

rough canvas covered bolster running lengthwise, so that occupants must lie across the bed, their heads to the wall, their feet pointing towards the middle of the room. Upon each bed was a cockly lacquered tray bearing the impedimenta of the smokers, with a curious Chinese opium lamp, lighted, as the outstanding item upon each tray. A fire, glowing a dull red, was built high above the topmost bar of the crazy old grate: on the hob at its side bubbled a pot of tea, looking like a biscuit jar, plus spout with a wicker handle. Overhead a jet of gas, turned so low as to furnish merely a bead of blue flame afforded the only light save that given off by the lamps on the bed. The entrance of "foreign devils" caused a significant commotion amongst seven of the occupants. The eighth was unconscious; his stertorous breathing was frequently interrupted by dolorous growlings and mumbings, as if, having in his dreams the keys of paradise which he had sought, he was unable to find the lock. The wakeful seven started to their feet, and, so far as a Chinese under the influence of opium can, stared at us wide-eyed.

Such a chorus of savage interrogatory and protest there was. One lean and aged sinner—named Chung Hi—anxiously fingered an attenuated carving knife which he drew from out a heap of papers stored on shelves at the foot of his bed. I may add at once, however, that he did nothing more alarming than, later, to cut an orange into forty pieces on his bed with that knife: and with it prod each fragment, peel and all, down his throat. The rest jabbered nineteen to the dozen in expostulation and inquiry. Seven Chinese in one room talking their language at its fastest can be likened to nothing else but a den of irate monkeys. Apparently our host made it plain that no danger was to be apprehended from our visit, and that no violence was to be practised upon us; for the seven subsided upon their beds, palpably pacified, but still chattering in weird cadences which made my companion ask, "Are they singing?"

We removed our coats and hats and hung them upon nails driven into the door;

stimulated as by an air as we could command, and took possession of a corner of Chung Hi's bed. This display of confidence quite won him over, and the knife disappeared. He could talk fairly good English; they all could who would. He offered me his pipe, which I declined, saying I had been sick and feared that the inhalation of smoke from the opium would be hurtful to me. "Besides," I added, "I don't smoke; I am only my friend's friend," leaving my comrade to evade a similar invitation by as tame and inconsequent a subterfuge.

Throughout the evening I was asked, on an average once every five minutes to smoke opium. That was what they were there for: was it not so with me? Each man in turn offered me his pipe, ready charged for smoking. There was no suggestion of coercion, neither was there show of resentment at my repeated refusal. According to their lights these men meant well and hospitably by their invitations, just as would your host in desiring you to share with him the cigars dearest to his fancy. So my profuse thanks and apologies—mainly in dumb show—if not fully comprehended, were taken in good part. To one it occurred that I was suffering from surfeit of opium—he could not understand refusal on any other grounds. And he turned up the gas in order more closely to scrutinise my face.

A man, who, I suspected, had some sort of proprietary interest in the establishment, now came and took in hand the slumberer, whom the brighter light more clearly revealed. The new comer was in appearance a magnificent specimen of his nationality; tall, broad shouldered and muscular, and, unlike the rest, not dull of eye nor moist of brow, not pallid nor emaciated. His name was Dol Form; that, at least, was as near as it could easily be rendered into English. When written down in Chinese characters, the signature looked as if a flash of lightning had struck the paper after falling foul of an inkpot. Dol Form, as I have said, aroused the sleeper.

First he shouted at him as if his pig-tail was being torn off by wild horses, then