



A DAY OFF.

CONTENT WITH THISTLES, FROM ALL ENVY FREE.—From Picture by S. Bruzzi.

DINING WITH A MANDARIN.

BY MISS A. L. CRAIG.

Dorothy and I, after cruising along the shores of the "Morning Lands," found ourselves in Tientsin for the winter months, and there Dorothy had her first Chinese dinner. It was given in her father's honor by a mandarin in the "Old City," which is two miles or more from the large, handsome European settlement known to foreigners as Tientsin.

This "Old City" is surrounded by an ancient wall, so thick that daylight is dim and dusky under the quaint arched gateways, though an intense yellow sunlight shines always over that part of China. With its throngs of dark, suffering, ignorant faces, its booths, its curio shops, old Tientsin is well worth seeing, though not pleasant in every respect. But our evening with the mandarin was gorgeous with wealth and Eastern hospitality.

Our invitation was written, I might say brushed, on a big card of bright red paper, such as the Chinese and Koreans use for visiting cards. The invitation was most ceremonious; it was in the manner considered the most elegant, in the form used in addressing persons of the highest official rank. I will give the translation:

"On the 10th instant I will wash my cups and await your coming to dinner at seven o'clock. My card is inclosed." The huge red invitation and the huge red card was inclosed in a huge red envelope addressed to "Great Man." An assurance that the cups will be washed has its attractions, coming from a Chinese host.

Dorothy flew into a dancing delight when she found that the "Great Man's" daughter was included in the invitation from the mandarin. Still she only hoped to look on at the queer feast. She declared that she would not be induced to taste any of their heathenish food.

Our mandarin kindly sent his own sedan chairs for us. They were lined throughout with the daintiest white fur, and liberally supplied with fluffy, white fur rugs. In each was a comforting little foot stove of carved brass. It was an exquisite way to travel. We set out on a bright moonlight night. Our party was large,

and our chair bearers were constantly calling and yelling to clear the narrow streets for our procession. They were the more crowded because it was the "Feast of Lanterns." The lanterns were very beautiful, and in every form that could be devised—temples, pagodas, birds, fishes, frogs, and curiously cut imitations of blocks of ice. The shops and houses were illuminated with them, and children and grown people were carrying them through the streets.

At the end of an hour our sedan chairs were set down before the high, blank, gray wall surrounding the mandarin's house. A double row of servants awaited us at the entrance. They held silk lanterns which seemed colossal soap bubbles. Between the two rows of servants we passed into a large courtyard, brilliantly illuminated with lanterns of a size and beauty I have never seen equalled out of China.

Here we were received and welcomed by our host, who was magnificent in a satin fur-lined gown of rich color, and a cap tipped with the button of his rank. We were then ushered into a room near the entrance, to remove our wraps. Around the walls were fur-covered divans and several painted folding screens. In the middle of the room was a table, spread with caviare, anchovies, buttered bread, and sherry, of which we were asked to partake. After eating a little we crossed the courtyard, and entered a long, large room with small tables laid for dinner. At each table were seats for seven persons.

Across the end of the room was a platform, slightly raised from the floor, on which were lamps placed on substantial tables of richly carved black wood. On the platform and at intervals down one side of the room were big, carved, high-seated, low-armed black chairs, divans, rugs, and long mirrors. Few Chinese houses contain so handsomely furnished an apartment. The palace of the viceroy has none better in ordinary use, for his rare carvings, embroideries, and paintings are packed away except when displayed on festivals. The three tables were pretty, with small glass dishes piled with sugared fruits, delicious compotes, and nuts glace.

The Chinese are fond of sweets, excel in making them, and eat them before and throughout the dinner at pleasure. Dorothy's appetite came back when she saw the attractive tables, and she resolved to taste even the most remarkable dishes. But she did not expect to do more than taste, for she did not suppose she could nerve herself to swallow even one mouthful.

We had a menu, but as it was in Chinese we were no wiser for it. For this ignorance we were thankful afterward, when the bill was translated for our benefit. Our implements were ivory chopsticks; large silver spoons with a round bowl, and long, thin, two-pronged silver forks, like a hairpin. For plates we had small, deep saucers, each standing on a sort of little pedestal. Each course was served in a bowl, and placed in the middle of the tables that every guest might help himself with his own spoon or chopsticks. With the soups and spoons we were tolerably tidy, but our efforts to get the solids to our lips with chopsticks sometimes made sad work with the tablecloth.

Our first attack was upon preserved eggs, the greatest of delicacies to a Chinese epicure. These are boiled and kept underground for months and years before being brought to the table in a sort of sweet pickle, as a luxury. They are as black as mud, and it required all our nerve to undertake those. Dorothy summoned the bravery that she calls up for the dentist, closed her eyes, held her breath, and nobly made her bite. To my astonishment and relief she kept it in her mouth. I cannot say that any of our party liked the preserved eggs, but their flavor was not so disagreeable as their appearance.

After that Dorothy hesitated at nothing. Shark's fins, sheep's eyes, antique eggs—she devoured all. Fortunately for her enjoyment she did not know what she was eating. Long afterward she learned just how heroic she had been. There was one notable exception to the array of unknown dishes. We all recognized the edible bird's nests; if we had not known what they were, we should have believed we were eating a very delicious vermicelli soup. Silver fish were good little things fried

whole like whitebait; pigeons' eggs were beauties, gleaming through a smooth coat of pink jelly; the lotus seeds looked like boiled chestnuts stewed in sugar, and tasted as chestnuts might treated in the same way. As for the "fowl," "undercut," and "tame duck," they were disguised beyond recognition.

The viands, take them for all in all, were not suited to our palates. In our hungriest moments we shall never think longingly of our Chinese dinner. After the feast we were invited into the opium smoking room—not to smoke, but to look on. Evidently it was the pot room of the mandarin's friends. It was luxurious in hangings, low couches, tables, and smoking utensils.

Jugglers were brought in to entertain us when we returned to the dining room. They produced immense bowls of water as if from vacant air, flowers grew up and blossomed before our bewildered eyes, and there were marvellous acrobatic feats by very small boys. Poor little creatures! They worked desperately hard and made painful contortions. Soon a wizard-looking Chinaman informed us, in a jovial manner, that his head was full of wooden toothpicks. Taking it for granted that we doubted his statement, he proceeded to convince us. He winked vigorously, and toothpicks seemed to stick out from the corners of his eyes. He pushed them back again with his thumb, sneezed one partly out of his nose, and then sniffed it back again.

This was a mere preliminary. Presently he sneezed at frequent intervals, and each sneeze sent from his nostrils first from one side, then from the other, the half length of a toothpick. Drawing it out with his long-nailed fingers, he would exhibit it triumphantly. In this deliberate manner he sneezed and pulled out ten or twelve toothpicks from each nostril. Pity Dorothy. She had gone through the dinner with fortitude, but the tooth-picks were too much. She said that never, never could she use a wooden toothpick again. The juggling was followed by a grand display of fireworks in the courtyard, and in this blaze of glory we departed. On reaching our house in the settlement, we sat down with relish to a banquet of cold roast beef and bread and butter.—*Messenger*.

HIS LITTLE CHIVALRY.

Sometimes the spirit of sympathy and tenderness crops out on apparently barren soil. On the corner of one of the business streets of a city, a shoeblack had just finished polishing the shoes of a well-dressed man. The latter was unfortunate in having a deformity which compelled him to wear a shoe on one of his feet with an exceedingly thick sole, thus endeavoring to make up mechanically for what nature had denied him.

"How much shall I pay you?" he asked the boy.

"Five cents, sir."

"Oh, but you should have more than five cents for polishing my shoes," said the gentleman, tapping the thick sole significantly with his cane.

"No, sir," said the boy; "five cents is enough. I don't want to make no money out o' your hard luck."

The customer handed out a coin, laid his hand on the youngster's head for a moment, and passed on. Who says the days of chivalry are over?

PUT OUT THE FIRE.

When our houses take fire, says Dr. Cuyler, the first impulse is to go after a bucket of water. But if temper takes fire, the first impulse is to throw on more fuel. Now, the best water bucket for a roused temper is resolute silence. If, whenever an irritating act were done, or an injury struck us, we should firmly seal our lips for even ten minutes, we would save ourselves many a quarrel, many a heartburn; many a mortification, many a disgrace to our religious profession. Speech is often explosive and shattering. Silence is cooling. It cools us off, and cools other people. One of the calmest men I ever knew told me that he used to be violently passionate, but he broke his temper by resolutely bridling his tongue until he cooled down.