

A NIGHT IN CHINATOWN.

WITH all the capacity to absorb and assimilate apparently incongruous elements possessed by the political, social and religious institutions of the United States, they seem powerless to digest the Mongolian. The representatives of nearly every nation under the sun have taken refuge in this land of freedom, and before the second generation have become completely Americanized, with one exception—the Chinese. For thirty-six years the "childlike and bland" countenance of the Chinaman has been seen on the streets of our western cities, and yet, as a class, with scarcely an individual exception, he is as much of a foreigner to-day as he was when he left the shores of the Flowery Kingdom a third of a century ago. The German, the Swede, the Russian, the Turk, and even the Japanese, adopt the costume, and to a large extent the customs, of our people immediately upon planting their feet upon our soil. Clannish, they are, to a certain extent, drawn together socially, and even politically, by those ties of common blood and birth which are among the strongest that find root in the hearts of men; but gradually these wear away by contact with the mass of people, and the children of these immigrants, reared in our public schools and associating with the youth of the country, become Americanized and relieved of every inclination towards such ideas and customs of the land of their fathers as are incongruous with those obtaining in this country. Not so the Chinese. They hold themselves aloof, and wherever they go huddle together and set up a miniature China in the midst of our antagonistic civilization. A third of a century on the Pacific coast still finds them in their peculiar native costume, their heads shaved and their pig-tails flapping about their legs. This precious appendage, originally a badge of servitude, is now held by them a crown of distinction, without which no true Chinaman can expect honor in this life or glory in the life to come. Even such of them as pretend to have become converted to Christianity under the faithful missionary labors of many good and noble men and women—chiefly the latter—still cling to their pig-tails with all the superstitious fervor of their more benighted countrymen. No effort is made to teach their children the language and manners of this country, but the little ones are in every respect miniature counterparts of their fathers and mothers, and as much Chinese in every instinct and action as if they had been reared under the very shadow of the throne of the Pearly Emperor. The explanation of this is simple. Other nationalities come here to live, to mingle with our people and become a part of us, and their children are educated for a life among us; the Chinese come here for a temporary residence, to make money upon which they can eventually live at ease in their native land, and their children are consequently reared with a view to a future permanent residence in the land of their fathers. The one is an immigrant, the other a carpet-bagger—or, rather, a bamboo-poler, since his worldly possessions

are generally carried in bundles dangling from either end of a bamboo pole.

The great mass of Chinese in America are of the laboring class, unmarried and irresponsible. Bound to no locality by family or property ties, they go from place to place wherever employment can be secured. They huddle together in the "Chinatown" of our various cities, from which they go out singly in search of work, or are sent out in gangs to fill contracts for labor taken by some "boss Chinaman," returning promptly to the city rendezvous whenever out of work. Only those of the better class, the merchants, bosses, etc., can afford the luxury of a wife and family. A wife represents an investment of from one hundred to five hundred dollars purchase money, and a steady outlay for current expenses. Consequently they are above the means of the ordinary coolie, and are a scarce article in America. The great majority of Chinese women brought to this country are of the disreputable class. They are not very numerous in comparison with the men, yet they amount to several thousands in the aggregate; and since they remain in the cities and are there seen in great numbers, they give the impression of being in greater force in proportion to the men than is actually the case. Every effort is made by our customs officials to exclude them under the terms of the restriction act, and of late years their numbers have not increased as rapidly as formerly.

There is one class of Chinese who acquire and maintain property interests here—the merchants. They are of a higher order than the mass of their countrymen who reach our shores, and the two are as distinct socially as the same classes are among our own people. Their property consists chiefly of merchandise, and it is seldom they acquire real estate. Some of them, however, have erected buildings upon land held under a lease, while a few have even gone to the extent of purchasing the land itself. Some of these are rich, even in the American acceptance of that word, while all of them are well-to-do according to the Chinese standard. They are shrewd business men, and possess as fine a sense of commercial honor as do the white merchants occupying more imposing quarters on the adjoining street. Their dealings are principally with their own countrymen, though our wholesale and commission merchants have quite extensive transactions with them, and find them desirable customers. They have a commercial system of their own, and it is seldom our courts are troubled with their business affairs. The majority of respectable women are wives of these merchants, and generally live in apartments in the rear of, or above, their husbands' stores. They are seen but little on the street, are modest and retiring in their demeanor, and are usually dressed in the most expensive silk and velvet. They toil no more than the lillies that put the glory of Solomon to shame, but are considered by their husbands more as toys and ornaments than as companions and helpmeets. Their domestic duties are practically nothing, since all cooking is done by men, and they have but the care of