon table and not in an drawing-room. The bill of fare is always the same and consists of three drinks, sherry, champagne and tea, and an assortment of biscuits, small cakes, fruits, preserves, and fine candy. In general, the guests eat one cake, a fruit, and a piece of candy, and sip one or two glasses of wine. This being the fashion among the high mandarins, it is adopted by thousands of lower ones as a rule of etiquette. It is in this way a knowledge of European and American vintages is gradually penetrating the entire Middle Kingdom.

The moderation of John Chinaman is well illustrated by his wine-cups. Nearly all are so small as to seem comic. They are not on an average so capacious as the top cups which are employed to furnish doll houses. The vast majority contain a tablespoonful, with a few containing a tablespoonful. The tumbler, goblet, brand, schoppen, toly, mug, tankard, pewter, Tom and Jerry cup, and the schooner, are unknown in the far East. Where it is necessary, as in the case of sickness, or to drink a large amount of stimulant in a hurry, an ordinary tea-cup is employed for the purpose. For a man to use a tea-cup regularly with his alcoholic beverages is proof presumptive that he is a confirmed drunkard or a chronic invalid.

The wine cups are usually very simple and very cheap. A good, serviceable article can be purchased for three cents a dozen. Finer ones cost more. Above the everyday kind are fragile ones made of thicker than Bohemian glass, and are of a creamy whiteness. Above these are fanciful designs, which are often very expensive. One seen at Swatow was of thin white porcelain, moulded to represent the bell of a lily; another was a white rose in full bloom; a third represented a rustic cup made by felling an oak leaf; a fourth was a round fired cell; a fifth was a trout; a sixth was a grotesque fish; a seventh, a piece of bamboo. All these were marked by splendid workmanship. Those which seemed the most artistic were created in the form of birds and colored glass; still others in two, three and four colors, and last, even white cups, ornamented with vines and flowers, birds, and other pictorial objects in natural colors.

Nearly all these patterns were very beautiful; a few bordered on the humorous or grotesque. One tiny cup had little green crabs and shrimps crawling on its sides, another had black beetles and green bugs upon its walls, a third had a striped serpent coiled around its exterior. These fanciful designs are not very popular, however, and are difficult to find outside of Canton, Swatow and Chow-Choo-Foo.

Alcoholic drinks in China are regarded and served as food. They are served on the dinner table, and seldom or never at other meals. They are never used alone. The idea of a man going into a cafe, no

matter how gilded and artistic, and taking a cocktail, sour, or punch, would seem the average Mongolian. Men who do such things in the Middle Kingdom are considered fools or infants, or worse. The great Chinese poet, Su Tung Poo, who was an eastern equivalent of Edgar Allan Poe in many ways, the one, disapproved water and tea in the lounge and his Lyttonian error and distinguished himself by the moderate quantity and variety of ingredients used, both at meals and all other times of the day and night. He must have had a strong constitution, for he lived to be old and boasted that his strength, health and longevity were entirely due to his antipathy to what he would style temperance fluids.

Other liquors made from koo liang are mo-qua, of which the leading ingredients is melon; meu-koo-foo, or rose wine; ying-to, or cherry-wine. There are hundreds of others of similar character.

From rice beer is extracted an alcohol spirit similar to koo liang, but a little lighter in strength and flavor. It is a little diluted and rectified so as to produce the standard grades of rice brandy. The highest is an shining, the three rectified being strong, light or twice rectified, light or twice distilled, and soy jin. All of these are used for potations, but not to any great extent until sweetened and flavored.

From anching the native distillers extract an impure alcohol or Fench spirit, known as fun chin. It is the strongest product of the still in the East. Its chief uses are for making medicinal compounds and tinctures, and as a basis for a series of cordials which are in vogue throughout the empire, but are particularly popular in the great cities and province of Quang Tung (Canton). These are made by mixing fun chin with alcohol derived from rice, and are moderately flavored. The general use for these cordials is no-majou. According to the color is the prefix hoo-ming-ming (white), hoo-mi-chin (black), hoo-mi-chin (red). They are sweet, clear, and mild flavored. Age imparts their quality the same as with wine. They are put up in little round jars of brown earthenware, and are found in every part of the world where there are Chinese.

The flower wine, made by steeping leaves or petals in spirits a long time and then diluting and sweetening the result sounds pretty and reads pretty, but does not appeal with the same success to the American palate and stomach. Genuine wine is almost equal to ice-cream in practical working, and resembles wine a horrible travesty on the way. The orange flower wine suggests the cordial remedies put up by village druggists.

It will be easily seen by the above remarks what an immense field opens the tippler in the Orient. There are many distinct liquids which are valuable for the subtle spirit of wine. N.Y.S.

The Lewiston, Me., Journal tells an interesting tale. At one time the back logs came into a Piscataquis drug store not long ago bearing a big fashionable bottle which he wanted filled with sulphur and rum. He was so talkative, and before the tippler had got a word in edgewise he was on the plain: "This is allers the way I have fixed. I have sulphur up to the neck, and the bottom of the bottle— and the sulphur and rum. And the way you have got it is allers the way you have shak'er up afore I drink; as I don't want no sulphur, why I shak'er."



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