

THE STREET OF THE GAMBLERS.

*"Underneath their artistic appreciation of the grace in life, runs a hard, wild streak of barbarism."*



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PICTURES OF  
OLD CHINATOWN

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BY  
ARNOLD GENTHE

WITH TEXT BY  
WILL IRWIN

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## FOREWORD

*My Dear Dr. Genthe:*

Long before I knew who you were, I used to mark you in the shadows and recesses of Chinatown, your little camera half-hidden under your coat, your considering eye and crafty hand of the artist alert to take your shy and superstitious models unawares. Later, it was my privilege to follow you sometimes—to watch you playing your Germanic patience against their Chinese patience, to marvel at you, in dark room and studio, working with those mysterious processes by which you—more than any other man alive—have made art out of the play-time snap-shot. Now, after the great disaster, all that remains for your work of a decade is this same picture record of old Chinatown at which you worked so lovingly for eight years.

In the summer of steel and steam drills and heroic enthusiasm—the summer of rebuilding—you



## FOREWORD

and I passed through the new, clean Chinatown. It was a clear, sea-scented night, I remember, and very late. We stopped beneath the ruins of Old St. Mary's. The new-rising city, like the old one in dim, suggestive contour—as an adult face is like its childish counterpart—stretched out at our feet. Where the vivid carouse and romance of Dupont and Kearny Streets had been, a black hollow, mysterious, awful, as though the Pit had taken Hell's Half Acre back to itself; beyond, a wall of steel skeletons and gaunt, windowless towers. The scattered lights, placed where never lights would be in finished and inhabited structures, gave a dreadful air of strangeness and desolation to this city vista. I stood as one who sees spirits. And you spoke:

“Rubber boots and copper kettles in the shop windows—and we have still to call it Chinatown!” You had been looking backward, I perceived, as I had been looking forward. So, with the ruined tins of St. Mary's creaking above us in the night wind, we talked about that little city of our love, Chinatown. “No, it's gone,” said I, “And beauty, or at least such beauty as they know, cannot live



## FOREWORD

in Class A buildings." You, like a true partizan, fell to defending as soon as you found me agreeing with your criticisms. "They won't remain Class A for long," you said. "The Chinese will make them over somehow. They can no more live in inappropriate ugliness than we in dirt." Yet we both sighed for the Chinatown which we knew, and which is not any more except in the shadowing of your little films.

You, the only man who ever had the patience to photograph the Chinese, you, who found art in the snap-shot—you were making yourself unconsciously, all that time, the sole recorder of old Chinatown. I but write as a frame for your pictures; I am illustrating you. If, in these writings, I use the past tense, I do not mean to imply that our Californian Chinese have changed their natures or their manners. Much of what I describe here has survived, and much more will prevail. It is just that your lenses and plates record only the past; and, I, embroidering your work, have tried to keep in tone.

WILL IRWIN.



# OLD CHINATOWN

BY WILL IRWIN

**F**ROM the moment when you crossed the golden, dimpling bay, whose moods ran the gamut of beauty, from the moment when you sailed between those brown-and-green headlands which guarded the Gate to San Francisco, you heard always of Chinatown. It was the first thing which the tourist asked to see, the first thing which the guides offered to show. Whenever, in any channel of the Seven Seas, two world-wanderers met and talked about the City of Many Adventures, Chinatown ran like a thread through their reminiscences. Raised on a hillside, it glimpsed at you from every corner of that older, more picturesque San Francisco which fell to dust and cinders in the great disaster of 1906. From the cliff's which crowned the city, one could mark it off as a sombre spot, shot with contrasting patches of green and gold, in the panorama below. Its inhabitants,



overflowing into the American quarters, made bright and quaint the city streets. Its exemplars of art in common things, always before the unilluminated American, worked to make San Francisco the city of artists that she was. For him who came but to look and to enjoy, this was the real heart of San Francisco, this bit of the mystic, suggestive East, so modified by the West that it was neither Oriental nor yet Occidental—but just Chinatown.

It is gone now—gone with the sea-gray city which encircled it. The worse order changeth, giving place to better; but there is always so much in the worse order which our hearts would have kept! In a newer and stronger San Francisco rises a newer, cleaner, more heathful Chinatown. Better for the city—O yes—and better for the Chinese, who must come to modern ways of life and health if they are to survive among us. But where is St. Louis Alley, that tangle of sheds, doorways, irregular arcades and flaming signs which fell into the composition of such a marvelous picture? Where is the dim reach of Ross Alley, that romantically mysterious cleft in the city's walls? Where is Fish Alley, that horror to the nose, that

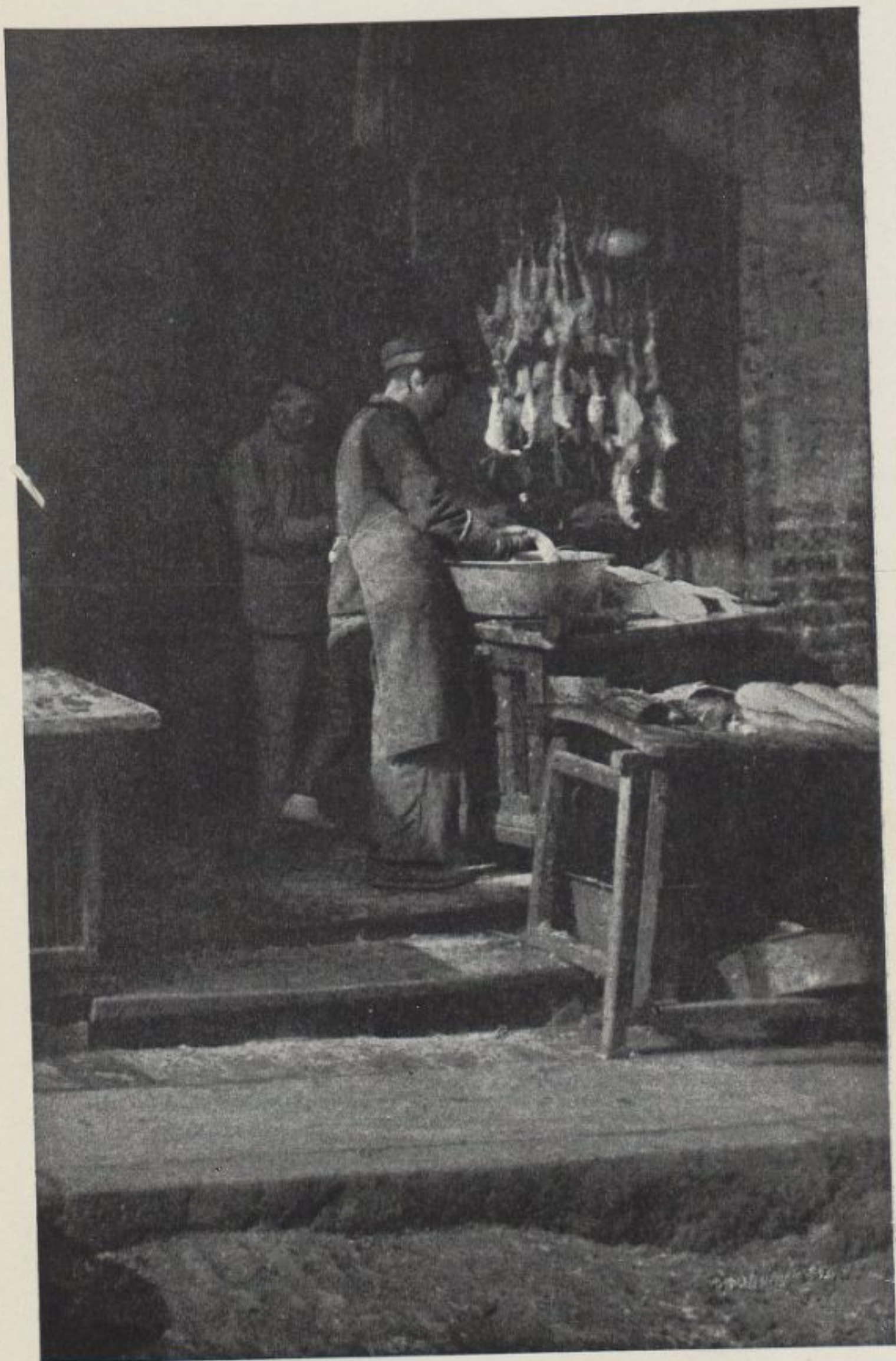




THE FISH PEDDLER.

*On those gold-gray mornings when the Italian fishing fleet slid in under its lateen sails, a group of these peddlers, whose routes included the whole city, was always waiting to buy and distribute the catch.*





A BOOTH—FISH ALLEY.

*"That horror to the nose, that perfume to the eye."*



perfume to the eye? Where are those broken, dingy streets, in which the Chinese made art of rubbish?

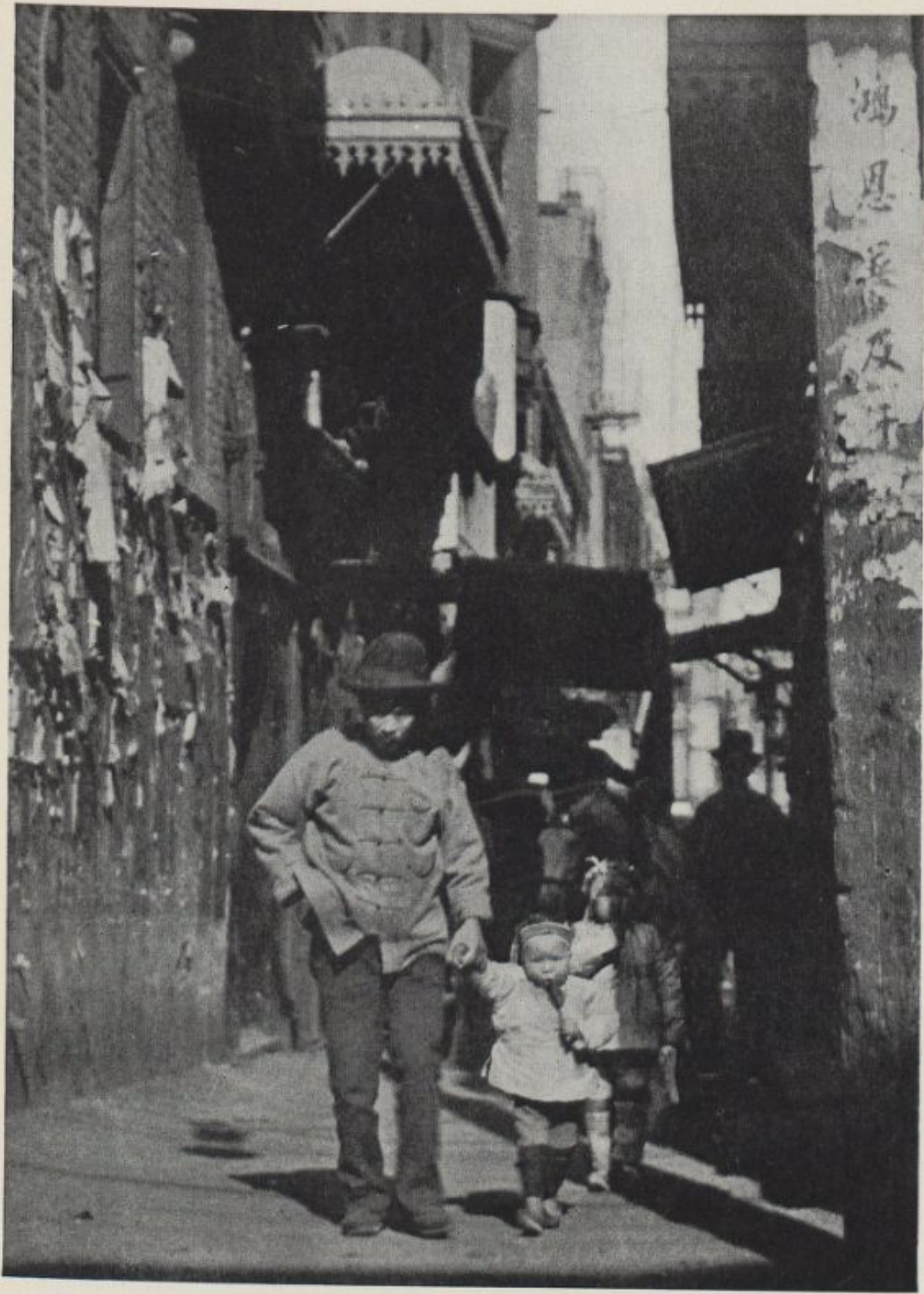
I hope that some one will arise, before this generation is passed, to record that conquest of affection by which the Californian Chinese transformed themselves from our race-adversaries to our dear, subject people. Theirs will be all the glory of that tale, ours all the shame. In the dawn of the mining rush, the little, trading Cantonese began to appear in California. The American, the Celt, the Frenchman came for gold—gold washed out of the hills—uncounted millions. Gold brought the Chinaman also; but his ideas were modest. The prospect of two, four, five dollars a day was enough for him, who had made only ten cents a day at home. He asked simply to do menial work at a menial's wage. Beside our white pioneers, he took his part in the glorious episode of the Pacific conquest. He, with them, starved on the desert, died on the trails, faced Indian bullets and arrows. Wherever the report of gold called into being a new camp, he struggled in behind the whites, built his laundry, his cook-house or his gold rocker,



girded up his pig-tail, and went to work. In his own spirit of quiet heroism, he shared all the hardships of our giant men—shared in everything they held except their dissipations and their reward of glory. For glory, he had to wait half a century.

That curious, black episode of early Western civilization, the Chinese persecution, followed hard upon their first arrival. Why this thing began, what quality in the Chinese nature irritated our pioneers beyond all justice and sense of decency, remains a little dim and uncomprehended to this generation. They were an honest people—honest beyond our strictest ideas. They attended to their own business and did not interfere with ours. Their immoralities, their peculiar and violent methods of adjusting social differences, affected only themselves. Not for thirty years was there reason for believing them a danger to American workingmen. But the fact remains. Our pioneers cut off their sacred pig-tails, cast them forth disgraced, beat them, lynched them. Professional agitators made them a stock in trade. By the power of reiteration, this honest people came to figure in the public mind as a race of thieves, this cleanly





THE ALLEY.

*"Those broken, dingy streets in which the Chinese made art of rubbish."*





WAITING FOR THE CARS.

*"The respectable Chinese woman . . . bound her hair with sober filaments, she dressed quietly in the dark greens which uniform respectability, and she went abroad only on great business."*



people—inventors of the daily bath—as “dirty” and “diseased,” this heroic people, possessed of a passive fortitude beside which our stoicism is cowardice, as poltroons. With a dignity all their own, they suffered and went about their business, though death lay at the end.

The day came when the Chinese themselves nearly justified the professional labor agitator. The romantic, unsettled period of the gold rush passed into history; the age of bonanza farming followed; the state buckled down to stable industry. But two and three and five dollars a day was still a lure to the Canton man. Their number increased with every Pacific steamer. Even yet they were no real menace to American labor—the state at any time might have swallowed up fifty thousand more without harming a single white workingman—but that menace lifted itself in the immediate future. Ripples from the black Dennis Kearney outrages, the shameful Montana massacres, reached Washington. Congress passed the Exclusion Law. When that happened, there vanished the last logical objection to the Californian Chinese.

A gradual change passed over the spirit of Cali-



fornia. We were a long time learning that human souls, different but equal, souls softened by forty centuries of highly moral civilization, lay under those yellow skins, under those bizarre customs and beliefs. The Chinaman, being a gentleman, gives himself forth but charily. I think that we first glimpsed the real man through our gradual understanding of his honesty. American merchants learned that none need ever ask a note of a Chinaman in any commercial transaction. His word is his bond. Precedent, as well as race characteristic, makes it so.

The newer generation of Californians grew up with baby-loving, devoted Chinese servants about them. The Sons and Daughters of the Golden West did not, indeed, draw their first sustenance from yellow breasts, as the Southener has drawn it from black ones. That mystic bond was lacking. But a Chinese man-servant had watched at the cradle above most of them, rejoiced with the parents that there was a baby in the house, laughed to see it laugh, hurried like a mother at its cry. A backyard picture in any of the old Californian





THE AIRING.

*"With what pride the father—never the mother—used to carry the boy baby down the street in all his finery."*





LOAFERS YOUNG AND OLD.

*" . . . This life of the streets, which never grew stale to the real Californian "*



mansions included always the Chinese cook, grinning from the doorway on the playing babies.

This Chinese cook was a volunteer nurse; for him, the nursery was heart of the house. He was the consoler and fairy-teller of childhood. He passed on to the babies his own wonder tales of flowered princesses and golden dragons, he taught them to patter in sing-song Cantonese, he saved his frugal nickels to buy them quaint little gifts; and as the better Southerner, despising the race, loves the individual negro through this very association of childhood, so the Californian came to love the Chinaman that he knew. In his ultimate belief, indeed, he outstripped the Southerner; for he came first to a tolerance of the race and then to an admiration.

The older people, and more especially the housewives among them, reached understanding and admiration through a different channel. The Chinaman was an ideal servant. Now, when the insolent and altogether less admirable Japanese are taking their places beside the cook stoves, your San Francisco housewife will never cease lament-



ing for the old order. His respect for a contract, written or spoken, made him observe every article of the servant's code. Unobtrusive, comprehending in all its subtleties the feminine mind, part of the household and still aloof from it, the Chinese servant did the work of two American maids and stirred up no friction in the process. Supreme virtue of all to his mistress, he delighted in "company," in all the pomps and parades of a household. Nothing pleased him more than to take the responsibility of a dinner or a reception upon himself, to plan confections for it, to have a hand in the decorations. The other side of his life, which might be frescoed with fan-tan and highbinder troubles, he kept for Chinatown and his night off. Perhaps on that night he dropped his month's wages in the gambling houses of Ross Alley, perhaps he smoked a few pipes of opium, perhaps he knew more than the police would ever learn of the highbinder shooting proclaimed all across the first page of that newspaper which he handed you at breakfast. He never troubled you with these things. To you, he was first the perfect servant, and, if his term lasted long enough, the shy, and





THE BUTCHER.

*"Its exemplars of art in common things, always before the unillumined American, worked to make San Francisco the city of artists that she was."*





THE LILY VENDOR.

*"Who more gracious than your Chinese cook or laundryman, calling on Chinese New Year's, his hands full of lilies for the women of the family?"*



gentle familiar, versed in the arts of friendship. Who more gracious than your Chinese cook or laundryman calling on Chinese New Years, his hands full of lilies for the women of the family, his pockets of nuts for the children? Under kindness, he might blossom into a feudal retainer of the family, lingering on for years in a voluntary slavery, truced only when, the price of Chinese service having gone up, he made his just demand for a raise in pay. So, out of family life, both child and parent learned to appreciate and love the race. The Chinese had conquered our foolish hatred by patient service; and I call it a glorious conquest.

Long before this, a whole generation before, and while they still lived amidst terrors and alarms, they had laid the foundations of that which became Chinatown. Like all Spanish towns, San Francisco clustered first about a plaza—Portsmouth Square the pioneers renamed it. On its fringes, in the days when the streets ran gold and the Vigilantes were the whole law, appeared the first modern buildings. Then, with the unaccountable, restless drift of American cities, shops and wholesale houses passed on down into the hollows and



“made lands” reclaimed from the Bay marshes. The Chinese, following in, took possession of those old buildings about Portsmouth Square. An unwritten city ordinance, strictly observed by successive Boards of Supervisors, held them to an area of about eight city blocks. Old St. Mary’s Church, the first Roman Catholic Cathedral, marked the southern edge of that area; and to the last day of the old city any report that the Chinese were moving south of St. Mary’s drove the newspapers and the city fathers to arms. The Chinese conquest of affection never proceeded so far that the Americans wanted them for neighbors.

These eight blocks, supporting a population which varied between ten thousand and thirty thousand according to the season of the year, lay close to the very centre of San Francisco, between the business district and the old palaces of Nob Hill. Wealthy citizens, walking down to their offices from the citadel of the town, used to envy the Chinese their site; the city authorities were forever starting a movement to get “dirty Chinatown” out into the suburbs, that the white might take the Quarter back. But the Chinese owned much of the prop-





THE TOY VENDOR.





THE MOTHER.

*"Soberly dressed, keeping close that they might not dishonor their lords through the glance of forbidden eyes."*



erty, and paid a high rental for the rest. With their conservatism and their persistence, they stuck. They stuck even after the fire, when San Francisco, starting a dozen projects in the heroic rebound of its spirit, tried to seize the occasion to move Chinatown.

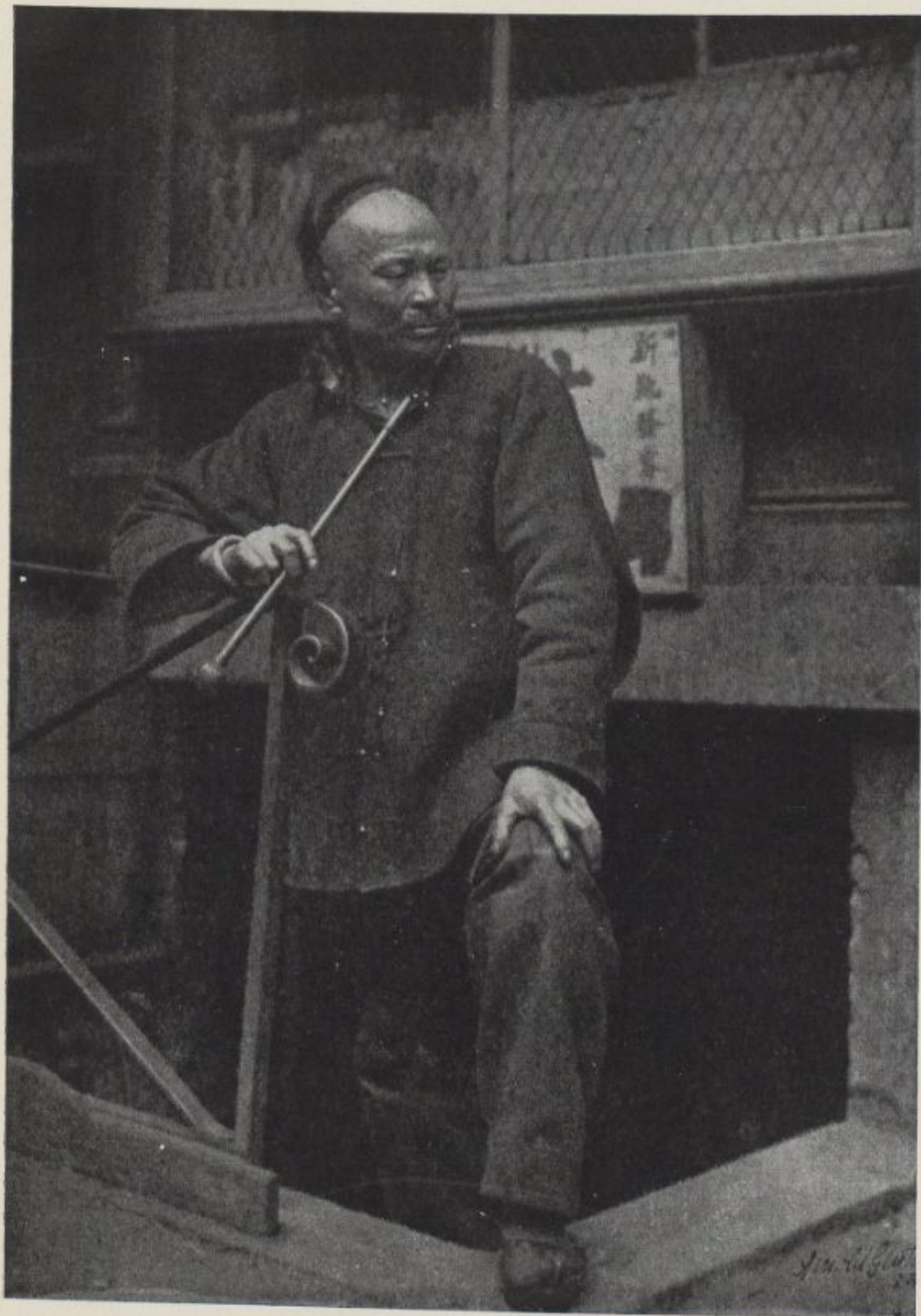
This district of old-fashioned business blocks, laid out on fine lines by the French architects who wrought before the newly-rich miners began to buy atrocities, the Chinese transformed into a semblance of a Chinese city. They added sheds, lean-tos, out-door booths, a thousand devices to extend space; they built in the eternal painted balconies of which the Chinaman is as fond as a Spaniard. Close livers by custom, they lodged twenty coolies in one abandoned law office; they even burrowed three stories under ground that they might make space for winter-idle laborers, overflow of the northern canning factories. Clinging always to their native customs and dress and manners, they furnished forth their little stores and factories, their lodging houses, their restaurants, with the Chinese utensils of common life in which they express their inborn art sense.



So the quarter grew into a thing like Canton and still strangely and beautifully unlike. Dirty—the Chinaman, clean as a whistle about his person, inventor of the daily bath, is still terribly careless about his surroundings. Unsanitary to the last degree—Chinatown was the care and vexation of Boards of Health. But always beautiful—falling everywhere into pictures.

This beauty appealed equally to the plain citizen, who can appreciate only the picturesque, and to the artist, with his eye for composition, subtle coloring, shadowy suggestion. From every doorway flashed out a group, an arrangement, which suggested the Flemish masters. Consider that panel of a shop front in Fish Alley which is to me the height of Dr. Genthe's collection. It is a Rembrandt. Such pictures glimpsed about every corner. You lifted your eyes. Perfectly conceived in coloring and line, you saw a balcony, a woman in softly gaudy robes, a window whose blackness suggested mystery. You turned to right or left; behold a pipe-bowl mender or a cobbler working with his strange Oriental tools, and behind him a vista of sheds and doorways in dim half tone, spotted with





THE SHOEMAKER.

*"Human souls, different but equal, souls softened by forty centuries of high civilization, lay under those yellow skins."*





RESCUED SLAVE GIRLS.

*"A girl four years old, past the delicate stage of infancy, would bring from fifteen hundred to two thousand dollars as a speculation."*



the gold and greens of Chinese sign-boards. Beautiful and always mysterious—a mystery made visual by that green-gray mist which hangs always above the Gate and which softens every object exposed to the caressing winds and gentle rains of the North Pacific.

In the greatest of his short stories, Frank Norris said that there were three circles in Chinatown. The first was this life of the streets, which never grew stale to the real Californian. The second was that prepared show which the tourist saw and which supported those singular persons, the Chinatown guides. The third was a circle away down below, into which no white man, at least none who dared tell about it, ever penetrated—the circle which revolved about their trafficking in justice, as they conceived of justice, about their trade in contraband goods, such as opium and slave girls.

Rather, I think, were there four circles, for in between the circle of Show Places and that of Hidden Things came the family life and industrial activity of the quarter.

This Chinatown was a Tenderloin for the whole Chinese population of the Pacific Coast, the pleas-



ure palace where fish cutters from the northern salmon canneries, farmers from the Sacramento deltas, fruit pickers from the hot San Joaquin, gold washers from the Sierran placers, came to enjoy themselves and to squander their earnings between seasons. Although a part of its reputed viciousness was the exaggeration of race hatred, no man could deny that it was tough. Also, it had gathered about it the lowest of those white tramps and soldiers of ill fortune who haunted that terminus of Caucasian civilization, San Francisco. The habitation of a darker race has an attraction for the debased; witness the environs of negro streets in the South. Because "sin is news and news is sin," this side of Chinatown was always before the public.

Nevertheless, a real life of homes and quiet industry went on there also. The Chinese overall, cigar and shoe factories were important enough to draw the hatred of labor unions for a generation long. Much of the American tea and silk trade was controlled from those streets. The Six Companies, virtually the Chinese Chamber of Commerce—though bound by an alliance closer than





A CORNER ON THE HILLSIDE.

*"This bit of the mystic, suggestive East, so modified by the West that it was neither Oriental nor yet Occidental—but just Chinatown."*





THE CELLAR DOOR.

*"Children high and low, rich and poor, they had the run of the streets."*



any commercial organization which we know—had but to assert itself, and the whole Pacific Coast paid attention. The merchants, as they grew rich, sent to China for their old wives, married new ones by proxy, slipped brides past the inspectors, bought them from the slave dealers. In their toy establishments, rich often with spoils of the Orient, they bred children and developed a kind of polite society.

To a degree which we cannot comprehend, the place of the respectable Chinese woman is in the home. So the foreign American seldom saw the true lady of the Chinese Quarter. She lived tight in her little flat, she bound her hair with sober fillets, she dressed quietly in the dark greens that uniform respectability, and she went abroad only on great business or on the occasion of great festivals.

But children,—high and low, rich and poor, they had the run of the streets. And they were the pride, joy, beauty and chief delight of the Quarter. Hope of heaven and everlasting worship to their fathers, nothing was too bright and beautiful for them. So mothers and nurses decked them out in



the brightest tunics, the most cleverly conceived caps all tinkling with golden devil-chasers, the whitest little socks and shoes, the most gorgeous ear-tassels, fit, otherwise, only for the altars of the joss. Tiny, yellow flowers of the world—how the American women, native and tourist, used to crane their necks and smile and coo at them as they passed! With what pride the father—never the mother—used to carry the boy baby down the streets in all his finery! How the Chinese, child lovers from the bottoms of their hearts, used to pay them court on the corners! Usually, they were contented and rather stolid babies; only once in a blue moon did one of them cry. And when it happened that a baby cried on the streets, the Chinese, bargaining at the open shop-fronts, used to look after him and grin and exchange comments in Cantonese sing-song as though it was the greatest joke in the world.

School, whether in the Oriental schoolhouse which the city maintained or in the private Chinese seminaries of the rich and conservative, was out by four o'clock. That was the brightest hour of all the day in those streets. Dupont and Washington





YOUNG ARISTOCRATS.

*"How the Chinese, child lovers from the bottom of their hearts, used to pay them  
court on the corners!"*





A FAMILY FROM THE CONSULATE.

*"Hope of heaven and of everlasting worship to their fathers. . . . Nothing was too bright and beautiful for them."*



and Stockton blossomed with racing, tumbling babies, all bright in silks. The barber, the grocer, the butcher, the lantern maker, dropped tools and occupation and came to the doorways to watch them play. The elder sisters, too many of them, alas, with the bound feet that showed how high their mothers expected them to marry, walked arm on waist like school-girls the world over, swaying with that gentle motion which marks the Chinese lady from her common sister. The big boys, much more subdued than our own twelve year olds, got out those feathered shuttlecocks with which the Chinese youth imitates football, and frisked along Dupont street or over into Portsmouth Square. A curious game that was, without team work or rules—nothing to it but dexterity of foot. Something essentially Oriental in its grotesque grace appeared in the attitudes of these boys as they kicked the ball, first forward like the punt of a Rugby player, and then backward over their shoulders like a French movement in *la savate*. Sometimes the more radical mothers joined their babies after school, walked down to the Square—a fearful journey for them—and made a little picnic about the



football players. That children's hour of the Quarter showed Chinatown at its sweetest and most gracious.

Once only, in my recollection, came a day when all the women, high and low, virtuous and lost, had free run of the streets. This was the Good Lady Festival, celebrated every seven years in honor of that illustrious Chinese woman, princess and martyr, who was raised for her virtues to godhood. Her symbol is the little shoe, the tapering shoe of the lily feet, which she threw into the river before she died. And on the day of her festival, woman was raised to the level of man. She was free to walk the streets, to sacrifice, to bow publicly before the outdoor altars where priests in white robes and white fillets tapped their little gongs and sang incessantly to the joss. The "Prayer store" on Dupont Street, where one might buy anything and everything sacred to Chinese religion, banked its counter and filled its windows with tiny shoes, from a thing of gold which one might hang on his tunic as a souvenir to a valentine thing in pink rice paper, large enough to clothe a proper lily foot.

On that day, also, might the respectable woman

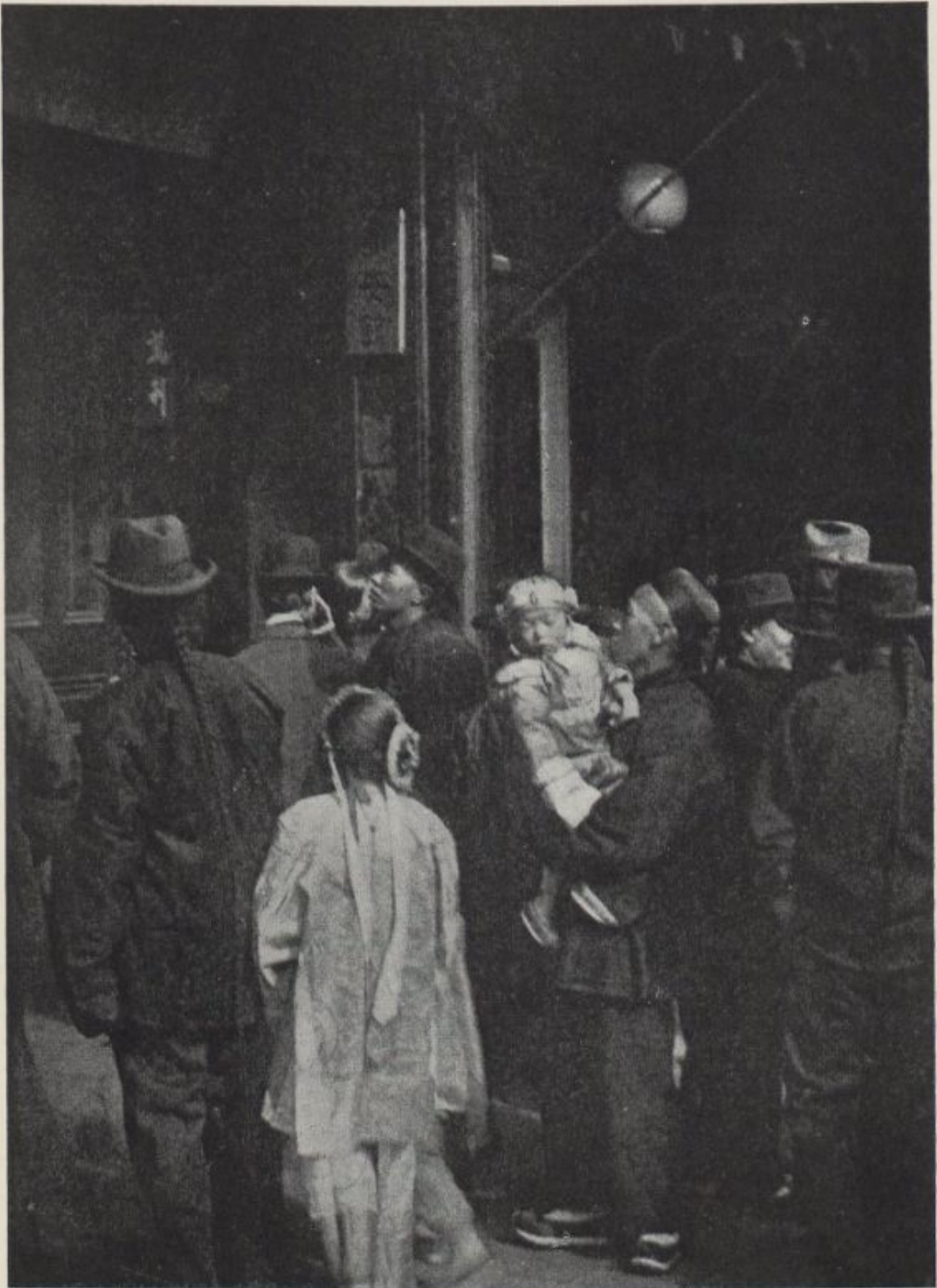




#### HOLIDAY DRESS.

*"On that day might the respectable woman wear those parti-colored robes, those trousers of pale, neutral shades, those jade and gold ornaments for the hair. . . ."*





NEW YEAR'S DAY BEFORE THE THEATRE.

*"Four or five times a year, some fixed or movable feast brought out everything that was wonderful in the Quarter."*



wear those parti-colored robes, those trousers of pale, neutral shades, those jade and gold ornaments for the hair, publicly appropriate at other times only to the fallen among women. From the brass and cedar treasure chests kept carefully under the beds in their tiny flats, they took these festival clothes, saved, perhaps, since the wedding; and Chinatown became one blaze of color. Here, as everywhere else, fashions changed; one marked that phenomenon usually by the varying patterns in the children's caps. That year, I remember, light blue was most in vogue. The really modish tunic, at that festival of the Good Lady, was of a robin's egg color, above and below; but about the centre of the body ran a band of deep blue, edged with scroll work and embroidered, like as not, in gold. The black, straight hair, glossy with ointments, was usually bound by a great clasp of flat gold which amounted almost to a cap.

Down the street, that night, walked a procession of priests in white robes. They carried a great banner inscribed with sacred Chinese characters; to right and left of them walked stavemen bearing weapons of the old Empire. Behind followed the



women, for all the world like a swaying bed of great, gaudy flowers. Along the sidewalks burned unnumbered sacrificial candles and lights, surrounded with the roast pig and rice bowls of a Chinese sacrifice. When the procession was over, the women, emancipated for the night, went to feast—those of no caste to the restaurants, the ladies to their sombre homes.

Next morning, when the careful priests of Confucius had picked up the papers on the streets and burned them, that the sacred name might be sullied by no base uses, the women were back in their nests again, soberly dressed, keeping close that they might not dishonor their lords through the glance of forbidden eyes; and only the harlot and the very young maiden walked freely and frequently abroad until their next holiday. Alas, that festival of the Good Lady came again in a year when no one knew if there was to be any more Chinatown!

They love a fiesta, those Californian Chinese; four or five times a year, some fixed or movable feast brought out everything that was wonderful in the Quarter. Two or three of these holiday occasions linger in memory. On Stockton street





#### HOLIDAY FINERY.

*"So mothers and nurses decked them out in the brightest tunics, the most cleverly conceived caps all tinkling with golden devil-chasers, the whitest little socks and shoes, the most gorgeous ear-tassels, fit, otherwise, only for the altars of the joss."*





DRESS CLOTHES.

*"They wore the long, silk tunic of neutral tint which is dress coat and frock coat both to the Chinese gentleman."*



stood the clubhouse of a merchant organization only one whit less powerful than the Six Companies. Do not ask me its name; if I could remember, you would forget. Those Chinese monosyllables are dreadfully elusive. Once in three years, this club celebrated the glories of its joss and kept open house. The reception was for white and Chinese alike; in this time of peace and good will, they drew no color line. All races mixed in the crowd which packed their rooms to drink tea and scan the innumerable paper altars in honor of this immortal god or that dead hero. Mostly, these altars told, in flimsy paper statuettes and legends on red rice paper, some tale of old China. There, life size, was the great god, sitting in fearful state and casting insolent eyes upon the priests who sang before him with many prostrations. About him, stood a dismounted hero in the tasseled and feathered war bonnet of old China; the princess his wife; a horse which was a caricature of an animal in shape and a wonder of art in blended coloring; the seven goddesses, gazing indifferently upon rich offerings of roast pig, punks and fruit.

Near the entrance, in a recess of his own, sat the



terrible and luck-bringing joss of the Tong. He is a devil as well as a god; he is beatifically kind and terribly cruel. His image is all white in face and clothing, but his eyes are weeping tears of blood. He is so lucky that just to touch him will make you win at lottery or fan-tan, and if you should but own him, no game from pie-gow to Wall Street could resist you. So he was much sought by the thievish; and between festivals the Tong kept him in a burglar proof vault. On this public occasion, when his owners brought him out to bless and help their guests, two white watchmen guarded him with club and gun. No Chinese watchman could be trusted, in face of that awful temptation to win everlasting prosperity at one stroke.

Once, in this week of festivity, they brought him out on the streets. That was on the last night, when the elders of the Tong, in caps and long dress tunics, publicly distributed bread and meat to all the poor of Chinatown, whether white or yellow. Then, priests bore him high in air on their shoulders that he might radiate fortune on the unfortunate. I wonder sometimes whether he, bearer of luck and material salvation, saved himself in the





THE CHINESE SMILE.

*"A backyard picture in any of the old Californian mansions included always the Chinese cook, grinning from the doorway on the playing babies."*





THE MOUNTEBANK.

*"Who forgets the Pekin Two Knife Man who used to perform for nickles a sword  
dance of the Old Empire?"*



great disaster; or whether he went down to destruction in the downfall of his house.

I remember, too, a certain night in the annual festival of devils, when the orthodox Chinaman purifies his house, as the Hebrew sprinkled the blood of sacrificial lambs on his lintels. The air, in the Chinese cosmos, is full of these devil people; a Chinaman wastes a deal of his time and energy worrying about them. At home, I believe, the very orthodox never make a straight entrance to any building—for devils cannot turn a corner, and a crooked entrance is a safeguard. Behold how superstition yields to convenience! The Chinese of San Francisco had adapted to their uses abandoned American stores and business blocks. It was inconvenient, almost impossible, to screen against devils the entrances to American-built stores. The practical Chinaman, therefore, gave up the doctrine of his creed, and took the more ardently to propitiatory sacrifices and offerings and devil-scaring firecrackers. And at the great devil feast, he fairly outdid himself in casting out all the works of evil, that his house might be clean for another year.



On the night which I am recalling, a certain observation upon the Chinese crystallized in my mind. Out of his mental difference from us, his oblique thinking as contrasted with our straight reasoning, his subtlety as contrasted with our directness, his commercial honesty as contrasted with our comparative commercial dishonor, his gentility as contrasted with our rudeness; further, out of our wholly unnecessary persecution and race hatred, he has come to a superior contempt of us and our ways. Certain broad spirits among them look across the race line and regard us as human beings; certain humble personages among them, such as the old family retainers whom I have mentioned already, develop a curious, dog-like affection. But in the main, they feel a passive contempt. We were to them a medium of commerce when we stopped at the stores to buy, meddlers when we interfered with lotteries, fan-tan games, plague, highbinder wars and other affairs which were none of our business, plain pests when we swept down upon them with uniforms and patrol wagons, but always Things—never persons. You passed them on the streets; they turned out for you; but they

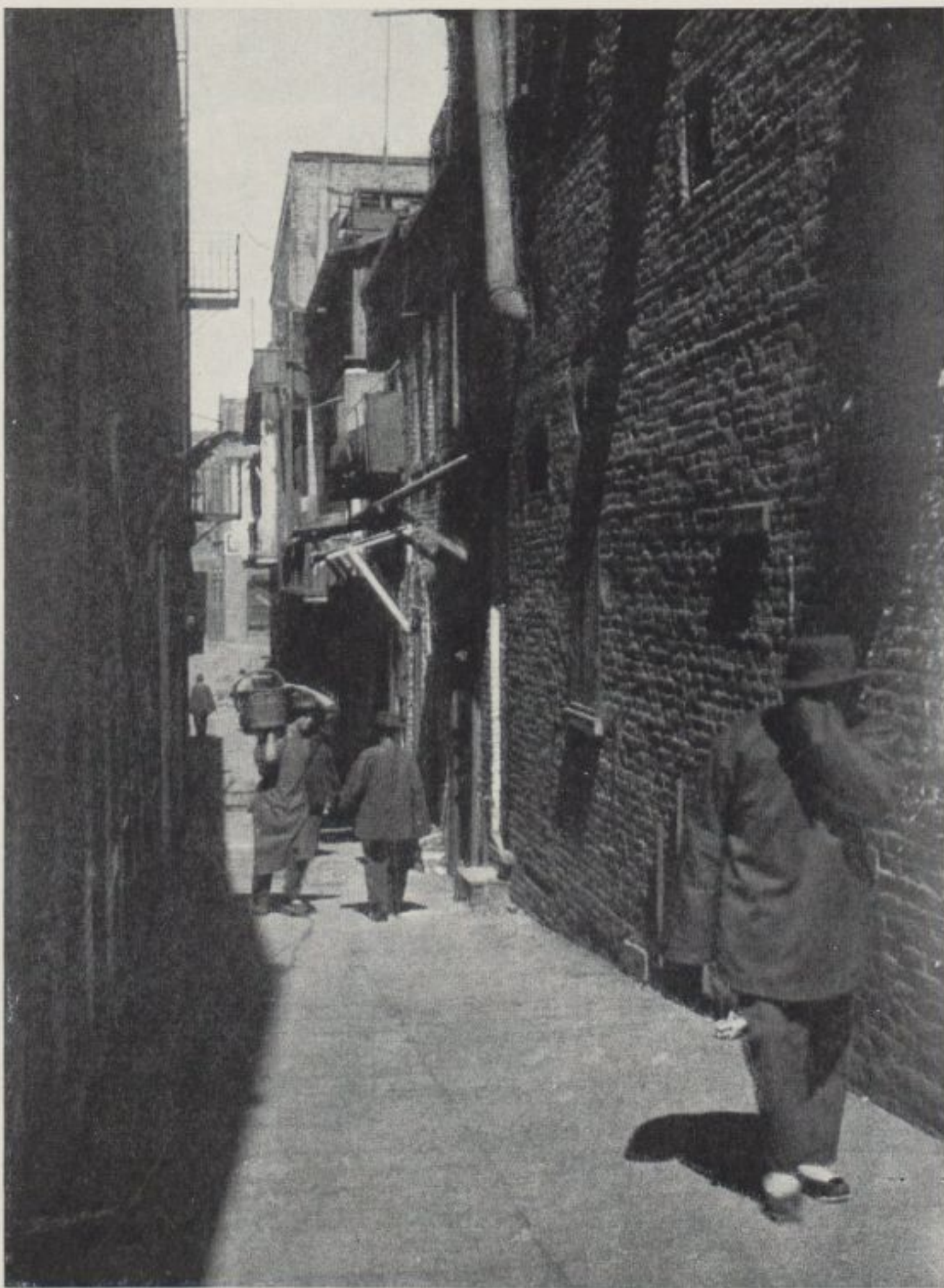




A VISTA.

*"Spotted with the golds and greens of Chinese sign-boards."*





"NO FACES!"

*"He would notice you no more than a post—unless you pulled a camera on him."*



glanced at you no more than they glanced at the innumerable sleek cats sunning themselves in the doorways. You might pick a specially beautiful or interesting Chinaman and stare at him all day; he would notice you no more than a post—unless you pulled a camera on him. A Chinese father would, indeed, soften if you stopped to pay court to the baby in his arms; it was too much to expect that he would refuse tribute from anything in the earth below or the air above to the pride of his heart and the hope of his immortal salvation. That, it seemed to me, was the only point at which your Chinese willingly granted intercourse to the despised race.

But on that night, when the punk-sticks and the pocket altars burned at every corner and before every sweet-meat stand, when all the alleys were canopied over for the use of the priests, when every window glowed soft from the sacrificial lights within; on that night, when horror and mystery held the air—then you paid court to no Chinese baby. Approach him, and his father drew him sharply away; persist, and his bearer would hurry off on his slipping, high-soled shoes in a panicky



run. Pidgin English brought no answer to your most polite inquiries. The children imitated their elders; the big brother or sister, caring for little Ah Wu or tiny Miss Peach Blossom of the lily feet, scattered fearfully from the foreign touch. We, inferior, uncomprehending, were brothers to the powers of the air. Only this I noticed—your money was still welcome at the stores. Perhaps it was right to take devil tribute.

It seems that there is no Lent, no Day of Atonement, in the Chinese calendar. All religious festivals are also feast days. Even on that night, men turned from fighting the devils to make holiday. Every restaurant held its banquet, every wealthy home its reception.

What is it which makes one picture of life linger in memory while others, and more marvelous ones, fade out? As vivid as though its bright impression was still dancing on my retina, I remember a dinner party which I saw that night. Perhaps I had with me a friend, whose identity is the one thing which has gone from me, but whose strong and stimulating pull on my mind lingers in this rise of memory to a permanent thing; per-





"NO LIKEE!"

*"The children imitated their elders; the big brother or sister, caring for little Ah Wu or tiny Miss Peach Blossom of the lily feet, scattered fearfully from the foreign touch."*





THE BALLOON MAN.

*"The barber, the grocer, the butcher, the lantern maker, dropped tools and occupation . . . to watch them play."*



haps that was one of those nights of youth when the world is right and life dances down before you, and all your powers are multiplied by some golden number of the gods. At any rate this picture remains, while greater and brighter things linger only as blurred outlines.

It was on the top floor of the old Man Far Low Restaurant on Dupont street, a show place it is true, but also the great café of the rich and dissolute. That floor, running clear through the block, was a succession of private dining rooms, divided one from the other by pictured, scroll-work screens. Carved woods and painted lanterns decked the walls; the tables were of black teak, delicately and minutely inlaid. The guests sat not on chairs, but upon square stools of the same teak wood. From the front apartment, you stepped out upon a balcony made into a little Chinese garden. This looked upon the dark stretch of Dupont street. At the rear was another balcony, a small, undecorated thing; and from that you saw first Portsmouth Square with its gilded caravel set to remember Robert Louis Stevenson; further on the city buildings, topped by the masts and spars of Adven-



ture Ships in from Pacific voyagings; and still further the golden delights of the great bay. One who came to enjoy the Man Far Low must buy at least tea and sweetmeats. The tea, poured from the crack between two bowls, one inverted over the other, was of a light lemon yellow, and in taste no more than hot water slightly flavored by an aromatic herb. Color and taste were deceptive; it would kill sleep for a night. One ate the sweetmeats—picked ginger, preserved nuts, plums and citron—from the end of a spindly tin fork. When the guest had finished, the waiter stood at the head of the stairs and bawled something in Cantonese. That was the check; the cashier, sitting in round cap and horn spectacles at the desk below, knew by it how much to collect.

That night, however, the Chinese occupied it; a great, expensive dinner, costing its tens of dollars a plate, was proceeding in the front apartment. At the biggest table sat a dozen Chinese men-about-town, very dignified as to dress, for they wore the long, silk tunic of ravishing neutral tint which is dress coat and a frock coat both to a Chinese gentleman. With each man sat his woman





ON DUPONT STREET.

*A real life of homes and quiet industry went on there also.*

*"This district . . . the Chinese transformed into a semblance of a Chinese city."*





THE SWEETMEAT STAND.

" . . . Flashed out a group, an arrangement, which suggested the Flemish masters."



—not at the table, but just behind, so that she had to reach caressingly over his shoulder to get at the hundred viands in their toy porcelain bowls. When her lord's appetite failed, she fed him with her plaything hands; when he wanted a cigarette, she lighted it for him between her own rouged lips. One of these women, I remember, had a homely, irregular face, with a broad mouth, but with an illumination and expression in her features exceptional among Chinese women—they tend to the brainless, doll type. A soubrette sauciness showed in her every gesture, but you felt that it was a measured impudence which knew its convenient bounds. Musicians, squatted on a woven straw couch in the corner, were tormenting a moon fiddle, a sam yin and a gong. In the rests of that sound, which I shall not call music, she would lean forward and throw out a remark; and the company, already a little gone with rice brandy, would laugh mightily.

Presently, the feast having reached the stage when food is less to the feaster than drink, they began to play "one-two." I must explain that game, so simple and so appealing to the convivial.



You challenge a partner. If he accepts, you throw out from your closed hand any number of fingers from one to four and call off in a loud tone of voice the proper number of fingers. He throws out the same number of fingers and calls the number after you. But at last you call out, craftily, any one number, and throw out a different number of fingers. And if, by calling that number after you, he shows that he has failed to watch your hand, he has lost; and he must drink a cup of rice brandy as a forfeit. He who first becomes drunk is "it." It goes faster and faster, until all the table is playing it in pairs. "Sam!" "*Sam!*" "See!" "*See!*" "Yee!" "*Yee!*" "Sam!" "*Sam!*" Then a howl of Oriental laughter, more crackling and subdued than ours; for the proponent, on "Sam" (three) has thrown forward only two fingers, and the opponent, falling into the trap, has thrown out three. So he is caught, and down his throat goes the forfeit.

And as they drank and played, and played and drank, something deep below the surface came out in them. Their shouts became squalls; lips drew





THE LILY-FOOT WOMAN.

*"Swaying with that gentle motion which marks the Chinese lady from her common sister."*





FORMAL DRESS.  
*"A woman in softly gaudy robes."*



back from teeth, beady little eyes blazed; their very cheek bones seemed to rise higher on their faces. I thought as I watched of wars of the past; these were not refined Cantonese, with a surface gentility and grace in life greater than anything that our masses know; they were those old yellow people with whom our fathers fought before the Caucasus was set as a boundary between the dark race and the light; the hordes of Ghengis Khan; the looters of Atilla.

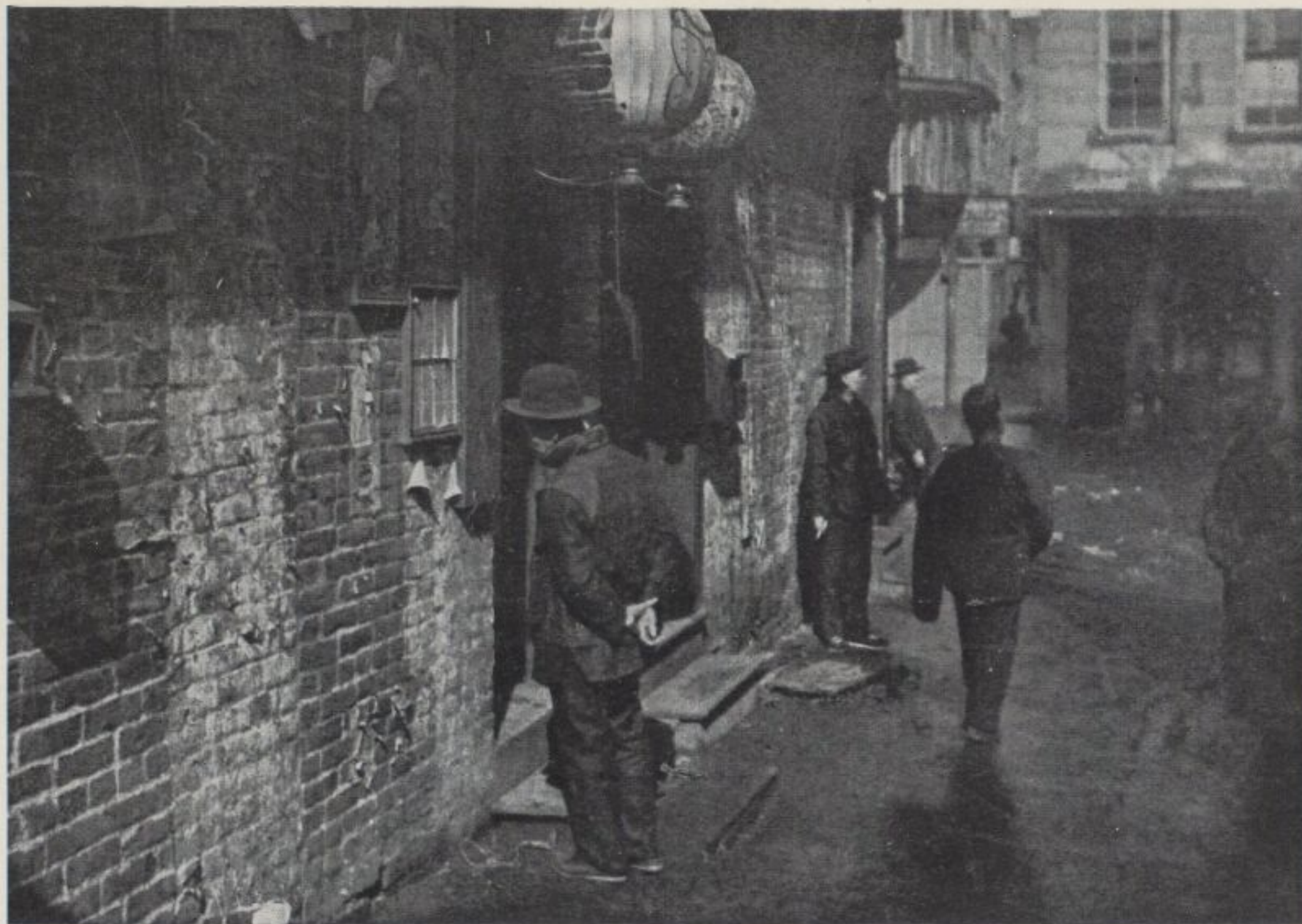
The "its" fell out one by one, retired with some dignity to the straw couch and to sleep. She of the saucy, illuminated face crept close to her lord and whispered in his ear—she, like all her kind, was taking the moment of intoxication to ply her business; and the debauch was nearly over. Only when I was out on the street, and purged somewhat from the impression of Tartar fierceness which that game of "one-two" had given me, did this come into my mind: there had been not one unseemly or unlovely act in all that debauch of young bloods and soiled women, not one over-familiar gesture. Tartar though they had shown them-



selves, they had remained still Chinese gentlemen and—may I say it of women in their class?—Chinese ladies.

These pretty and painted playthings of men furnished a glimpse into Frank Norris's Third Circle, the underworld. We shall never quite understand the Chinese, I suppose; and not the least comprehensible thing about them is the paradox of their ideas and emotions. On the anomalies of Chinese courage, for example, one might write a whole treatise. A Chinese pursued by a mob never fights back. He lies down and takes his beating with his lips closed. If he is able to walk when it is done, he moves away with a fine, gentlemanly scorn for his tormentors. To take another instance; at Steveston, in the mouth of the Frazer River, the white and Indian fisherman struck. The owners, supported by the Canadian militia, decided to man the boats with Oriental cannery laborers. The Japanese jumped at the chance. The Chinese, to a man, refused to go out on the river. They were afraid of it. Yet a Chinese merchant condemned to death by the highbinders, aware that the stroke may come at any time from

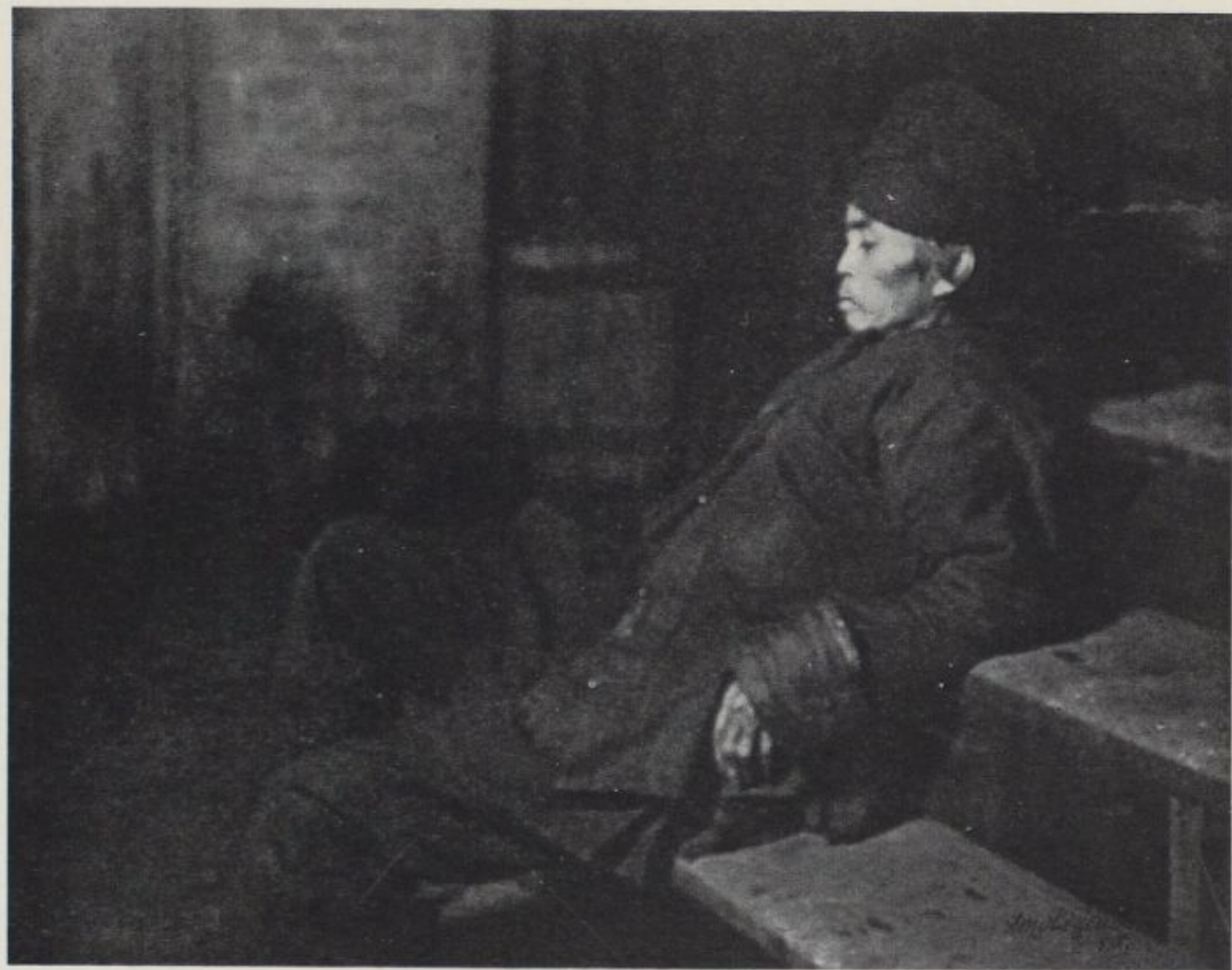




*"DOORWAYS IN DIM HALF TONE."*

*These lanterns denoted to the Chinese—and never to the police—a big gambling house which was raided monthly, and monthly exonerated "for lack of evidence."*





THE "HOP FIEND."

*As the town drunkards to an American community, so were these creeping, flabby slaves of opium to Chinatown.*



in a business way with those who live by vice. In this development of civilization we are as children beside the Chinese; and out of this situation grew the highbinders, adventurers in crime. For they were not only criminals; they were formal and recognized agents of justice. Crime and punishment had become tangled and involved beyond any power of ours to separate them and straighten them out. The constituted police of San Francisco struggled with this paradox for a generation long; and, finally, perceiving that the Chinese would settle their own affairs in their own way, gave it up and let the thing go. They kept only such interest in the Quarter—these Caucasian police—as would permit them to gather that rich graft which made a Chinatown beat a step toward fortune.

Before I go on with the Highbinder Tongs, of which no white man knows too much, I must explain that the Chinese have a positive talent for organization. They do everything, from running a store to keeping up public worship, by companies. Your insignificant Chinese shop-keeper may belong to a half dozen tight, oath-bound organizations—social, religious, financial, protective. In the early



seventies of the last century, certain organizations known to the whites as "Chinese Masons" began to attract journalistic attention. So, at about the same time, did certain mysterious and unavenged Chinese murders. These Masons and these murders, closely connected beyond a doubt, were the first public manifestation of the Highbinders. Some of these societies, the Chinese say, are offshoots from the old Triad Society, responsible for the Tai-Ping Rebellion and later for the Boxer trouble; some of them are legitimate social organizations, degenerated and gone wrong. Through vicissitudes of which the best-informed Chinatown detective knows only the shadows, they settled down into five or six unions of toughs and paid thugs, the hatchets and revolvers of their members always at disposal of any Chinese who wanted revenge or sued for justice. Blackest and toughest of all, perhaps, were—and are—the Bow Ons, who combined blackmail with their murder; but they were all black enough. For dead and wounded, their lists must read like the roster of a Civil War regiment.

I wonder if I can convey the process by which,





THE TONG PROCLAMATION.

*"Five or six unions of toughs and paid thugs, the hatchets and revolvers of their members always at disposal of any Chinese who wanted revenge or sued for justice."*



any alley, walks his accustomed way through the streets without looking to right or left. So it goes, all through their characters. Nothing fits our rules.

By the same token, underneath their essential courtesy, fruit of an old civilization, underneath their absolute commercial honor, underneath their artistic appreciation of the grace in life, runs a hard, wild streak of barbarism, an insensibility in cruelty, which, when roused, is as cold-blooded and unlovely a thing as we know.

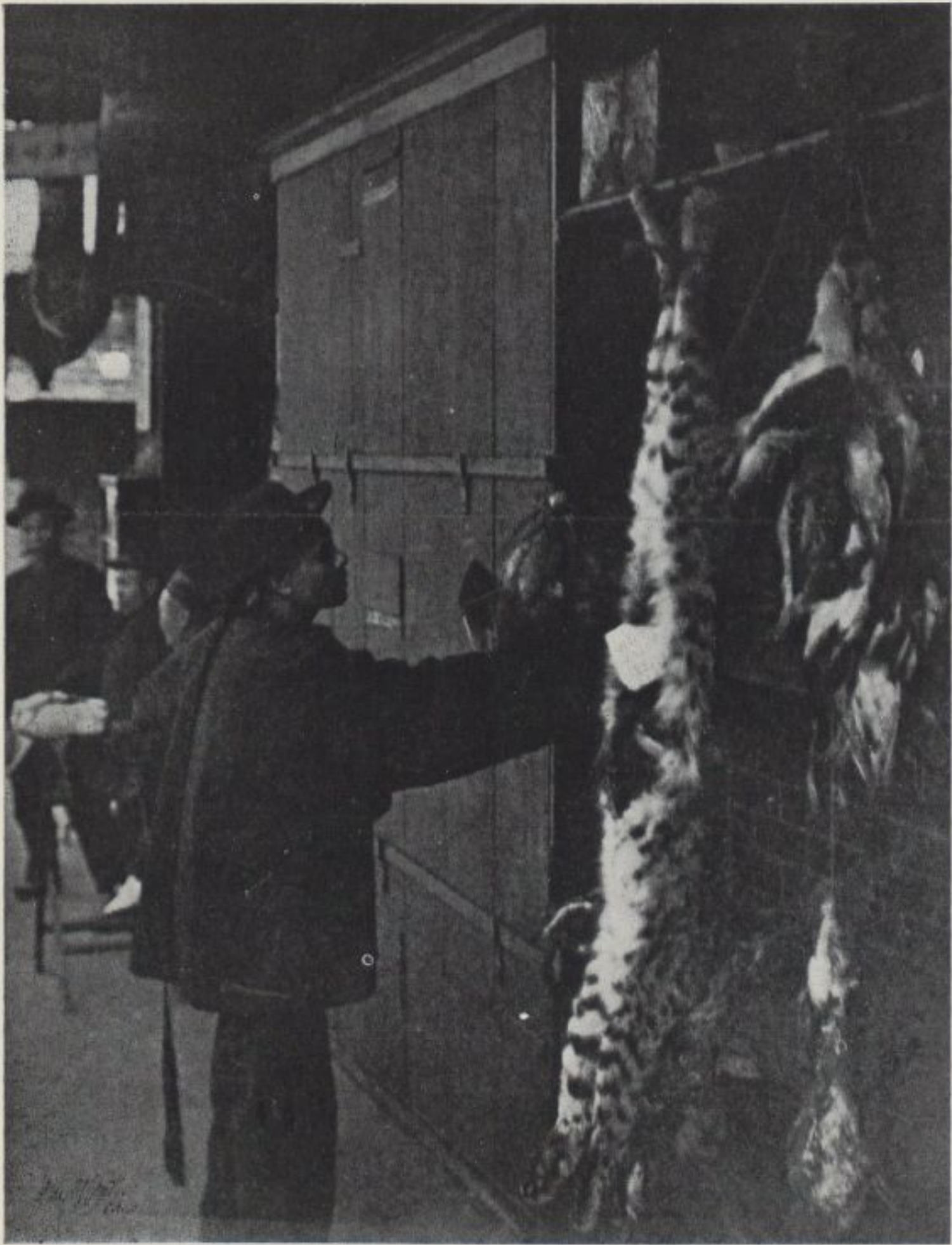
Chinatown, the Tenderloin for all the Western Chinese, lived not only by tea and rice and overalls and cigars and tourists, but also by the ministry to dissipation. It had gathered to itself the tough citizens, and especially the gamblers. Gambling is a darling sin to all the race; take his fan-tan counters and his pie-gow blocks away, and he will bet on the number of seeds in an uncut orange. With most, it is a mere diversion. Your efficient, quiet houseboy, no more trouble about the place than a well ordered cat, will go into Chinatown on Saturday night, have his little whirl at fan-tan, smoke, perhaps, his one pipe of opium, and



return in the morning none the worse for his social diversion. Others get the passion of it into their blood. One hears continually of this or that Chinese laborer, who, having saved for fifteen years to go back to China and live on his income, has dropped into a fan-tan house on the eve of his departure, lost his whole pile in one night, and returned, with a great surface indifference, to begin a life of service over again. Fat and powerful waxed the keepers of gambling houses. They came to be controlling factors in the vicious side of Chinatown; and they gathered under them all the priests of vice into one alliance of crime and graft. Those who traded in slave girls, those who ran the cheap, internicine politics of the ward, those who lived by blackmail, and especially those gentlemen of fortune known as highbinders, whose reason for being was paid murder, lived and moved in the shadow of the gambling game.

In the age of public exposés, we have discovered that the powers which we pay to keep order and virtue among us and the powers which minister to our dissipation have a mysterious affinity—that the policeman is constitutionally apt to unite himself





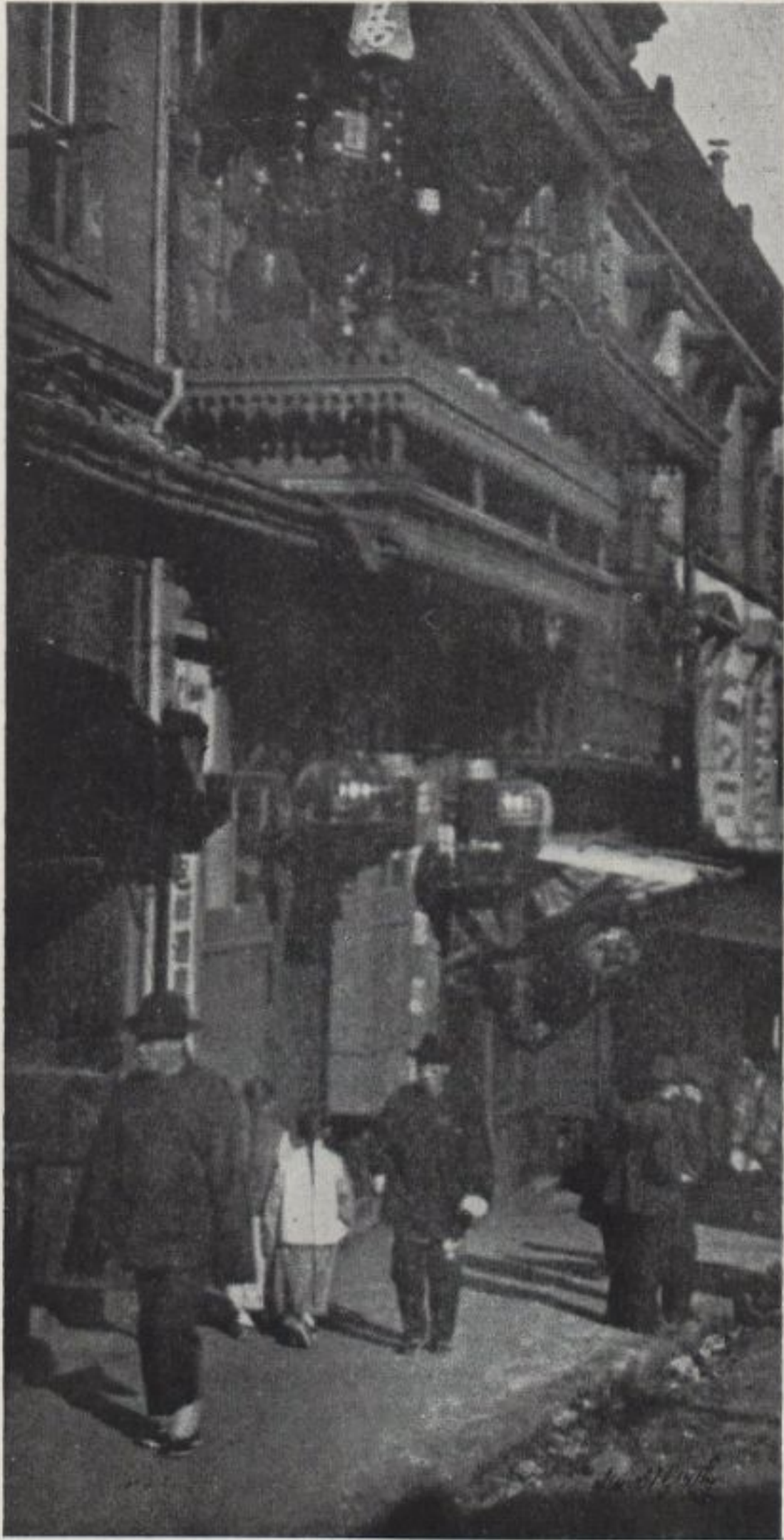
THE LEOPARD SKIN.





THE MORNING MARKET.





BEFORE THE BIG JOSS HOUSE.

*"They built in the eternal painted balconies of which the Chinaman is as fond as the Spaniard."*



in this transplanted Orient, assassins combined with justice to keep social order? Be it known that the Chinese has the most haughty contempt for our law. He seldom appeals to it; when he does, look out for some deeper plot. Perhaps he is not wholly in error; he has perceived how easily a clever lawyer can beat American courts. Aloof from our laws, then, and still apart from the laws of the Orient, these perpetual foreigners had to create some system of justice and punishment among themselves. Of this justice and punishment, the Highbinders, criminals themselves, are also the executioners.

Suppose, then, that you are Wong Kip, Chinese merchant, and that one steals from you or commits the fearful crime of repudiating a just debt. You do not bother with the American courts. If the thing is bad enough to warrant the trouble, you or your Tong-man negotiate with a Bow on or Suey Sing Highbinder. For a sum varying according to your needs and resources, the hired assassin gets out his gun.

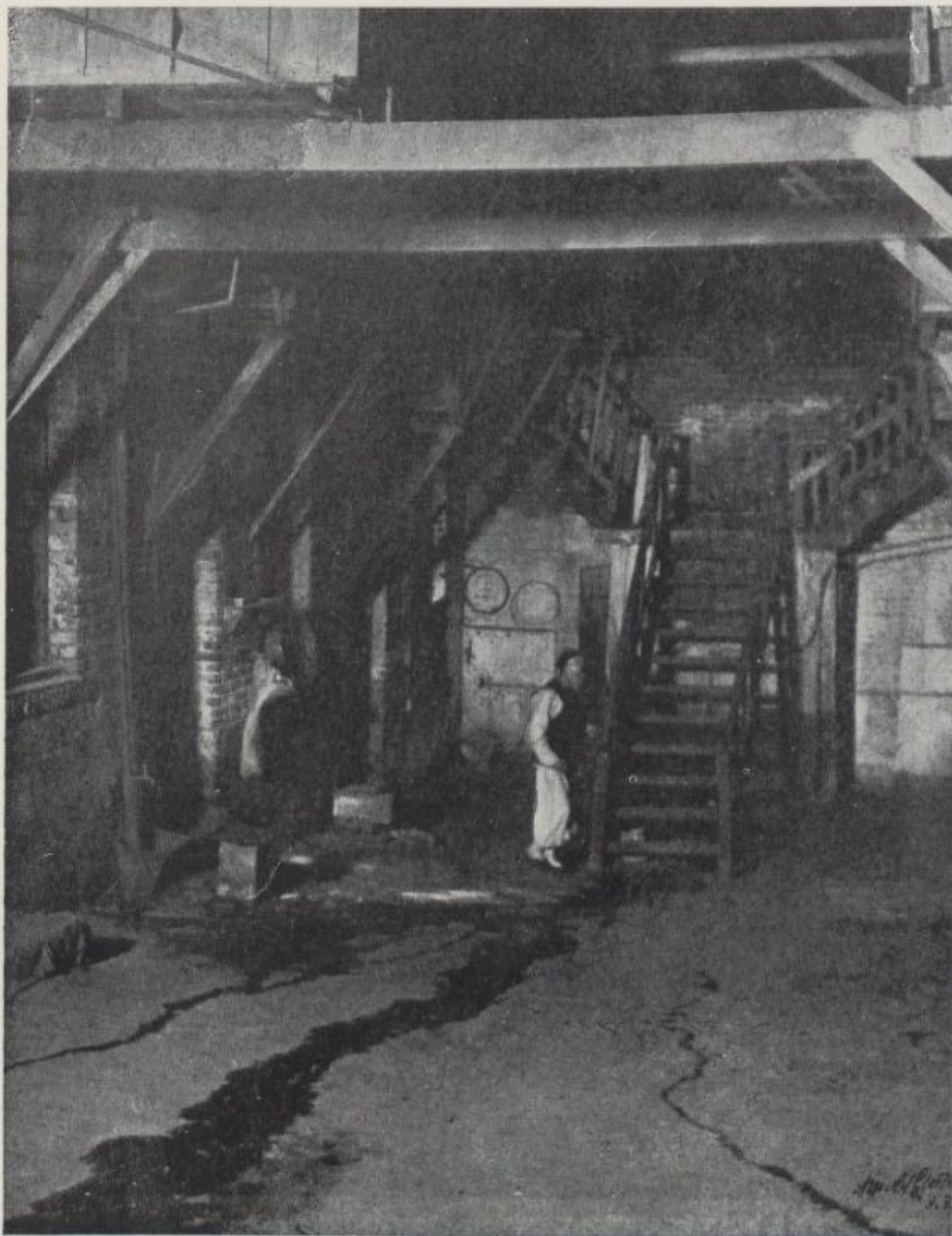
One night, the man who has injured you walks fair and straight through the streets of Chinatown;



and a shadow falls in behind him. The shadow glances right and left to make sure that no white person is watching. The Chinese spectators—they do not matter. The shadow walks with his hands tucked, muff fashion, in his long sleeves. They two, avenger and victim paired, reach a dark spot by awning or alley. The shadow creeps up close; his hands fly suddenly apart; a revolver goes off; the sacrifice to justice crumples up on the pavement. The murderer, with the motion of a quarterback passing the ball, tosses the revolver to another Chinese; it goes on from hand to hand. When the police come at last, the murderer is chattering with the crowd about the body, and that revolver lies in an entrance a half a block away. Twenty Chinese saw it done and know who did it. Will they testify to it in court? Not as they value their lives—not even if they are brothers of the dead.

Only—and here comes the imperfection in justice of this kind—the brothers and tong comrades of the executed felon often question the verdict and take an appeal. Hiring a highbinder from another tong, they mark the man who put the wheels of justice into motion—or one of his tong; it is





**"THE DEVIL'S KITCHEN" BY NIGHT.**

*All who have followed a guide through Chinatown will remember this show-place. The quarters which tourists paid to "see the hop fiends" kept it going for years in spite of the Health Board.*



nearly the same thing—and hold an execution on their own account. This may lead to more reprisals and still more, an endless chain.

Such is the highbinder situation in one of its simplicities. But the further you follow it the more complex it becomes. In the first place, these Chinese toughs, like white toughs, grow restive under peace. When no employment offers, they start trouble among themselves. The Bow Ons and the Suey Sings were eternally straining each at the other. An insult, a quarrel over fan-tan or the price of a slave girl, might set off the mine. There might, too, be a real grievance. It might be a mistress that had deserted her Bow On lover and taken up with a Suey Sing. Here, as elsewhere, women played ducks and drakes with the affairs of men. The offended Suey Sing man would slaughter a Bow On. Not of necessity the offending Bow On; anyone would do who wore the hated badge. The Bow Ons, touched in their soldier pride, would even up the score; the Suey Sings would dispute that the score was even and pick off another Bow On; and the war would begin. Where were our police all this time? "Baffled." The Chinese took care of



that. The blue devils who jumped from the noisy wagon would arrest the "suspicious loiterers" whom they found about the corpse, keep them awhile, and let them go for lack of evidence. The police of the little New York Chinatown had the same trouble when they tried—and failed—to control the late war of the On Leongs and the Hip Sings. This war cost a dozen lives at least; it brought not a single conviction. A few Chinese have been hanged in California for highbinder murders. In every case there remains a dreadful suspicion that we hanged the wrong man, his life sworn away for some dark purpose of the Chinese.

Further to complicate the mess, these highbinders had a way of playing foul with their own clients. Constitutional blackmailers, they lived, between wars, on the terror which their name inspired. An order for an assassination might always be turned into blackmail money. The executioner would approach his marked man with a polite, Oriental translation of "Dilly, Dilly, come here and be killed." When the condemned felon had pleaded enough, the executioner would promise to let him go upon payment of a weekly fine. The poor actors in the





THE "PALACE HOTEL."

*An angle of "The Devil's Kitchen"—the most dilapidated hole in Chinatown and  
a constant reproach to the Board of Health.*



two theaters, men of no standing whatsoever among their countrymen, suffered terribly from this highbinder game. The slave girls were always falling in love with actors and finding ways to meet them. This offense, in the law of custom, meant death for the actor. The highbinders watched these little games, got evidence, and, by threats of reporting to the legitimate owners of the girls, kept the actors penniless.

A highbinder war tended to go on and ever on. It ended, usually, in a general adjustment brought about by intervention of the Six Companies. Once, a war got beyond all power of this supreme Chinese tribunal in the Occident, and came to trouble the Imperial Master in Peking. The See Yups represent the laboring class, the "unions," in Chinatown, and the Sam Yups the capitalists. In the early nineties, disputes about the price of labor grew into a general strike of all the shoe, overall and cigar operatives. When the strike reached that stage when Occidental strikers begin to picket and to loosen entertainment committees, one side or the other called in the highbinders. So wide were the interests involved, so bitter were both the Sams and



Sees, that this became a general war, with weekly murders in sheaves of twos and threes. It lasted a year, it sent Chinese merchants into bankruptcy by the score, and it paralyzed all industries except the tourist trade. Its Gettysburg, its Marengo, came when the highbinders lined up in opposite doorways of Ross Alley, the narrow, overhung street of the gamblers, and fought until the police reserves charged in between.

At about the same critical period in this war, the See Yups bagged a general. "Little Pete," Chinese millionaire, gambler and man of affairs, had been lord of that little parish. A mere coolie in the beginning, he had the golden touch; he made everything pay. He formed a kind of gambling trust in the Quarter, and went out after the Caucasian racing game. He had played at Chinese gambling like Riley Grannan—cold, calculating, without excitement, making the real gambler pay. Just so he played the races, until he had mastered that game and was ready to corrupt it—if it were possible to corrupt Californian racing. Only when a great scandal broke out in the affairs of the California Jockey Club did the whites discover





THE NEW TOY.

*"But always beautiful—falling everywhere into pictures."*





THE CHILDREN'S HOUR.

*"That was the brightest hour of all the day in those streets. Dupont and Washington and Stockton blossomed with racing, tumbling babies, all bright in silks."*



that a system of pulling horses and permitting "long shots" to win, a system which had been suspected for some time, was conceived and conducted solely by "Little Pete."

Little Pete was a Sam Yup. The See Yups, whose paid highbinders were running behind the score, put a heavy price on the head of this prominent citizen. He sat one afternoon in a barber's chair, having his ears scraped. Two bullets, fired through the open door, caught him in the back and finished him.

His funeral was the greatest public ceremonial that Chinatown ever saw. Echoes from its gongs reached the Chinese Empire. The Consul General got orders to make this foolishness stop. He failed; the war, the state of bankruptcy, went on. The Minister removed him. His successor had no more luck. Finally, the minister put in Ho Yow, Oxford graduate, brother-in-law of Wu Ting Fang, member of a progressive family, a man who understood the whites and the Chinese alike.

Ho Yow studied the situation and sent representations to China. Suddenly, in scattered districts of Canton, certainly innocent persons found them-



selves under arrest. These were the relatives, even to the third degree, of the men responsible for this war in San Francisco. He served notice on See Yups and Sam Yups alike that any more murders in Chinatown would be avenged upon the persons of these Cantonese relatives. This ended the war with a bang; before the Consul General and the Six Companies, capital and labor made peace. This heroic measure discouraged, temporarily, the highbinder industry. The threat of arrests in China, shaken at the Tongs, has more than once been a restorative of order.

The underground passages of Chinatown have appealed mightily to the imagination of melodramatists, authors of sensational tales, writers of specials for the Eastern press, and others who guide and stimulate the popular imagination. Although some declare them a myth, those passageways of the Third Circle really did exist at one time. Their end antedated the great fire. In the late nineties, a Board of Health, appointed by the last honest municipal government which the old city knew, forestalled epidemics by going through the Quarter with warrant and deputy. Against





THE VEGETABLE PEDDLER.



the diplomacies and concealments of the Chinese, the inspectors closed up cellar after cellar, filled in passage after passage. A few, effectually hidden from that Board of Health or restored under the venal Schmitz administration, remained to the end. Still those who knew old Chinatown marveled, when they looked into the gaping cellars left by the fire, to see how little of this mole-work remained.

So wide was this maze, in earlier days, that a Chinese who knew his way might travel by it from almost any point in Chinatown to almost any other. A reporter who held the confidence of the Chinese has told me how he subnavigated the quarter during the quarantine of 1901. The Federal doctors, suspecting bubonic plague, had drawn a line tight about Chinatown; and, since Federal and not municipal authorities were doing this thing, the prohibition against passing the lines was absolute, even to "gentlemen of the press."

A Chinaman, caught outside himself, said to this reporter: "I take you." They entered the little den of a white cobbler in California street. The cobbler, after a whispered exchange of words,



opened a trap door under his counter. The Chinese guide, crouching in the shadow, lighted a red paper lantern; and down a ten-foot ladder they went. The rest was a bewilderment of knife-edge passages, stopes, ladders; sudden encounters with closed doors, from behind which came murmers of a mysterious life within; glimpses, through the terrific glooms, of other pedestrians in those underground streets. Once, they passed through a mouldy lodging house, its walls dripping with exhalations of the earth, its day-shift of inmates peering out at them in affright; once they came upon a latticed window, strangely futile in this unlighted world, through which the reporter saw slatternly women working with something on the floor—doubtless they were rolling, for warmed-over consumption, the scrapings of opium pipes. Once, he thought he heard the sound of moaning. Rumors of plague were in the air. It came to him that this might be some one sick unto death with it. The sense of darkness and confinement made the thought of contagion by Black Death doubly terrible; it was as though he were shut in a dungeon alone with a spectre.

They came at last square up against a rough





"HE B'LONG ME!"

*"A Chinese father would soften if you stopped to pay court to the baby in his arms."*



wooden wall. The guide fumbled and scratched; a panel slid back as though Mrs. Radcliffe had imagined it. A drop of three feet brought them into a cellar; from there they walked out of a Chinese grocery store into the full daylight of the Quarter. When the reporter had looked about to his satisfaction, the guide said: "You go back notha' way." Starting from a lodging house next door to the grocery, they traversed more drops and rises, dark passages, hidden apartments, and came out in a cellar of the Latin quarter. They had walked all the way under Chinatown.

Another man has told me how he rambled through some of these passages with a Chinese acquaintance—this was a mere visit of curiosity. When, bewildered and utterly lost, he declared that he had enough of foul air and suggestion of horrible mystery, his guide mounted a ladder and scratched at a trap door. It opened; and they were in the kitchen of the Jackson street Chinese Theatre, with the gongs of a Chinese orchestra clanging on the stage above their heads.

The exchange of opium, smuggled in from Pacific ships by bay pirates; the heartless slave



trade; the preparation of bodies for convenient return to their ancestral grave mounds; the hidden revenges of the Highbinders—all went on in these catacombs, twenty feet below the pavement of Dupont and Washington. What tragedies their earthen walls must have witnessed, what comedies, what horror stories, what melodramas! There it was, below everything; the Third Circle whose circumference was darkness and whose centre death.

Doubtless I am following here the newspaper fashion and dwelling too much upon this criminal aspect of the Quarter. If so, it is because the crime was so picturesque, because it expressed so clearly the difference of this civilization from its parent Orient and its adopted Occident. I am not quite done with it, either, for I must speak of the slave trade.

The world knows from Christian missionaries how little the careless and criminal, among the Chinese at home, value a girl baby. The sale of such children is an established custom—born of the low esteem in which women are held and of the terrible Chinese famines. Those Californian Chinese, who were degraded enough to stoop to such





THE TINKERS.

*"The Chinese utensils of common life in which they express their inborn art sense."*



things, sold these babies into pure shame and the ruin of souls. So small was the supply, owing to the difficulty of smuggling women past Federal inspection, that prices were high; it paid a coolie woman to bear female children. A girl four years old, past the delicate stage of infancy, would bring from fifteen hundred to two thousand dollars as a speculation. At thirteen or fourteen, when she was of age to begin making returns to her owner, her price was three thousand. Slavery it was, literal and hopeless; and that in face of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Federal authorities tried to break it up. Pretty generally, they failed. The trouble lay in the Chinese contempt for our courts. Snatch a girl from a brothel, and what happened? A slave from babyhood, kept in ignorance of any other world than that of her brothel, she believed the word of her keeper when he said that white men want girls only to pickle their eyes and eat their brains. First, one must win her from that idea. Then, the master would always bring action in the courts through certain white attorneys unscrupulous enough to take such cases. Chinese witnesses would be found to go upon the stand and swear that



this girl was a daughter or niece of the master; and the poor girl, the moment she faced her master in court, would fall into the cowed custom of a lifetime, quail before his eye, and swear falsely that these witnesses told the truth—that she wanted to go back to her “uncle.” This system, shameful in our eyes—though indeed there are institutions just as cold-blooded and evil in our own social structure—existed from the first day of Chinatown; exists, I make no doubt, to-day.

From a woman, and she a pretty, fair-spoken Scotch maiden, this slave trade took its hardest blow. Donaldine Cameron was a girl stripling of twenty when she came to take charge of the Presbyterian Mission, which concerns itself especially with the lives and souls of Chinese women. She says herself that she inherited her tastes and talents from a line of Scotch parsons grafted on a line of sheep-stealing Camerons. The spirit in her led her straight to the slave trade. First, as all her predecessors had done, she tried the police and the courts. She found the police inefficient or venal, the courts ineffective. She saw girl after girl, who had welcomed rescue in the beginning, crumple up





AFTER SCHOOL.

*"Tiny yellow flowers of the world. . . ."*



on the witness stand and swear herself back into Hell.

Nevertheless, Miss Cameron kept on, raiding and fighting in the courts. In a warfare of ten years, she won a kind of Fabian victory. She usually lost her girl in the end, but before that end she had cost the owner dear in smashed doors, valuable property kept idle, disturbance of business, and the heavy fees which cheap white attorneys used to exact from the Chinese. Playing her desperate lone hand, she reduced the traffic by about one-half.

Our lives in old San Francisco were all tinged a little with romance; but I can think of no life among us which so quivered with adventure as hers. Would that I could convey the quaint, workaday style in which this soncy Scotch gentlewoman related her adventures—the material of a dime novel, the manner of a housewife telling about her marketing. During one raid, she met at the door of the brothel some unforeseen barrier which delayed the attack. As she waited for the axman, she looked through the latticed window upon a confusion of painted, flowered, Chinese women, all squalling together. From this group,



a girl disentangled herself and came running, her arms outstretched, toward the raiders. It was the girl they had come to rescue; and by this fatal slip, born of over-eagerness, she revealed that she was first cause of the raid. The slave master perceived it, too; before Miss Cameron's eyes he knocked her down and dragged her by the hair through a sliding panel, which opened at his touch. When at last Miss Cameron gained entrance, she found a dozen passages leading confusingly from this secret door; the inmates had lost themselves in the Third Circle. She never saw that girl again; but months later the underground gossip of Chinatown brought Miss Cameron the end of the tale. The master, down there in the bowels of the earth, had beaten her to death in presence of his other cowering women.

This piece of artistic detail from another of her raids which failed: The inmates had rolled into a trap door under a bed, and escaped into the underworld. So orderly and so deserted was the place that she wondered, at first glance, whether she had not made a mistake. Then she noticed a samesin in the corner, and perceived that its strings still quiv-





THE CHINESE SALVATION ARMY.

*Every night, this handful of converts sang and exhorted in Chinese and English on Dupont street. The Quarter paid slight attention to this campaign for souls.*



ered and gave forth a dying sound—showing how recently it had dropped from the lily hands of the lily woman.

One of the slave girls in the mission was an orphan, sold as a baby; she had never known any life but that of the brothel. Neither had she any education save in certain primitive arts of woman, any religion except a superstitious fear of her masters. "If you escape from us down to Hell," they had told her, "we will drag you up by the hair. If you escape to Heaven, we will drag you down by the feet."

A certain man, a Christianized Chinese as it turned out later, used to visit that house. He singled out this girl, talked to her apart of the life outside, showed her that she was a slave and a prisoner, informed her of the white woman who lived only to rescue such as she.

"When he spoke of a white woman," said this girl, "I was much afraid, because they had told me that the whites were devils who wanted to get me just to eat my brains. Though I knew nothing different, I had always been discontented with my kind of life, and had been wishing for something



else—I never knew what. After he went away from me, I thought about all this. I fell into such a melancholy and longing for the open world that I was ready to take my chances with the white woman being a witch. I could think of nothing but escape.

“When this man visited me again, I told him that I would trust the white woman. He advised me then to wear some secret token so that they might know whom to rescue; because if they failed, and my master knew that I had brought on the raid, they might abuse me afterward. We agreed on a lily-flower over my left ear. He told me also to fight and cry when they carried me away—”

Well, Miss Cameron smashed that door and snatched from the arms of her slave master the girl with the lily over her ear. All the way down the stairs, she kicked and fought; but when they got her alone in the carriage, she said: “Why didn’t you come for me before?” This was one of the few girls who ever stood by her guns on the stand. She kept her freedom; and the last I heard of her she was getting ready to marry that Chinese who first told her about Miss Cameron.

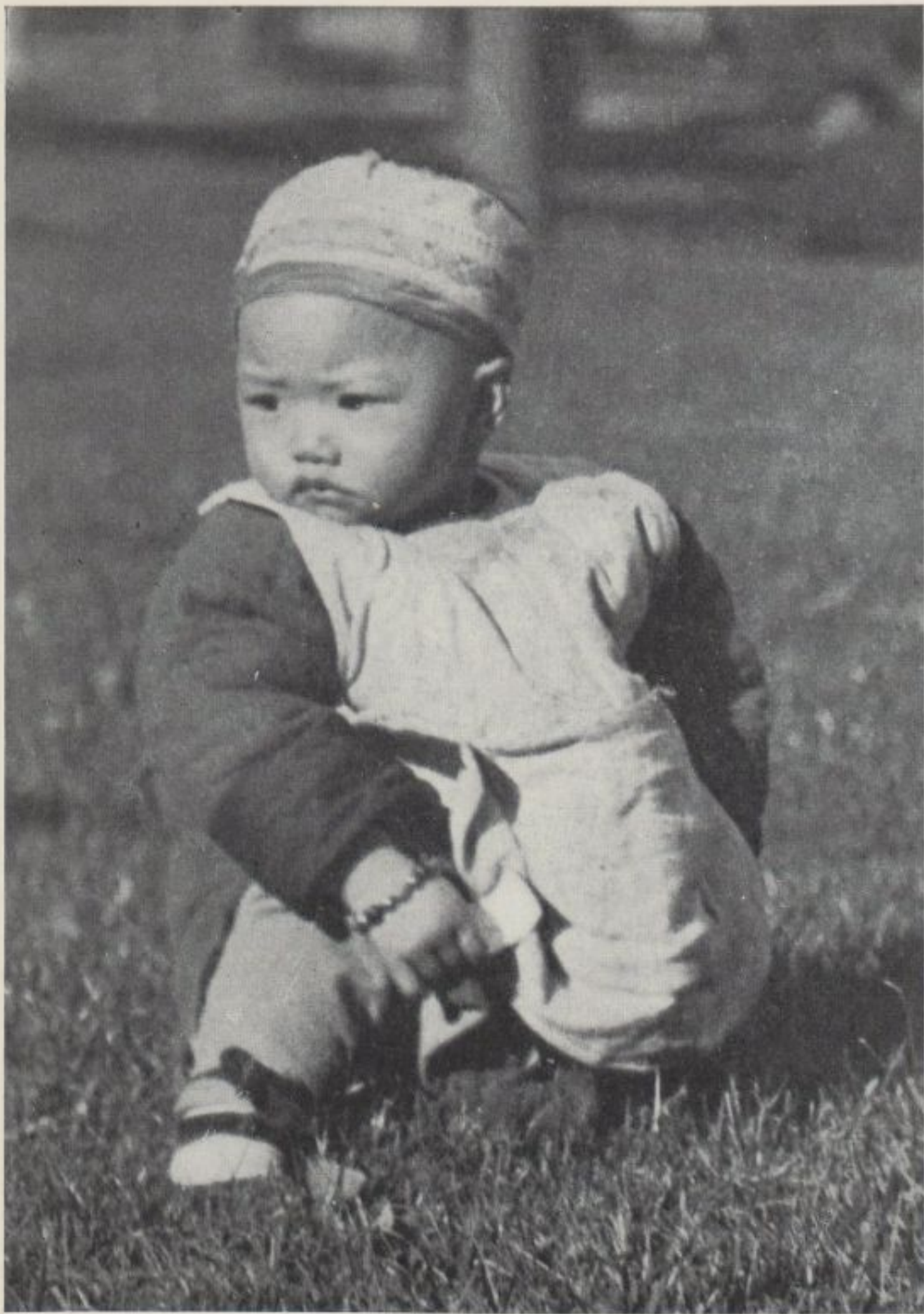




THE PAPER COLLECTOR.

*"That withered wisp of a Confucian priest whose task it was to gather day by day  
all the papers on the streets."*





THE LATEST BORN.

*"Usually they were contented and rather stolid babies; only once in a blue moon did one of them cry."*



Donaldine Cameron—how her name, after these years, so few in number, so many in change, brings up the other characters and originals of that curious little parish! Does the Emperor of the Universe still parade about Portsmouth Square, I wonder? He was the mildest, gentlest paranoiac that ever followed the moon. For years he walked the streets; a tall old man, with one of the sparse beards which Heaven grants to but few Chinese. Always, as he walked, he smoked a long, curved pipe and turned a look of kindly disdain upon the populace. He believed that all these whites and Chinese were his subjects; but he was a benevolent ruler, well content with his domain. For that reason, and also because everyone liked him, no one ever took the trouble to lock him up. The Central Police Station came to inhabit the Hall of Justice across Portsmouth Square. At four o'clock on fine days, the downtown squad used to deploy on the sidewalk. The Emperor was always there. He would walk down the line with the air of a general reviewing his troops, salute formally, and march back to Chinatown. When the captain in command was good-natured, he let his policemen return the



salute—which they did with all gravity in the world.

Who can ever forget the pipe-bowl mender, *the* pipe-bowl mender who sat in the same spot—on Dupont street a few doors from Jackson—for a decade long? A picture always, what with his bow-string bits, his tiny hammers, his leather cases, he was most a picture on cold days when he got out his martin-lined jacket from the family inheritance, and his fur cap. In the short-lived drama, “The First Born,” which so enchanted San Francisco Power the author and Benrimo the actor made this pipe-bowl mender chorus to all the things which happened on a certain tragic Chinatown night. Who forgets the Pekin Two Knife Man who used to perform for nickles a sword dance of the Old Empire? Who forgets that withered wisp of a Confucian priest whose task it was to gather day by day all the papers on the streets, that the name of the god-sage might never be profaned? Who forgets Ah Chic of the splendid, noble face, the greatest actor (I verily believe) of all his time in America—Ah Chic who lived and died in the Jackson street theatre, playing seven nights a week for





THE END OF OLD CHINATOWN.  
April 23, 1906.



the pure love of playing, to coolies who could never understand? Who forgets the lantern maker, he who plaited moons of red and gold delight out of paper and bamboo strips, betraying the artist in all those devices by which he made each one a little different from the other?

Gentle figures, seen bright through the sunset scarlets of a youth that is past, do you linger yet, now that your old environment is gone?