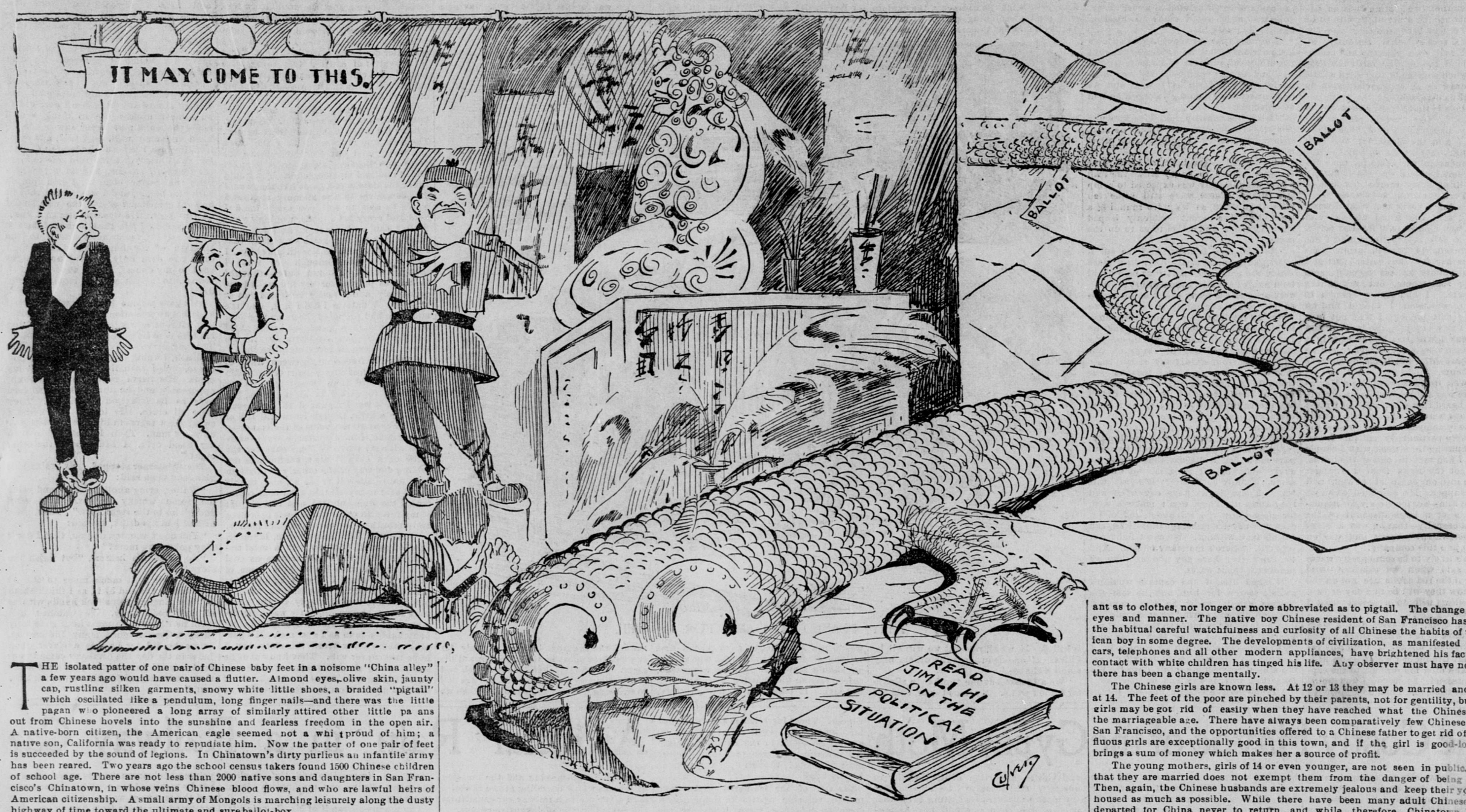
NEW AND STARTLING PHASE OF THE CHINESE QUESTION



THE isolated patter of one pair of Chinese baby feet in a noisome "China alley" a few years ago would have caused a flutter. Almond eyes, olive skin, jaunty cap, rustling silken garments, snowy white little shoes, a braided "pigtail" which oscillated like a pendulum, long finger nails—and there was the little pagan who pioneered a long array of similarly attired other little pa ans out from Chinese hovels into the sunshine and fearless freedom in the open air. A native-born citizen, the American eagle seemed not a whi t proud of him; a native son, California was ready to repudiate him. Now the patter of one pair of feet is succeeded by the sound of legions. In Chinatown's dirty purlieus an infantile army has been reared. Two years ago the school census takers found 1500 Chinese children of school age. There are not less than 2000 native sons and daughters in San Francisco's Chinatown, in whose veins Chinese blood flows, and who are lawful heirs of American citizenship. A small army of Mongols is marching leisurely along the dusty highway of time toward the ultimate and sure ballot-box.

This phase of the Chinese question does not appear to have been fully comprehended. But not later than the year 1920, at the present birth rate in Chinatown and supposing average conditions regarding mortality to obtain, it is as clear as anythin can be that something like 2500 Chinese native-born citizens, now mostly young children, will be entitled to the ballot in San Francisco alone. Sacramento, Stockton, Los Angeles, San Jose, and in fact nearly all communities in California, have also their native-born Mongolian babies who are on their way to citizenship. Not less than 4000 native-born Chinese voters will be in the field of politics in 1920 in California—enough with an alliance with some large political party and with a united front to carry a State election; enough to settle a Presidential election if California should be the pivotal State, conceding that the strength of parties should be somewhat nearly divided.

Surely the student of political history must see something curious in this not very remote contingency. Less than one-quarter of one century may see dragon flags flying from the roofs of Chinese josshouses, from the tops of buildings in which fan-tan games abide, and from scores of buildings reeking with filth and "smelling to heaven," in celebration of the election of the candidate of the Chinese for Governor or even for President of the United States of America, or Congressman, or Mayor, or Supervisor. There may even come a time when bonfires will burn in Chinatown and Chinese gongs and other alleged musical instruments be sounded to catch the Mongolian vote, and wagons carry up and down the steep slopes advice to Chinese-Americans to vote for Ah Jow or Tom Lee for Sheriff or Mayor or some other equally important office.

Chinese, it is well known, have strong family attachments. The head of a family directs all the others, who obey him implicitly. Unquestioning obedience gives the ideal conditions required for henchmen of a political boss. Another queer feature engrafted upon the American political system in San Francisco will be the influence of aged Chinese, who have no votes themselves, but who will have power to insure how numbers of votes will be cast. The Chinese patriarchs, with goat-like beards, will be "bosses" of the most approved sort. This is certain enough.

The Chinese children are receiving enough education to enable them to vote when the time comes. There are now hundreds of them who can read and write English fluently. In addition to the Chinese public school on Clay street there are mission schools where English is taught. The Clay-street Chinese public school has three classes of Chinese boys and girls, with a total attendance of about eighty-five children, who are reading and writing English every day.

The Chinese mission schools and the approximate attendance at each are about as follows: Occidental Mission at 911 Stockton street, 38, of whom 29 are boys and 9 girls; Loomis Memorial School, 911 Stockton street, 40; Baptist school at the corner of Waverly place and Sacramento street, 20; Methodist school at 916 Washington street, between Powell and Stockton, 37.

Here is the beginning and here are 220 Chinese children who can already read and write English. The Chinese are taking care with the education of their children as do other races. The little boys and girls who study English during the forenoon and the early afternoon occupy themselves during the later hours of the day learning to read and write Chinese at several schools, in which teachers brought from China preside. The schools of this sort are all located in Chinatown, being as follows: Kearny and Washington streets, 12 pupils; 765 Clay street, 16 pupils; 738 Jackson street, 20 pupils; Brenham place and Washington street, 8 pupils; Clay and Dupont streets, 18 pu ils; Waver y place, between Washington and Clay streets, 14 pupils.

There are comparatively few Chinese girls in the schools. There are two reasons for this. The leading reason is that their parents are afraid that if their girls leave home they will be kidnaped and held for ransom by other Chinese. The other reason is that Chinese consider women inferior. There are grotesque and striking possibilities in the chances of abduction. A Chinese woman of voting age is a marketable commodity. Her price varies according to her beauty. The more beautiful she is the more she is in danger of a violent and involuntary change of abode through the agency of the highbinders. The possibility of a Chinese woman in her capacity of candidate for member of the Board of Education—for the education of Chinese children will grow in importance in proportion to the increase in their political power—visiting the polls on election day and being abducted may exist.

It has been assumed, for the purpose of presenting the full strength of the future Chinese "push" in this City, that the Chinese might vote solidly, all on one side of a given question. This does not fail to include knowledge and recognition of the bitter hostility between Sam Yups and See Yups and their possible outbreaks at the polls should there be opposing candidates, white or Chinese, both catering to the Chinese vote. Bul lets would fly very likely in such a contingency, and that imperium in imperio, Chinatown, would have old troubles intensified by an election.

But there are questions upon which the Chinese vote may be solid. Let it be borne in mind that the more Chinese there are in San Francisco the more trade there is for Chinese merchants; the more blackmail money for highbinders; the more fees and importance and members for the various companies; the greater the influence of the Chinese politically. Still fronting California, on the Pacific, are millions of Chinese persons who would like to come to the United States to earn money. The local Chinese vote, a little more than twenty years hence, may help them to come.

In the Chinese public school on Clay street and in the mission schools where Chinese children are taught the books used are the California State text series. The Chinese children, according to competent testimony, learn rapidly. Their copybooks look fully as well as those of white children in the most favored school. They sit at desks like other children. Some of them, especially the children of christianized Chinese parents, dress as Americans. The little girls braid their hair and tie ribbons to it like other little girls. They giggle behind their books and act not one whit different from other children in school. They sing songs in both English and Chinese and find no insuperable difficulty in adopting the diatonic musical scale of civilization. Nor has Chinese music deprived them of an appreciation of civilized melodies.

They are just as mischievous as other children. The boys delight in climbing upon the desks and making a noise when the teacher is absent. They pull the girls' hair and tyrannize and tease. It is when recess comes and they play in their own way that the boys show their marked racial divergences from the youthful Caucasian. They are often seen fencing with long sticks after the alleged sanguinary fashion of the actors in preposterous Chinese dramas. With abbreviated "pigtails" swaying they seek sheltered nooks to play shuttle-cock, kicking the shuttle-cock into the air with their heels. Will some distant successor of Mayor-elect Phelan commend himself to voters by trotting up and down Brenham place and kicking up his heels in a crack exhibition of shuttle-cock playing?

The coming male voters of Chinatown are different in outward appearance from the Chinese children as they were observed in San Francisco even so recently as ten years ago. They are not more or less gorgeous in spangles, nor more or less radiant as to clothes, nor longer or more abbreviated as to pigtail. The change is in their eyes and manner. The native boy Chinese resident of San Francisco has added to the habitual careful watchfulness and curiosity of all Chinese the habits of the American boy in some degree. The developments of civilization, as manifested by cable-cars, telephones and all other modern appliances, have brightened his faculties, and contact with white children has tinged his life. Any observer must have noticed that there has been a change mentally.

The Chinese girls are known less. At 12 or 13 they may be married and mothers at 14. The feet of the poor are pinched by their parents, not for gentility, but that the girls may be got rid of easily when they have reached what the Chinese consider the marriageable age. There have always been comparatively few Chinese women in San Francisco, and the opportunities offered to a Chinese father to get rid of his superfluous girls are exceptionally good in this town, and if the girl is good-looking she brings a sum of money which makes her a source of profit.

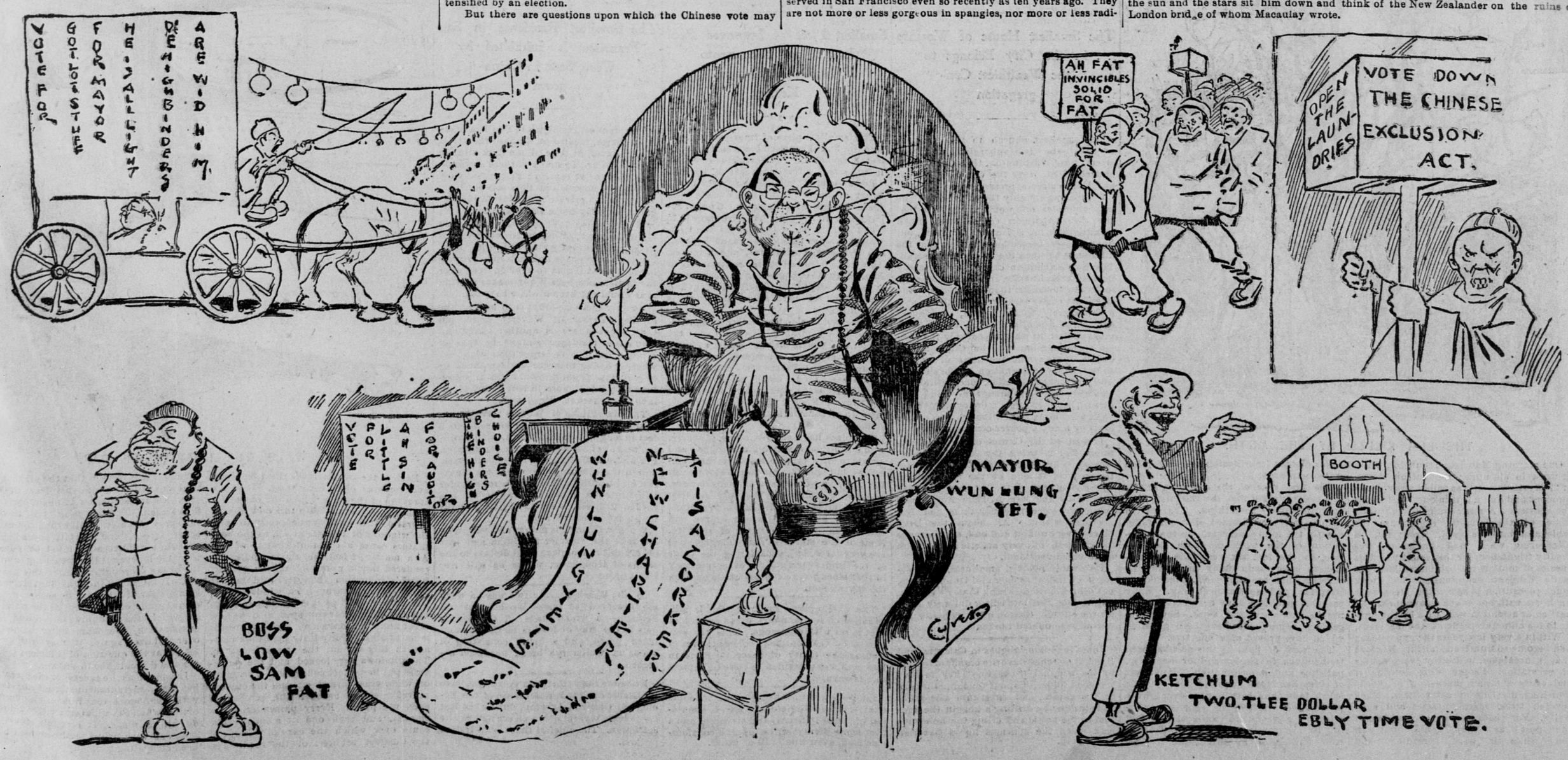
The young mothers, girls of 14 or even younger, are not seen in public. The fact that they are married does not exempt them from the danger of being kidnaped. Then, again, the Chinese husbands are extremely jealous and keep their young wives housed as much as possible. While there have been many adult Chinese who have departed for China never to return, and while, therefore, Chinatown has many unoccupied stores and dwellings which were formerly filled, it is not safe to assume that Chinatown is doomed ultimately to disappear. In fact, quite the contrary appears probable.

The children who are born in San Francisco have no natural attachment for China, which they have never seen and which has less of freedom and of opportunity than the United States for them. There is little reason to suppose that they will seek China when their parents voluntarily have chosen San Francisco in which to rear their families. They will live in San Francisco. The rate of increase is very rapid. The babies are taking the places of the adults who have gone to China to remain.

Everywhere throughout the length and breadth of Chinatown is heard the laughter and chattering of Chinese children. They seem to spring up like mushrooms over night. Being small they do not compel their parents to enlarge their tenements, which are as small as possible under the circumstanees. It is only a very few years since Chinese raised families as freely in this City and the effect of an increasing population is not felt appreciably because of the extreme present juvenility of the additions.

There are other points of interest concerning the coming Chinese voters. While they are learning to read and write they remain pagans to a great degree.

"It is not right," said an English speaking young Chinaman to a lady recently, "that the Chinese in San Francisco should have to obey American laws. The Chinese laws are enough."

Chinatown will have the numerical strength to cause itself to be represented in some future Board of Supervisors of the City of San Francisco; very likely by a Supervisor who shall enter the chamber of the board attired like a Chinese merchant during the Chinese New Year's festivities. Seated between two sober-suited American citizens, who represent Caucasian wards, he may wave his fan and rustle his Oriental finery and legislate. Or it may be that Ah Sing, overcoming the national prejudices of his parents in the matter of dress, may eat rice with chopsticks at the Mayor's banquet, wearing a claw-hammer coat and white tie.

Then and there may arise a din of Chinese music, so called, as a gracious tribute to the growing political influence and importance of Ah Sing. Perhaps roast pig may smoke, cooked in the Chinese style, and punks may fragrantly fume, and the Chinese Supervisor, rising to respond to the toast of the evening, shall pull out with the manuscript of his remarks a package of Chinese prayer papers, and so the picture become comp ete. Perhaps he will wave his fan and eat preserved ginger and teach the Mayor how they kowtow in Peking. Then shall the son of the moon and the sun and the stars sit him down and think of the New Zealander on the ruins of London bridge of whom Macaulay wrote.