

Of the more respectable class—the merchants and tradesmen—many have been attracted by the prospects of gain; many more have had ‘urgent private reasons’ for quitting Chinese territory; a residence in a British colony has shielded them from the importunities of creditors or the pursuit of justice. ‘What is said of David’s Adullamites would apply to thousands in Hong-Kong.—Every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him.’

“Under these circumstances, it will hardly be imagined that a high standard of morality prevails in the colony. Crime prevails to an amazing extent, and the local Government has been sorely hampered in dealing with its vicious subjects. The difficulty was to find jail-room for the criminals. Two or three spacious prisons were built; but these were rapidly filled; still the prisoners multiplied. What was to be done? Besides the difficulty of securing and punishing the offenders, there was a grave objection against the outlay involved in their support. Only a small proportion could be employed on the public works, whilst thousands of idle criminals were hanging as a dead weight on the finances of the colony. A bright idea suggested itself; the authorities resolved upon a plan, which, whilst it relieved the colony of its burden, at the same time freed it of the vicious element. Every convict was branded on the ear, and then deported to the mainland with the assurance that, if they returned again to the colony, they should be severely dealt with. It was a dear-bought freedom, for no sooner had the poor wretches set their feet on Chinese ground than their brand betrayed them. It was known they had been criminals, that was enough—off went their heads, and so the matter ended.

“The Chinese are wonderfully expert at chopping off heads. A gentleman described to us a scene of which he had been a witness. During the rebellion in the Canton province, two hundred and eighty rebels were caught. The chances were, that quite half of them had been peaceable subjects; but that did not matter, so many heads had to be cut off as a warning to the refractory. Our friend went to the spot. There were twelve executioners, each holding a shining sword in his hand. The prisoners were divided into twelve groups. All were awaiting the arrival of a Mandarin, whose order was to be the signal for the execution. His Excellency shortly arrived; a list of the prisoners was placed in his hand. He quietly asked, ‘Is all ready?’—‘Yes.’ ‘Then go to work.’ The poor creatures had been all this while standing with their heads inclined forward. None flinched—none spoke; each of the twelve swordsmen deliberately walking along his line of convicts, and at a blow severed head after head. Our friend had been curious enough to time the proceeding; he found that, from the arrival of the Mandarin to the fall of the last head, only *twelve minutes and a half* had elapsed.

“The Chinese have a perfect rage for gambling. Go where you will, you see crowds of people thus employed. Hoary-headed men, and little children who can hardly run, may be seen tossing the dice. Many a man, after losing all his money, will barter his clothing to the last rag, and then strip his wife, his children, his house, and leave himself literally naked and destitute in the world. In some provinces the Chinese Government have put down this vice with a strong hand. They have made the keeping of a gaming-house a capital crime, for which the keeper must surrender his head.

“It is a curious fact that the Government of Hong-Kong adopted the opposite expedient of legalising gaming-houses. Every such house had to be licensed, and penalties were only enforced in the case of those who encouraged gambling without a license. We believe the home Government has disallowed this most questionable enactment. So much the better; for, whilst it existed, it was a sin and a reproach.

“One morning a somewhat amusing incident occurred at the Bishop’s Palace. Several of his Lordship’s servants were caught by the police in the act