

AMONG THE OPIUM VATS.

THE STORY OF A VISIT TO THE CHIEF SEAT OF THE MANUFACTURE OF THE INDIAN DRUG.

G. A. Levett-Yeats in Macmillan's Magazine.

Having passed the main gate and the guard, the visitor finds that he has only penetrated the outer shell of the citadel, and that another formidable line of fortifications, consisting of railings covered with wire netting and dominated by a second gateway, has still to be surmounted. Before the irresistible authority of his pass this barrier also falls before him, and he is at last in the inmost shrine of the world's opium house. Skirting some lofty buildings, the use of which will be explained later on, the explorer arrives at a large courtyard, in which about twelve hundred earthen jars are lying arranged in batches of a hundred each. These jars contain the opium as it comes in from the districts; and their contents, having just undergone a rigorous examination by the superintendent, are now being carried away one by one by a train of brawny, half-naked coolies. Each of these jars contains a mound of opium, equal in weight to eighty-two pounds avoirdupois, but the men poise them on their heads and trot away as unconcerned as a party of ants hurrying to their nest with booty from a neighboring cornfield. We follow the men through a doorway on the left into a room in which for a few seconds it is not possible to make out what is going on, so confusing to the sight is the abrupt change from the white glare of the courtyard to the twilight of this lofty chamber. It is soon, however, discovered to be quadrangular in shape, and its central portion is seen to be occupied by a number of stone cisterns or vats, with walls raised about five feet from the floor. Between every group of three or four of these vats runs a narrow alley at right angles to the passage around the edges of the room. To the uninitiated visitor the scene is one of indescribable confusion. Men carrying jars of opium run in different directions; others, empty-handed, hurry back to the courtyard; women with basins of opium on their heads race down the alleys and disappear; a jangling sound as of falling metal weights mingles with a continuous dull splashing as of stones being thrown into a well; the high-pitched tones of the women run through the hoarse rumble of the men's voices, while now and then the strident notes of some person in authority cut across this chaos of sound as the lightning flash pierces the heavy gloom of a storm cloud.

It is somewhat surprising to find that nothing but bustle and activity reign in the very heart of the Sleep God's stronghold. Hundreds of thousands of pounds of opium lie stored in this room, but there is nothing in the quick movements, bright eyes and healthy faces of the swarming coolies to show that the drug has any attraction for them. Each one of them, we notice, who carries an opium jar halts a moment at the doorway, where he receives directions to what particular vat he has to take his load. There a gang of men await his arrival, part of them seated on the flat walls of the vat, while the others help the carrier to remove the load from his head. The latter also hand up full jars to the men seated on the walls, who proceed to scrape out the contents with their hands and throw the opium in masses into the vats, thus producing the dull splashing sound aforesaid. Climbing up the steps alongside the walls of one of the vats (marked as holding two thousand one hundred maunds, or over fifteen hundred hundredweights), we find it is full to the brim of a soft mahogany colored substance, which here and there has begun to harden into a glistening crust. This substance is opium, and we are informed that most of the vats we see in the room will be filled and emptied several times before the season's work is concluded. To step into one of these vats would be as dangerous as stepping into a quicksand; yet they have daily to be entered by men whose duty it is to remove a certain quantity of their contents for the day's work. The difficulty is overcome by means of a broad plank on which the men stand as on a raft.

Outside the vat, on the quivering, spongy surface of the contents of which these men are floating, a number of women stand, each with a brass basin in her hands, eagerly waiting her turn to have it filled. The men scoop up the opium with their hands and fill the basins, which are instantly hurried off to be weighed at a neighboring scale and then taken by the nearest alley to the check scales, where a crowd of impatient fellow carriers surround a weary-eyed assistant, who is so busy that he has scarcely time to breathe. The jangling noise of weights and scales is caused by the operation we have been watching, and the apparent confusion existing in this part of the factory now unravels itself into order and methodical work. As fast as the men at the check scales weigh off a tagar of opium (as the brass basin is called) the woman to whom it belongs hastens with it to an adjoining room, where four oblong shallow stone cisterns occupy each of the four corners, leaving a cross-shaped passage in the middle. In each of these vats stand three or four muscular coolies, whose brawny limbs, shining with sweat, look as if they had been cast in bronze. They are armed with large wooden rakes, which they wheel around their heads and bring down as a boiler-maker uses a sledgehammer, striking the teeth of their weapons deep into the masses of opium and dragging away portions of it, which they deposit in different directions around them.

This furious battle is only one of the processes by which the opium is properly mixed. When the men with the rakes have worked at it a sufficient time their place is taken by another set of men, who leap into the vats and, seizing hold of a series of long cords hanging from the roof-trees, commence a slow procession through the adhesive substance, in which they are standing knee-deep. The men are often in this foot bath of opium for several hours, but no ill effects have ever been observed to follow from this partial immersion in so powerful a drug. This treading of opium has a very different meaning from the treading of grapes during a vintage. No ruddy juices stream from purple masses of fruit, to be converted afterward into the liquid ruby that Hafiz vows in impassioned verse to be better than the sweet waters of Ruknabad or the fountains of Mosul; no songs and laughter accompany the strenuous exertions of the men, converting their duties into festival and work at the same time; no halo of light verse encircles their memory. To most people it is a prosaic thing, a mere detail connected with the better mixing of the opium, a preparatory step to the process of manufacture. Yet there is much that is picturesque in it.

Passing from this scene of stress and turmoil, we enter another room of precisely the same size and arrangement. The vats in this room

contain the opium of a previous mixing, and are already giving up their contents to the busy hands of the workmen in the manufacturing room. Here are a number of scales at which large tin vessels filled with opium from the vats are being weighed. As each vessel passes the scales a carrier snatches it up and darts into the caking room, where the opium is being packed in the form in which John Chinaman is accustomed to obtain it from the merchant princes who deal in this expensive luxury.

The hum of many voices gradually increasing in strength has for some time warned us that we are near the caking room. As one steps into this long and crowded hall the first sensation is one of bewilderment. A thousand men are around us, all working as if their lives depended upon the rate at which they could turn out their task. Again it strikes one very forcibly that, if the poppy-god sleeps, his workmen are unusually wide awake.

A number of iron cages occupy the central portion of the room, in each of which sits a placid weighman, weighing out opium as calmly as the fat bunniah in the bazaar weighs out his doles of adulterated flour and weevil-eaten grain. To each cage there is a little door at which, platter in hand, stoops an expectant sprite. The help of opium is deftly tilted into the platter and the sprite is off and lost in the long line of similar brown imps, all standing before their masters, the cakemakers. The movements of this septa squire guide us to where the cakemakers sit, arranged in two long rows on the opposite sides of the room. Upon the walls over each man's head is a white circle with his number in black painted on it.

Let us stand before No. 1, who presumably, from his number, is the doyen of the craft, and see what his deft fingers are making. He himself is a man in the prime of life, with shapely head and fine aquiline features; a small, well-trimmed black mustache curls fiercely over his lips, his large eyes are full of intelligence, and his long, slender fingers move swiftly and almost mechanically about his work. He is a Brahman of the Brahmans, and is courteously addressed by all men of inferior caste as "Maharaj" ("Great King") when they speak to him. He is sitting on a low, sloping stool, stripped to his waistcloth, for it is May and the temperature of the room is unpeppable, although it is only about 9 o'clock in the morning. Great beads of perspiration stand on his back and little streams trickle down his shoulders to his elbows. We ourselves, though our progress has been a leisurely walk, are mopping our foreheads as we go along. But Mahadeo Maharaj, as he is popularly known, is too absorbed in his work to pay much attention to the heat.

He bends down to a tray before his feet, in which lies a brass cup. Near the edge of the tray is a platter with a pat of opium on it. A small cup full of some liquid substance, which we are told is opium, is on his right, and on his left is a pile of what looks not unlike a number of pancakes, but which are really wrappers made of the petals of the poppy flower. Hooked on to the edge of his tray is a little tin box full of paper tickets bearing his number. Before him his assistant kneels, reverently holding one of the wrappers in his hands. Mahadeo shoots one glance at us out of those keen eyes of his and then sets to work with complete calmness. He has played before a bigger audience ere now, for the great Lord Sahib, who rules over Bengal, has watched him making cakes. Tearing the leaf his assistant hands him to a convenient size, he deftly arranges it in the brass cup and smears it over with the liquid opium. Bit after bit he adds, his fingers moving like the needle of a sewing machine, until a nice soft bed of leaf has been made. Then in a moment he turns the opium into it, and, drawing up the edge of the leaf, covers it up, and, in a manner which baffles description, makes in a few minutes a perfect sphere, which he shakes out of the cup on to the palm of his left hand and adorns with one of the little tickets from his tin box. He then hands the cake, as this sphere is called, to his attendant, who receives it carefully in the palms of his joined hands, for it is yet soft and pulpy, and bears it away to the examiner. The examiner has not much trouble with this cake, which is symmetrical in shape and of the correct weight. It is once more handed to the sprite, who takes it off to a large box, in which a powdery looking substance resembling fine bran is kept, and dusts half of it with this. Next, fitting it with a little earthen cup from a stack of these articles, he carries it out into the large stone paved yard we crossed when on our way to the malkhana or storeroom. Here he deposits it in front of a metal plaque bearing the workman's number and hurries back to see that his master's wants are properly attended to.

The cake of opium is in shape much more like a thirty-pound roundshot or some large fruit than a cake. The name has, however, become so wedded with the history of the manufacture that, although inappropriate, it cannot now be changed. A cake of opium, then, when mature is not unlike an overgrown wood apple in appearance and color. The outer surface is grayish and smooth. When cut open the likeness to a fruit of some kind is still more striking, for the layers of leaf in which the cake is wrapped then present the appearance of a rind about half an inch thick, while the opium resembles the pulp of the fruit.

It is not until the winter begins, or some six months after manufacture, that the cakes are considered mature enough for export. They are then packed in large wooden chests made in the Northwestern Provinces of mango wood, and are sent to Calcutta, where they are disposed of by monthly sales to the opium merchants, and through them find their way to China and the Straits, the market for all the opium made up in this form. That which is used in India itself is manufactured differently, being first dried in shallow trays in the sun till it reaches a certain degree of hardness, and then pressed into large square blocks looking extremely like cakes of transparent soap.

INSIDE OR OUT.

From The Chicago Record-Herald.
Mrs. Jumper was in a bad humor. Things had gone wrong with her, and she was about to give Mr. Jumper a piece of her mind, when she saw the sky darkening, and looking out of the window said:

"There's a storm coming."
Mr. Jumper scratched his head, then pertinently inquired:
"Inside or out?"

HER USUAL REMARK.

From The Washington Star.
"What did Mame say when her father gave her that new gold watch?" asked one gladsome girl.
"Oh, the same thing that she always says. She remarked that she was having a perfectly lovely time."



- Artistic Millinery:—Miss M. F. McCarthy, 19 East 21st St., Bar Harbor, Newport.
- General Painter:—Wm. J. Shaw, 116 West 39th St., Hard Wood Finisher.
- Paintings & Prints:—C. W. Kraushaar, Art Galleries, 260 Fifth Ave. (Oil Paintings, Water Colorings, Etchings, Engravings).
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THE EXILED CHINESE COURT

LIFE OF THE EMPEROR AND EMPRESS DOWAGER AT SI-NGAN-FU.

From The London Globe.

Some months ago "The Globe" gave an account of the palace at Si-Ngan-Fu, which is the temporary home of the Emperor of China, the Empress Dowager and the heir apparent. The Chinese newspaper "Sin-wen-pao" gave recently some details concerning the Emperor and the Empress Dowager, and the following verbatim translation of them may be of equal interest:
"Since her arrival at Si-Ngan-Fu the widowed Empress has been continually ill. She suffers chiefly from an oppressive feeling on the chest; she is melancholy, and cannot sleep at night; however, she takes no medicine, but she summons the eunuchs frequently, and then they have to 'massage' the small of her back for hours in the Chinese method. The Emperor on the other hand is relatively much better and healthier than he was in Peking; he takes part in frequent bodily exercise with the keenest interest and is delighted to play games with the eunuchs; but if anything does not happen to please him then he scolds the eunuchs roundly as if he really hated them. When presents were coming in from every province of the empire, the Empress Dowager ordered the chief eunuch to make an accurate list of them, and, without showing any avarice, she had them distributed among the officials who had accompanied her from Peking. When the eunuch who drew up the list showed the presents to the Empress Dowager she evinced the greatest joy, mingled with a certain amount of restraint, for, although the presents gladdened her, yet she was saddened by the thought that she had been obliged to demand them. The Emperor wept bitterly when he saw the presents from the Province of Chi-li. Of late he has sought solitude in the gardens; but so soon as he sees a eunuch he either tries to hide himself behind a gate or runs to his rooms. No one knows how to explain this curious conduct on the Emperor's part; but it is believed that he is suffering from the idea that he is being followed.

"The daily expenses of the imperial kitchen amount to no more than 200 lan, or about £28. This outlay is sanctioned by the Governor Sen and the Empress Dowager. When the question of expense was discussed, the latter remarked, 'When we were in Peking the cost of our food was many times greater; but now we must restrict our daily expenditure.' Every day a eunuch lays a menu before the Empress Dowager; this contains over a hundred dishes, which are chiefly fish, ducks and chickens, prepared in many different ways. Since the 'presents' have come in from the various provinces the imperial table has been enriched by dishes made of swallows' nests and trepang. The Emperor likes a vegetarian diet, and he eats meat very sparingly. As a rule he orders only two or three dishes a day. Macaroni and vermicelli are the favorite dishes of the Empress Dowager, and of late she has ordered that the number of dishes shall be reduced, and now only ten dishes are prepared instead of a hundred. During the last summer both the Emperor and the Empress Dowager accustomed themselves to live on a milk diet, and for this purpose six cows were kept in the palace; however, with the approach of spring and the dry season, they ceased to drink milk, and the cows have been handed over to the district authorities, who receive 200 lan monthly for their keep.

"Both the Emperor and the Empress Dowager left Peking so hurriedly that the only wardrobe they could take with them was the clothes which they were then wearing. But new clothes have been received gradually from Peking, and now their majesties can appear in the dress suitable to their rank, and such as they wore in Peking. Since their arrival at Si-Ngan-Fu neither the Emperor nor the Empress Dowager nor the heir apparent has left the walls of the palace. The heir apparent, a son of Prince Tuan, had taught a little dog some tricks. When the Emperor heard of this he commanded that the dog should appear before him. The heir apparent sent the dog with one of the eunuchs. For this act of disobedience the Emperor punished the heir apparent severely, and the consequence is that they have become deeply estranged.

"During the journey to Si-Ngan-Fu the common people had an opportunity of seeing their Emperor's face. Before Si-Ngan-Fu was reached the Empress Dowager said to the Minister Wan Wen Shao: 'I must see the people and learn for myself how they suffer and work.' Thus it was that the people were allowed to see their majesties when the latter passed through towns and villages, or when they spent the night at such places. During the journey their majesties could look out from their litters and see their subjects at work in the fields; the people showed no fear in looking at the imperial cortege, and orders were given that they should be neither punished nor persecuted for so doing. The Emperor observed the life of the people with great astonishment, for he had never hitherto seen anything similar. During the journey the Empress Dowager turned herself to the Emperor and said: 'None of us could ever have supposed that our people are so poor.' After reaching Si-Ngan-Fu the Empress Dowager ordered the Governor Sen to set on foot a charitable fund for assisting the poor and also to establish public kitchens for supplying water and rice free of cost; at the same time Sen was reminded by his imperial mistress that he had better devote his best attention to her wishes in this respect.

"The Empress Dowager is continually endeavoring to return to Peking, but, as she receives terrible details from the north, she cannot make up her mind to take the step. On the tenth day of the second month, that is, on March 29, she ordered an imperial decree to be issued announcing the return to Peking, but as she heard that negotiations for signing the Russo-Chinese treaty had come to a standstill she postponed the return. Preparations were at once made for passing the summer at Si-

Ngan-Fu, and mats were hung up around the rooms of the temporary palace there to lessen the summer heat."

HOW FAURE FELL SHORT OF FAME.

A STORY OF THE PRESIDENT'S VANITY.

Paris correspondence of The London Telegraph.
Apropos of the observations on men and things made by the late President of the French Republic to the "chief" who took notes, which are now being published, a good story is told by a writer who had it direct from the hero of this comical adventure. It was the custom for M. Felix Faure to invite the officer of the Elysee guard to déjeuner, and this particular gentleman felt very nervous when he took his seat at table. "During the first part of the meal," as he related, "everything went well. No one spoke to me, and I did not say anything. I was not even listening to the conversation, when, suddenly, M. Felix Faure, addressing me by my military title, asked me pointblank, 'Am I popular?'" This was a very embarrassing question for the shy officer, who had never given the matter a thought, and he stammered out, "I do not think so, Monsieur le President," feeling ready to sink into the earth as soon as the words were out of his mouth. "Why do you not think so? Explain yourself," the President went on to inquire, in a condescending way. "Mon Dieu," I said, "my father told me one day that he only realized M. Thiers's popularity when he saw his portrait in gingerbread in all the booths at the fair on the Place du Trône. I have not yet noticed your portrait in this guise, Monsieur le President." Then M. Felix Faure exclaimed, very gravely, "That's true; I thank you; I had not yet thought of that." The gingerbread portraits were a revelation to him.

A FAIR AMERICAN AND LEO'S SKULLCAPS.

From The Pall Mall Gazette.

The Pope's wardrobe, in so far as his linen cassocks and capes are concerned, is looked after by the Nuns of the Reparation, on the solemn understanding that none of his discarded articles of wearing apparel are ever given or bartered away, a practice common enough in the Pontificate of Pius IX. Leo XIII has been known to break his own rule, and that no fewer than three times in favor of the same privileged lady, a fair and persuasive American, who presented herself at the audience carrying a skullcap of the richest white satin. This she succeeded in exchanging for that of the Pontiff's well worn one. This ruse met with a similar success on a second attempt; but, somewhat doubtful as to the result of a third, the fair American brought the new skullcap, filled with golden coins as an offering to Peter's pence. She scored again, needless to say, and the Pope's staff are awaiting with some curiosity the lady's next appearance in quest of the venerable Pontiff's skullcap.

AN ALIBI.

From The Philadelphia Press.

"Has my Willie been in swimming here today?" asked Willie's angry father.
"No, sir!" replied the biggest boy in the water.
"Are you sure?"
"Sure. Why, it was as much as he could do to keep from drownin', but we got him out all right. He's restin' over there in the bushes now."

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