

MISCELLANY.

EXTRACTS FROM A TRAVELER'S NOTE-BOOK IN PEKIN. At about ten o'clock in the morning, the mandarin sent to invite me to breakfast. I was agreeably surprised at the attention, and passing through the reception saloons, I was introduced into the breakfast-room. I had not yet seen my host, and did not know what footing I was with him. He received me with the greatest cordiality, his manners being affable, gracious, and amiable, rivaling with the high bred gentlemen. He begged me to remain covered. He was of about forty years of age, with an open, intelligent face. He evidently did not use opium. His hair appeared to me remarkable for its length, thickness, the beauty of the hair, and the elegance with which it was decked. He had on a long blue silk gown, ornamented with embroideries of gold and silver, representing a dragon's head, birds, butterflies, flowers, the like of which exist nowhere in the world, but which were excellently executed. He wore boots of black satin, a straw hat with two peacock's feathers falling on the shoulders, and in front a coral button, which was the insignia of his dignity. The breakfast room was decked with handsome crockery. The breakfast consisted of small dishes placed on the table one over the other, and containing soups of birds' nests, porwinkles, sharks' fins, eggs containing young birds, and a quantity of other Chinese dainties. Having a good appetite, I found all these things excellent. The repast lasted about two hours, including the ceremony of smoking the pipe, from which there is no escape. In returning to our chambers, the mandarin made, we had to pass before a suite of small apartments, all opening on a vast gallery. I looked into these rooms with eager curiosity, they were all literally encumbered with silk garments, shoes, fans, regalia, articles of natural flowers, and a thousand other things used by women. I never saw such disorder as prevailed. All these rooms were sumptuously decorated. The furniture was in lacquer, and in better taste than I had supposed the Chinese to possess. The walls and ceilings bore sculptures displaying great artistic skill. In a corner of each room was a sort of boudoir a few yards square, ornamented with brilliant paintings, to which access was obtained by a sliding door. In each boudoir was a bed surrounded with white curtains, a table, and two low chairs. These apartments were, it is scarcely necessary to remark, those of the women. In the evening, the mandarin entertained me at dinner. When the provisions had been placed on the table, every one sat down. My neighbor on the left offered me a portion of a kitten; the one on the right, the wing of an owl; and a third pressed on me the leg of a dog. The Chinese, to do honor to a guest, cram his plate with what they consider the most delicate morsels, so that he runs the risk of having a violent indigestion. In this country obesity is considered the highest beauty in man. The Chinese, with whom I was at table, had good appetites; they ate a good deal, and used their long, transparent fingers, which are as hard as horn, to separate their food into small portions. Wines made from rice, tea, and different sorts of syrup were sent round the table. I confined myself to taking a few glasses of the latter, but it would be difficult for me to give the names or to describe the taste. This repast lasted three hours, and when it was over, a little girl ten years of age came in and offered us liquors. She was not ugly in European eyes, and in those of the Chinese was a perfect beauty. Her eyes were triangular, her nose thick, her teeth white, and her hair raised to a prodigious height. She poured out to each guest a glass of fermented liquor, which to me was detestable; I received gratefully the allegorical compliments which nearly everybody addressed to her, and then trotted off as if she had only wooden legs; her feet in truth, were so small that they could scarcely be distinguished. Afterwards pipes were brought, and every one began smoking with great gravity and in silence. The smoking continued for half an hour, and then the master of the house taking me by the hand, asked me if I would visit his gardens and hot houses. My host led me along corridors, through small court-yards, and by dark passages, to what the Chinese call a garden. In China, everything appears to be the caricature of what Europeans see in their own country. Men, women, animals, vegetables—nothing in the Celestial Empire has the form, color, or structure of analogous things in our part of the world. When by chance nature herself does not make a difference, the Chinese take care to effect it, and they alone are capable of inventing such grotesques as those into which the mandarin introduced me. They consisted of a collection of artificial rocks, cascades, and valleys, displaying luxuriant vegetation; of singular pagodas; of winding paths, or narrow ones, that were not to be walked in them; of trees, shrubs, plants, precipices, bowers, aviaries, basins, fountains, grass-plots—all jumbled together in the strangest fashion. As my host evidently expected compliments, I made some, and he received them with a good grace.

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