

## AS THE CHINESE SEE US.

It sometimes does us good "to see ourselves as others see us." Montesquieu made a happy hit when, in his "Persian Letters," he gave the French the benefit of Uzbek's intelligent criticism. Goldsmith, who is not above imitation, favors us, in his "Citizen of the World," with the views of a Chinese philosopher. Lienchi Altangi is still on his travels. We meet him on the ocean steamer, at the summer watering place, and in the boxes of our fashionable theaters. He inspects our machinery and studies the mechanism of our social and political systems. He is not a *flâneur* in quest of distraction, but an observer by profession, reporting his impressions for the information of his people. To us he expresses himself in the language of oriental compliment, but if we wish to know what he thinks of us we must hear what he says to his countrymen.

The High Commissioner Keying, who was sent to Canton in 1842 to negotiate a treaty with the English, tried to be polite when he was placed at table between two European ladies. The ladies, it is needless to say, were charmed by his urbanity; but some years later, when, on the capture of the city, copies of his reports to the Emperor fell into the hands of the English, they saw the other side of the picture. One of the reports ran:

"Your majesty's servant accepted from policy an invitation to dine with the barbarian chief, but what was his astonishment to find himself seated between two women! His first impulse was to regard the affair as an affront, and to leave the table; but, on second thought, he deemed it better to conceal his feelings, and not to risk the rupture of our negotiation."

Two of the earliest narratives of Chinese travel in the West—one by Lin, of Amoy, written about forty years ago, the other by Pin, of Peking, written in 1866—are in the form of verse. The travelers saw so much that was new and strange that they naturally rushed into heroics. Their poetry is not, however, all

praise; in more than one place their laudatory stanzas betray an undercurrent of satire. Since those dates communication has become so frequent that Chinese readers are growing familiar with the phases of our western life, and Chinese writers are accustomed to handle us without the white gloves of poetry.

The two educational missions, one bringing a hundred young men to this country and the other a less number to France, formed the opening chapter of this prosaic apocalypse. The fact that the students sent to the United States were recalled, for fear they might learn too much, is in itself somewhat suggestive. More recently Chinese legations in our western capitals, and Chinese consulates at our seaports, have been busily engaged in photographing our manners as well as our politics; and within the last three years a commission of inquiry, consisting of twelve men eminent for scholarship, has been sent by imperial command to make a study of all countries from the Ural Mountains to the Golden Gate. The reports of these commissioners are not yet given to the public, but the correspondence of Chinese diplomatists has from time to time been allowed to appear. The general tenor of these documents is favorable, but in most of them there are perceptible *lacunæ*, where a sense of delicacy has suggested the omission of passages that might give offense to foreign readers.

Some years ago a Chinese diplomat at Berlin insisted on presenting at court a red card as large as a sheet of note paper, instead of the regulation pasteboard. So conservative was he that, in his published journal, he charges a colleague with treason to Chinese custom because the latter, while at Malta, allowed himself to be wrapped in the governor's mantle to protect him from a shower; and in visiting a polytechnic museum he sneers, as Plato might have done, at the shallow conception of philosophy which measures its value by its tendency to lead to curious inventions. Yet this man, prejudiced and haughty as he appeared, was practical enough, before returning to China, to provide himself with a new set of teeth.

"Your superior skill in the mathematical and mechanical arts we are ready to acknowledge," a learned Chinese once said to me, "but you must concede to us the palm in philosophy and

letters." This estimate is the prevailing one among educated Chinese, as they compare our civilization with their own. It may be modified, and doubtless will be, by further acquaintance; but it shows that they are not imposed upon by the glitter of wealth or by the noise of machinery. The material progress on which we pride ourselves weighs little in their scales when poised against moral principles and æsthetic culture. Steam and electricity are admirable as accessories; but the Chinese are not disposed to undervalue the wisdom of their ancestors, who were unacquainted with either. Nothing proves more conclusively that the Chinese government is waking up and striving to overtake this age of progress than the dispatch of such a commission as that to which we have referred. The program of questions by which they were to be guided in their researches related chiefly to the armies and navies of western powers, to their mining and manufacturing industries, and to their commerce and social condition. Under each of these heads, except the last, they must have had many marvels to report, and not a few things to recommend for adoption; but it is safe to say that in our social institutions they have found much to censure—nor would their censure be without a show of reason.

I purpose to convert my pen into a divining rod, and by its aid to follow the underground current of the commissioners' confidential dispatches. This I am enabled to do with the more certainty as, in addition to the documents above referred to, I have read and taken notes of a Chinese work in sixteen volumes on social life in Europe. This portentous production, entitled "*Sze-Chu-Che*," is from the pen of a gentleman who was attached to four legations in the capacity of interpreter or secretary, and who spent ten or fifteen years in the western world. In tone it is as far as possible from the *nil admirari* of most Asiatics; but the author does not abstain from friendly criticism. The following are a few of his headings, which serve to show the scope of the work and the opportunities which he enjoyed for the study of his subject: "Reception at Court; Rules for Drawing Rooms and Levees." "Tea Parties; Four of an Evening; My Fur Robes Changed Eight Times." "Visit to the Patent Office; the System and Its Advantages." "Hospitals,

Aided by Balls, Concerts, and Fairs." "Banks and Banking." "The Uses of Science." "Woman in Society; Extravagance of Female Dress." "Character of the English; Want of Filial Piety." "St. Valentine's Day; Love-making." "Stanley at the Royal Geographical Society." "List of Usages the Opposite of Ours; Strange but Not Irrational."

I might go on to transcribe almost the whole table of contents, with the assurance that every item would afford suggestions on the subject of this paper. Take, for example, the last entry, which seems to be a sort of summary of all the rest. How we should like to read that catalogue of contraries, and to note the reflection that "the fatality that has made us the antipodes of each other has of necessity turned our heads in opposite directions"! Unfortunately the book is not at hand, and my notes are incomplete. The work relates, moreover, not to America, but to England and other European countries. Instead, therefore, of making long citations from this book, or any other of Chinese authorship, I prefer to combine the impressions made by several, in the shape of what we may call "composite photographs." It is not likely that they differ in any essential feature from the pictures drawn of us in the secret correspondence of the mission of inquiry.

First, let us see what they think of our newspapers. Wherever Chinese travelers go they are dogged by reporters, and compelled to submit to the inevitable interview. They long for a longitude in which they shall be permitted to keep their opinions to themselves, or to impart them only to those who have a right to know them. Americans, they perceive, are very vain of their periodical press. The Chinese are struck with the fact that each of our great journals claims to have a larger circulation than any other, and to exert a leading influence in the formation of public opinion. The influence of the press they do not deny, but its character appears to them to be mixed. Our newspapers, as it seems to our visitors, not merely unmask the bad; they too often ruin the fair fame of good men. Committed to the interests of party, like sharpshooters they have but one object, and that is to bring down the enemy. Nothing could be worse for public morals. They serve up indiscrimi-

nately accidents and crimes for the daily fare of their readers, whose taste becomes so perverted that they can hardly enjoy a breakfast without a chapter of horrors to quicken the appetite. The amount of worthless matter thus forced on their attention, of necessity precludes the reading of classic authors. It makes men superficial—knowing many things rather than knowing much—and it has an unquestionable tendency to lower the standard of literary taste. So detestable are some of these papers that a Chinese reader scarcely regrets to see them trampled in the mire of the street, although in his country every morsel of printed paper is held sacred, and no one is so brutal as to abuse one, because by respecting letters the Chinese show respect to those from whom they derive their civilization. If the commissioners should recommend the introduction of newspapers into China, it would certainly be with the condition that they should be placed under the restraints of a judicious censorship.

Americans generally are proud of their theaters. They look on them as a source of refined amusement, and ask oriental visitors if they do not afford suggestions for the improvement of the Chinese drama. Our critics acknowledge the superior richness of our stage decorations, but the spirit of our theater they regard as exceedingly objectionable. The masterpieces of the classic drama are rarely placed on the boards. The favorite plays are those that teach no moral lesson, and depend for their fascinating power on enlisting the imagination on the side of the lower passions. In many instances little is left for the imagination to supply; scenes that ought to be withheld from modest eyes are represented in detail, and the wealth and fashion of the land are drawn together by the charms of women of doubtful reputation. If a woman with some pretensions to beauty is fortunate enough to win the attentions of a prince, and in consequence to figure in the divorce courts, rival theaters immediately compete for her services. Voice and acting are secondary considerations; her secret history and her voluptuous person are the things that draw. The Chinese theater is not immaculate; but if it does not always keep to its profession of inculcating the cardinal virtues, it is at least free from the charge of corrupting youth by unseemly displays of female profligacy.

The commissioners certainly will not advise the repeal of the law that forbids a woman to appear on the stage in China.

The Chinese are often asked whether they continue to approve what Americans are pleased to call the "oriental seclusion of the weaker sex," and they always answer in the affirmative. In their country this seclusion is happily not so rigorous as in Turkey. Their women wear no veils and are not deprived of air, sunshine, and society; the degree of privacy required by their rules not going beyond a modest retirement—protecting, not oppressing. To their ideas there is nothing more repugnant than the so-called social freedom that exposes innocent girls to the approaches of designing men. Elopements of wives and daughters, clandestine marriages, and the scandals of divorce are in America things of daily occurrence. How much better, say the Chinese, to have marriages arranged by parents than to leave them to the caprice of inexperienced youth! Their system works better than ours, if we may judge by the fact that, though their laws allow considerable latitude for divorce, the intervention of the courts is seldom invoked.

We Americans are justly reproached with neglecting our ancestors. In our public cemeteries we erect for them magnificent mausoleums, but in our dwellings one would search in vain for any vestige of former generations. Once buried they are forgotten, and the soul abhors oblivion. Chinese sages teach their people not only to bury their dead with suitable rites, but to keep them in remembrance by periodical offerings. On the first count Americans stand acquitted, but the second exposes the weakest link in our social system. Our ancestors, as such, have no hold on our affections. When a member of the family is laid in the tomb, we follow him for a time with tender regrets and floral offerings; then years may elapse without a visit to his resting place. Why, say our critics, do we not inculcate in the minds of our children that for body, mind, and character they are beholden to those who have gone before? And why do we not, like them, assemble at the graves of our fathers at least twice in the year, in order to cherish a sense of these obligations? No wonder that the sheaf of arrows falls asunder, that brothers strive about their patrimony, and that cousins are looked on as aliens.

We have in our books a sacred maxim which commands us to honor father and mother; but with us that duty never goes beyond our immediate parents, whereas with the Chinese it becomes a religion which extends its hallowed sentiment, like self-diffusing fragrance, to every link in the family succession. To keep the family line unbroken, to transmit the family name untarnished, and to win honors that shed their luster backward on the lowly resting place of former generations—these are motives in the absence of which it is hard for them to see how Americans contrive to maintain anything like a decent morality. In China the law favors the parent; with us it is partial to the child. The founder of our faith denounces the Jews for inventing the corban, by which a man was released from ministering to the wants of his parents; yet our laws release him from any such obligation at the age of twenty-one. As soon as he is capable of gaining his livelihood he is free to forsake the parental roof and to accumulate property on his own account. He may even become rich while his father remains in penury. A young man has been known to murder his father, and after a few months of seclusion to be set at liberty to corrupt society. In China such a monster would expiate his guilt by a death sufficiently horrible to strike terror into the minds of the unfilial. Nature requires the aid of law, and centuries of discipline cannot fail to leave their impress on the character of a race. For this reason, doubtless, the Chinese enter the world more richly endowed than others with that quality of reverence which disposes them not merely to honor their ancestors, but to show respect to civil authority.

“The family,” say the Chinese sages, “is the root of the state”; and monarchy is therefore as natural in the latter as in the former. Who ever heard of a republican family? In America the bonds of government are as lax as those of kindred. The American family is a grass, whose seed is dispersed to the four winds and takes root wherever it finds a favoring soil; the Chinese is a banyan, whose boughs bend reverently down and plant themselves in widening circles around the parent stem, the vital union remaining unbroken from age to age. Theirs is incontestably the nobler type; and the same, they maintain, is true of their government. The most ancient that exists on the face



of the earth, it rises before us venerable as Egypt's pyramids, and scorns comparison with a mushroom republic. Their throne is filled by inheritance, instead of being made the prize of a quadrennial conflict. So hedged about by law and custom is the exercise of imperial power that little room is left for arbitrary action, and their public affairs move on with as much steadiness as is attainable under the best-balanced constitution—with far more than in a country like this, which does not possess even the rudiments of a civil service, and where the people live in perennial dread of some political convulsion. While their sovereigns are schooled in the doctrine that the throne exists for the good of the people, the people, on their part, are attached to the government by a reasonable assurance that its highest offices are held as the rewards of merit. Aspirants for office, instead of canvassing for votes or traducing the opposite party, apply themselves to study, and accept the award of a board of examiners as the decree of fate. How much of noisy strife is thus averted! How much of that undignified tumult which resembles the howling of wolves after their prey! American writers admit that government by parties must of necessity present some unattractive features, yet they maintain that its outcome is a boon beyond price—the will of the people. Nothing is further from the truth; the fact is that if the majority get their wish, it is in most cases only a happy accident. Party politics is a machine that is usually worked by small minorities. Where two parties are pretty equally divided, a small body of neutrals finds itself in a position to impose its wishes on a State, and through a State on the nation. Thus the Irish vote, numerically insignificant, has been able to influence questions of foreign policy, even to the extent of jeopardizing the friendship of the United States with England. In this way the various classes interested in home production have been able to secure for themselves the benefits of protective legislation; and in the same way the white laborers of the Pacific coast, mostly naturalized foreigners, have succeeded in turning municipal and State authority against competition from China, the Chinese having no vote to give them political importance. The Pacific States once committed to a persecuting policy, the rest were compelled to follow; and a law



was passed which the Supreme Court has pronounced to be in flagrant violation of our treaty engagements. With that oppressive and unjust law the bulk of the American people have no sympathy; yet neither party dares to raise its voice in opposition, lest by so doing it should imperil the issue of a presidential campaign. With such examples before them, how can the Chinese be expected to admire our system of government?

The course of American politics, we usually acknowledge, is like a stream flowing over shifting sands—liable to get a little muddy and sometimes to change its channel; but in contrast to this we point to our courts of justice, apart from turmoil, inaccessible to bribes, unswerved by the stress of party conflict. The Chinese have studied these courts, and though they can hardly pretend to have mastered the mysteries of their intricate apparatus, it strikes our critics that no system could be more skillfully designed for the purpose of defeating justice. A court consists of three elements—bench, bar, and jury, the second and third apparently serving no other ends than to pervert law and to screen the guilty. In China, where there is neither bar nor jury, the processes of law are not only more expeditious, but, as the Chinese assert, more certain. In their eyes the jury is open to three objections: 1, while the weighing of evidence requires a trained mind, the jurors are chosen at random and are chiefly uneducated men; 2, their verdict is required to be unanimous, making conviction next to impossible in cases that admit of a difference of opinion; 3, to secure impartiality they are required to declare beforehand that they have formed no opinion on the subject; they are accordingly men who either do not read or do not reflect. In addition to these objections, much time is lost in impaneling a jury; and then the judge has to instruct them how to understand the evidence. Why not permit the judge and a couple of assessors to pass on the facts in the first place? It is amusing to an Oriental to learn that these jurors are locked up and deprived of food in order to compel them to agree, and that one man who can endure hunger longer than the others may thereby procure the release of a prisoner. Such is the palladium of our liberties—an institution which ranks among the noblest privileges of Magna Charta!

As for the bar, in the estimation of the Chinese its theory is thoroughly immoral, and the practice founded on it is a game of trickery and deceit. One of our great writers gives a comical picture of a judge who averred, when he had heard one side, that he could understand the case, but who always suffered from a confusion of ideas when he came to hear the other. The function of a lawyer is to compel a judge to hear the other side. The lawyer, however, is by the rules of his profession permitted to present only a one-sided view of the case. He seeks not the triumph of right, but the success of his client. The opposing counsel strives to determine the court in a contrary direction, and between these contending winds the arrow of justice will not fail to go straight to the mark! Each advocate browbeats the other's witnesses; he lays snares for the unwary; and to weaken their testimony he does his best to ruin their reputations. One who has the gift of eloquence appeals to the sympathies or prejudices of the jurors, who, being unsophisticated men, are liable to be carried away by his oratory. He acquires a name for power over a jury, and the litigant who can offer him the heaviest fee is almost sure to win his suit. What an original scheme for the promotion of even-handed justice!

In some of our courts our visitors see a statue representing a blindfolded goddess holding aloft a pair of scales. That emblem expresses perfectly the Chinese ideal of the character of a judge, but to express ours it ought to exhibit the counsel for the litigants as doing their best by surreptitious means each to turn the scale in his own favor. The task of weighing rival claims in such circumstances must transcend even the powers of a goddess. By means of these aids to justice rogues are set free to prey on society; wills of honest testators are broken; creditors are defrauded of their dues; and, more than all, through this cumbrous machinery the processes of law are rendered so expensive that the poor are deterred from attempting to defend their rights. Whatever else our Chinese visitors may borrow, they are pretty certain not to transplant either bar or jury.

Did space permit, I might point out other phases of western life which strike the mind of an Oriental as paradoxical and ridiculous. Since the foregoing was written, a letter from Mr.

Yung Wing, the well-known scholar and diplomat, has fallen into my hands, and an extract from it will form a fitting conclusion. Certain zealous Americans had the doubtful taste to invite his assistance in a "convention for promoting the general adoption of republican government." He replied:

"In view of what the United States government has done, for the past twenty years, in the way of enacting obnoxious laws against the Chinese, and without any provocation flinging insult after insult in the very teeth of the Chinese government, I cannot for the life of me see how republicanism is to become universal, or how the torch of American liberty is to enlighten the eastern races when they are shut out from its light."

This confirms on one point the views given above, and I feel confident that they would meet with similar confirmation in other respects if we could have access to the unpublished reports of the Chinese mission of inquiry.

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## THE FARMER'S CHANGED CONDITION.

DURING my childhood, which was passed on a rocky hillside farm in New England, farmers constituted a class more nearly independent than any other in the community. They were engaged in domestic husbandry, which embraced the care of cultivated fields, pastures, gardens, orchards, and forests. They produced nearly all the food that was necessary for their families. The owner of a small farm not infrequently raised corn, wheat, rye, barley, and buckwheat, as well as potatoes and all kinds of garden vegetables. The sweets for the table were often limited to the sugar and molasses that he made from the sap of the maple, and to the honey collected by his bees. Small game was obtained from the forest, and trout were caught in the streams that flowed among the hills. The lakes afforded larger fish, like perch and pickerel. Every farmer's intention was to raise each needful article of food that the climate and soil enabled him to produce. Even condiments, like pepper, caraway seed, sage, and other sweet herbs, were not below his attention. As a considerable portion of every farm was covered with forest trees of various kinds, the owner was at no expense for fuel or for materials to be used in making fences or in erecting ordinary buildings.

In those times most of the trade of farmers was carried on by barter. Eggs, butter, cheese, and smoked hams were taken by country store-keepers in exchange for groceries, dry goods, and notions. Nearly every farmer went to the seashore once a year, and exchanged apples, cider, potatoes, and garden vegetables for fish. The products of farm, garden, and orchard often paid the salary of the minister, the fees of the doctor, and the subscription price of the newspaper. A thrifty farmer generally managed to have the skins of the animals that he slaughtered at home tanned and dressed on shares, as by so doing he obtained leather for making shoes and boots for his family, without the payment