

CHILDREN IN SLUMS.

John Habberton Takes a Stroll Through the Chinatown of New York.

DEPRAVITY ON ALL SIDES.

The Babies, If They Do Not Die, Learn to Swear First Thing.

FUNERALS ARE VERY COMMON.

The Mongolians Are Not the Worst Element of the District.

LITTLE ONES PLAYING IN THE GUTTER.

(CORRESPONDENCE OF THE DISPATCH.)

NEW YORK, May 21.—New York has the unfortunate distinction of containing more unusual people to the square mile than any other portion of the civilized world.

When one comes to look the country over these squares don't share much room between them, for the entire area which they describe is not much larger than an ordinary pasture lot behind a farmer's house.

The Pietrowskys and Hopewells. Pell street is named after a prominent man who gained American position and universal rank by starting a large settlement in the country of Westchester.

These several streets, all of which are in the Chinese quarter, present different aspects at different times of the day. Were a philanthropist to read this paper and then stroll down to Chinatown in the middle of the day to see how much of it might be true, he probably would find the streets almost empty.

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Very Quiet During the Day. Otherwise he would see only an occasional dead-end Chinaman or a couple of a celestial gambling den—a lounge or a place where he would be ashamed of himself because he is not hard at work, like all others who belong to the dominant race of that locality.

A little before 9 o'clock all of these children will have disappeared, not to return again until the middle of the afternoon. When they start in the morning their faces and bodies are clean, and in spite of the occasional patch they look as neat as any possible American sovereigns.

On the other hand there are a great many youngsters whose eyes suggest the traditional almond which has marked the Asiatic race. They show also that to many Chinamen in what is called the "laundry district" the goddess of love has appeared in the guise of an attractive woman of German or Irish extraction.

Every Chinaman is supposed to be here for the sole purpose of making enough money to go back to China and end his days there. It is filled with a race of Americans with him all of his ancestors who may be living would regard her first as a curiosity and then as a slave, to be sold at whatever price could be obtained and for whatever purpose the purchaser might have in view.

Chinamen Always Go to the Slums. Besides, evil communications corrupt good manners. No Chinaman can fail to be affected by American disrespect for age, sex,

though in the land of the Celestials one's ancestors are reckoned almost among the deities. The Chinese are said to have made part of New York worse than it ever was before, but the real truth is that the Chinaman never settles anywhere except among the lowest and most debased people of the city into which he happens to have strayed.

John Chinaman wasn't looking for had company when he selected his present colony site, but on general principles he assumed that he had reached his proper position.



A Common Scene in Pell Street.

street sweepers and scavengers are unknown. He didn't know how anything could be worse than China, so he was ready to go to any place that he might be better with the calm confidence of the poker player to whom any change of cards will be gratifying.

For some reason which no one has ever been able to discover the Chinese fixed upon Mott street as their permanent habitat, although Mott street, right in their vicinity, was the site of the original Roman Catholic Cathedral of the city of New York—an edifice to which thousands of devout worshippers resort to this day.

John's Heart in the Right Place. In this part of the city John Chinaman can be studied at leisure, and it is only fair to him to say that he stands this sort of ordeal quite as well as if he were an American. He never pretends to be anybody in particular and he makes no pretensions now, but he does know that he works a full day for a day's pay and doesn't charge more than any one else, and why it is that little Irish boys should throw stones at him and the German children should jeer him of can't understand. Neither can I. He has taken an American wife, and he has the reputation of being a very considerate husband and father, a virtue which is very scarce in the part of the city of which he is the fondest.

which wouldn't be in keeping with Pacific coast ideas. One is that the environment doesn't always make the man. Right down part of shabby, dirty Pell street he would find two or three Chinese shops, each of which is managed by a man who is quite as shrewd, sympathetic and quick witted as any man in similar position anywhere else in the United States. One of these American-Chinese fellows whom I dropped in upon was the living image of our new Secretary of War, Mr. Steve Elkins. This statement is not uncomplimentary to either of the gentlemen named, for the Chinaman looked healthy, manly and sensible, and his eyes asked the customary question which every one expects of a business man, "Who are you, how much money have you about your clothes and what do you come here for?"

When the Sun Sets on Mott Street. There is another side, however, to the slum life of this quarter of old New York, and it is visible after 6 P. M. when the workmen in the few factories on the street go away and the inhabitants of the various tenement houses in the vicinity return to their homes. Then the aspect of the street is entirely different. Everybody likes a resting time once in 24 hours, and if Pell street and Mott street and Doyers street live up to their privileges there is nothing the laws of the Police Department or the city ordinances in general to prevent them.

It is after 6 in the afternoon and before 7 in the morning that the very un-American spectacles which are presented in this locality may be seen by any one who chooses to look. It is due the inhabitants to say that they make no secret of their customary methods of life, and the social code of manners in the poor districts finds no fault with the American slummer's stare, although it is quite as offensive as anything else. Let the visitor look at the street, because the people live out of doors through the weather allows it does not follow that they expect uninvited visitors to enter their houses. Nobody in the Chinese quarter is likely to be ugly, but a great many are full of self-respect as if they lived on Fifth avenue or on one of the swell streets which cross that fashionable thoroughfare.

Indeed, one must look aside from the Chinese if he would see the dark side of Chinatown. The Celestials have their vices, chief among which are gambling and opium smoking, but a more quiet, harmless lot of people cannot be found in the best streets of the city. The miseries and mysteries of the vicinity are to be found not among the Asiatic heathen, but in the houses in which Caucasians huddle together.

Why lodging houses and family tenements should be popular in a part of the city which is full of beings whom the lower classes profess to abhor is hard to explain; that they are there, and fully occupied, can be seen at a glance. Perhaps the occupants have learned by experience that the Chinese are inoffensive neighbors; certainly no other class of men drink so little or make less trouble for those who do not annoy them.

It is very hard to find drunken Caucasians and negroes in Chinatown, but a resting Chinaman would be a curiosity. The Irish-American corner loafer is there with his irrepresible inclination to make Rome howl; tramps of any and all nationalities are there, too, for part of Chinatown's streets are storage places for wagons at night, and a wagon is as good a bedroom as any tramp can ask for in warm weather. Decent women pass through the streets without fear of being annoyed by the almond-eyed loungers; the Chinaman seldom speaks to a woman who does not first address him, and women of this class abound in the Chinese streets.

The Children of Chinatown. Strangest of all, however, in this strange

locality is the presence of a number of decent families. Perhaps they live there for old association's sake, perhaps to be near the place where the man of the family earns his living. City men and women who work hard for little money seem not to care much where are the four walls which shelter them at night, but how decent people can allow their children to live in such surroundings passes comprehension. The street is the only playground of the little ones, in which respect the locality doesn't differ at all from any other tenement house district, but there are many streets which are not infested by tongs and tramps, and in which dens of vice do not abound. Rents are very high in Chinatown, for the emigrants from China are willing to pay higher prices than any other class of lessees. Most of the houses are too old to be fit to live in, and the most profitable business in the neighborhood, next to rum selling, seems to be done by the under-takers.

There are healthy looking children there—some races seem to thrive better in the gutter than others in palaces—but even in these early spring days, when everyone should be rejoicing in the health giving air, one may see pallid mothers, with infants equally pallid, and sadly predicting their funerals at an early date. The poverty which crushes into dumb despair

One half the human race, secondly, are the victims of its most successful work among the Caucasian inhabitants of Chinatown.

A Funeral is a Matter of Course. The people do not seem desperate nor bad; they are merely hopeless of ever being any better of than they are now, and they don't easily scare at the thought of sickness or death. As to that, they seldom are ill. Only the fittest have survived in the long struggle with bad air and insufficient food. Babies born in the neighborhood generally conclude to go back to heaven as soon as possible, and their parents have learned to recognize a funeral as a matter of course. How the children who survive grow to decent manhood and womanhood, as some of them do, can't be explained, except through recognition of the religious influences which are brought to bear upon some of them, for there is nothing bad which they do not see and anywhere else, and childhood is quite as curious and quick-witted in the slums as in any other place.

The only protection is in the fact that the youngsters are abed and asleep at the hours in which the depraved classes are most active. A good deal of mischief may be learned, however, on the sidewalk in the long summer evenings, while loafers of both sexes are freeing their minds in language peculiar to their tastes and social status, and that it is learned may be quickly observed by any passerby who will keep his ears open. On the other hand, the youngsters make the most of their opportunities for innocent diversion.

The Little Ones Seem Happy. "What are you doing, Johnny?" I asked of a small boy who sat on the curbstone and stirred the foul water of the gutter with his feet. "Takin' a bath," was the reply, and the little fellow looked as happy as if he were wading along the beach at Coney Island. To see the deers of mischief trying to amuse themselves without anything to do with it is to long for money enough to send them all on an excursion somewhere, no matter where, if only to an abandoned field in the country, but whether they would know what to do when they reached it is doubtful. Probably they would wish themselves back to school, with a cool curbstone to sit upon and dark stairways upon which to race up and down.

The redeeming feature of child life in the worst streets is that many of the half-grown boys and girls seem devoted to their smaller brothers and sisters. Babies out for an airing are generally carried by their sisters instead of their mothers, and when you see a little fellow toddling along there is almost sure to be an older boy watching him to see that he does not come to harm. In short, there can be found more contradictions of human nature in the course of a short walk in the slums above described than any novelist ever succeeded in evolving from his own imagination.

JOHN HABBERTON.

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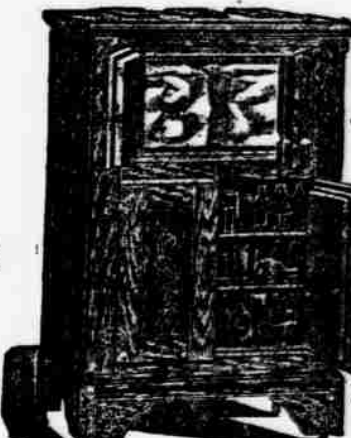
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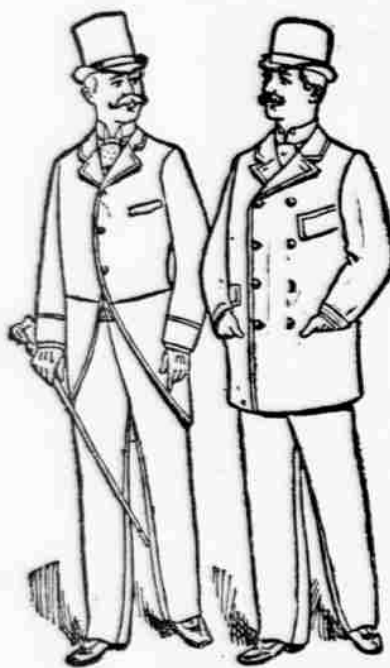
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