

## Poisoning by Wholesale: A Reminiscence of China Life

by Albert Farley Heard

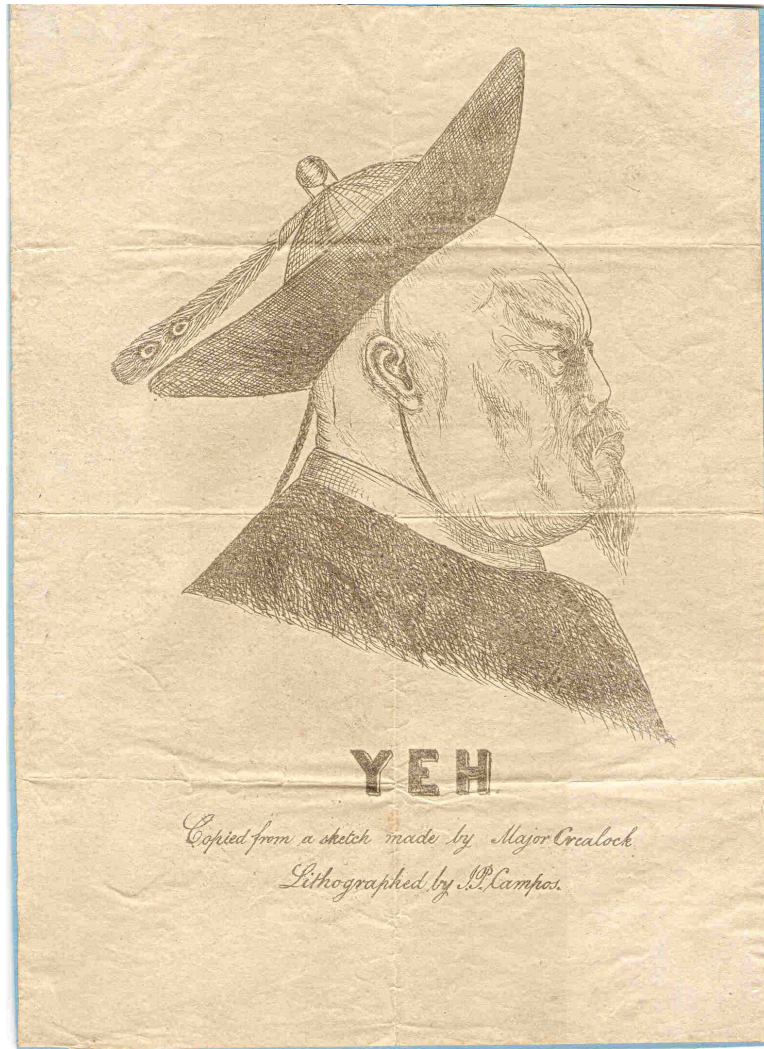
Transcribed from a handwritten manuscript found in the papers of Augustine Heard Gray in 1982.

Introduction by Robert M. Gray

**Introduction** Albert Farley Heard was a merchant, diplomat, and author. Born in 1833 and educated at Yale (A.B. 1853), he went to China after college to take his turn along with his brothers managing the trading firm of Augustine Heard & Co. founded by his uncle. Augustine Heard of Ipswich had no children of his own, so he brought his four nephews, the sons of his brother George Washington Heard, to China to manage the business. In addition to his mercantile duties, Albert served as the Russian Consul-General in Shanghai and later as the representative of the Chinese Government in Russia. In 1887 his book *The Russian Church and Russian Dissent*, Harper & Brothers, New York was published, giving a history of orthodoxy, dissent, and erratic sects of the Russian Orthodox Church. He died in Washington DC in 1890.

At some time during the 1880s while living in Boston, he composed this reminiscence of his experiences during the panic of 1857 in China, when Great Britain and China were in the process of going to war and the position of foreigners throughout China was precarious. The subsequent Anglo-Chinese war of 1858–1860 would bring radical changes to China and in its trade with the Western world. Shortly thereafter the American Civil War would bring the end of many of the primary American trading firms in China because of the lack of shipping and the general economic hardships. In 1857, the firm had recently moved its headquarters from Canton to the less hostile British Hong Kong. Albert's brother John was arriving in Hong Kong and his brother Augustine Heard Jr. was leaving. The period described in S. C. Lockwood's *Augustine Heard and Company, 1858–1862: American Merchants in China*, Harvard East Asian Monographs, Vol 37 (1971) was about to begin.

The manuscript describes both the general environment and a specific incident during the period before an official declaration of war, when both Great Britain and China were beginning hostilities but neither had the forces available to mount serious offensive maneuvers. The European community was understandably nervous and quick to assume the worst. The



Yeh  
Courtesy of the Ipswich Historical Society

viewpoint is the (hindsight) view of a young man fresh from college, with the prejudices and literary style of the time.

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I left Shanghai in January 1857 on board the steamer *Antelope* for Hong Kong.

The telegraph was unknown in the East of those days; the mails from Europe arrived but once a month, opium clippers and stray steamers kept up an irregular communication with the South and the adjacent ports, but frequently weeks passed without news from the outer world.

War between England and China, though not declared, existed in reality, but operations were postponed for want of sufficient forces to undertake an offensive campaign, which the dogged obstinacy and passive inertia of the Chinese officials rendered necessary.

The delay occasioned by this circumstance was subsequently prolonged by the mutiny in India, as the troops destined for China were, on reaching Singapore, diverted to Calcutta, and, meanwhile in China, every thing was in abeyance. The situation there of all foreigners was most anomalous, inasmuch as the Chinese made little, or no, distinction between different nationalities.

At the South there was a complete rupture between the English and native authorities. Canton had been bombarded, its public edifices riddled with shot, its forts captured and dismantled. The European quarter there, and at Whampoa, had been destroyed, and the occupants driven away; a price was offered for the heads of foreigners, and every stray Fan Hwei <sup>1</sup> was butchered without mercy.

The fighting epidemic had seized upon the usually pacific and indolent American squadron, and in a spasmodic effort of vigor to avenge an insult to the flag, Commodore Armstrong, and the Commissioner Dr. Parker, ordered the destruction of the Barrier forts in the Canton river. This task was thoroughly accomplished by Captain A.H. Foote, the officer afterwards

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<sup>1</sup>Editor's note: this term is later identified as "foreign devil."

so distinguished in the war of the Rebellion<sup>2</sup>; content however with this extraordinary exhibition of energy, the American authorities withdrew from the conflict and

—“the subsequent proceedings interested them no more”!

The entire foreign community had taken refuge either at the Portuguese colony of Macao, or at the English Island of Hong Kong, a hundred miles from Canton, but scarcely a mile from the coast of China.

Yeh, Viceroy of the Two Kwang, a truculent Mantchou, ignoring his defects, persevered in dogged obstinate resistance. The English forces, insufficient for further offensive operations retired from Canton to await the arrival of reinforcements. Hardly was their back turned than the forts were reoccupied and Yeh triumphantly, and in solemn ceremony, like Abimelech at Shechem<sup>3</sup>, ploughed up the site of the foreign factories, and sowed the land with salt, as devoted to utter desolation.

The island of Hong Kong was then but a military station, one of the footholds of the mighty empire of Britain. It is a granite rock, rising from the ocean to a peak 1800 feet high, clad with scant verdure, and without an acre of arable ground. The town of Victoria, crowded to overflowing by the influx of foreigners, had also a large Chinese population, and was entirely dependent for its supplies upon the mainland. Notwithstanding the mutually hostile attitude of the authorities, the Chinese people were as ready as ever to trade, and at no time was any scarcity of food perceptible. The native population were tranquilly submissive, and, despite occasional scares, there was but little apprehension of danger among the foreign community, save as regards instances of individual treachery.

At the open ports on the coast of China there was no appearance of impending hostilities, no serious alarm, and no expectation of interruption to trade. There was perhaps a little less sense of security, and excursions to the interior, shooting parties, and picnics ceased,

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<sup>2</sup>Ed's note: Andrew Hull Foote, 1806–1863, As commander of the *Portsmouth* he led the retaliatory raids on the four barrier forts below Canton. During the American Civil War he commanded Union forces on the upper Mississippi and participated in the reduction of Forts Don and Henry. He is also reknowned for having enforced temperance on his ships and brought about the abolishment of the traditional grog ration in the Navy in 1862.

<sup>3</sup>Abimelech was king of the Philistines in Gerar [Genesis, Judges]. Shechem was a town of ancient Palestine, near Samaria, at the current location of Nablus in Israel. In violation of the Torah, he destroyed the fields of a conquered people in revenge for their earlier rejection of him.

but otherwise no change was noticeable in the daily routine of busy mercantile life. China was still the China of the middle ages, when patriotism, in the large sense of modern days, was unknown. It was at best a clannish feeling, restricted and selfish, and the difficulties at the South aroused no responsive sympathy in other provinces of the Empire. But yet vague rumours filled the air, and in the absence of positive intelligence, gave rise to some uneasiness, for in that country of contradictions, where steam and electricity were unknown, the winds seemed to bear news on their wings, or as if a word spoken at one end of the empire were transmitted to the other from mouth to mouth of its prolific millions.

Speculation was rife, and the excitement great, but it was rather the feeling of aroused curiosity than of apprehension, the interested wonder of spectators at a theatrical drama. The whole thing seemed a gigantic farce, so ridiculous did any real attempt appear on the part of the Chinese government, to withstand foreign pressure when seriously applied.

However erroneous may have been the first causes of the misunderstanding, it was evident that England was now in earnest. Stimulated by personal ambition, her officials were taken at its flood the tide which was to bear the chief instigator of their policy from a vice consulate to knighthood, and an embassy. <sup>4</sup>

The lorcha *Arrow*, a small coasting craft, Chinese built and owned, flying the English flag by special colonial registration, for a specified time, had been seized and condemned by Canton authorities for smuggling and piracy. This was the original pretext for England's reclamations, but when it was established that the period of the *Arrow's* registration had expired, that she had no right to the flag she bore, and had been legally seized while violating Chinese revenue laws, other and weightier pretensions were advanced. John Bull determined, once and forever, to erase from the vocabulary the insulting epithet Fan Kwei, <sup>5</sup> to end the long series of consular bickerings, of never satisfied reclamations, and systematic evasions of treaty stipulations, which, although extorted at the cannon's mouth, were sacred rights; he resolved to cut with the sword the knot of oriental circumlocution, to break down the wall of Chinese isolation, and forcibly introduce the blessings of piece goods and opium. The English press magniloquently proclaimed that the hour had come to open the vast territory of the Middle Kingdom to European enterprise and Christianity, that it was England's duty and high mission, as the apostle of progress, to bestow upon the benighted teeming millions

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<sup>4</sup>Sir Harry S. Parkes, K.C.B.

<sup>5</sup>Foreign Devil.

of the Flowery Land the crowning mercies of civilization and English manufactures, which are but synonymous terms.

Advantages secured for one would by the favored nation clause of foreign treaties, redound to the benefit of all, and we Yankees with perhaps an occasional qualm of conscience at possible injustice, complacently waited for a share of the fruit.

It was a striking illustration of the anomalous condition of affairs that my fellow passengers on board the *Antelope* were two Chinese officials of high rank, with their wives and attendants. When it was for their interest the Chinese could make a distinction between the starry flag, and, the red cross of St. George, and they preferred to trust their fortunes and their families to the despised foreigner's Ho-lun-chuen, or fire-wheel ships, rather than undergo miseries for an indeterminate period on an antediluvian junk.

The ladies and their maids filled to overflowing the tiny staterooms of the little craft, and crowded in together, with Asiatic dread of solitude and cold. Their vermilion lips and painted eyebrows, their gaudily daubed cheeks, were closely veiled, and their club shaped feet, the "golden lilies," of which their poets sing, could not

Like little mice steal in and out,

from the ample silken folds of their wide and flowing pajamas. Hardly were they shrouded from view by the heavy curtains than their lively chatter, and the squirrel like munching of melon seeds gave evidence of things not seen.

The high dignitaries and their attendants seemed to find the raised transom over the screw the natural place for personages of their importance and thereon, in sad ignorance of its fatal advantages in a sea way, the "Ta Jin," or greatmen, ignoring with a contemptuous stare, the presence of a despicable "red head," stretched themselves out at ease. They doffed their trim-upturned, stiff official hats and peacock feathers, rolled their queues around their shaven pates, and replaced their flowing embroidered robes and light silk leggings by thick padded jerkins and loose pajamas, leaving feet and legs bare. A Chinaman is comfortable if his body, especially its most important organ, the stomach, be warmly covered; the nether extremities framed for more ignoble use, need no protection, or, if cold, are snugly tucked away beneath him. Luxuriously reclining on cushions, they sipped the afternoon teak, black dragon tea, which we call oolong, possibly from "the Hall of the ten thousand times shining midday tea,"

in the street of “Enormous Serenity,” near the gate of “Extreme Peace,” whose proprietor advertises “that a cup will strenghten the stomach, create appetite, dispell vapors, and in respect to longevity, it is wonderful.”

The clatter of cups, the hubble bubble of pipes, and the guttural jabbering of the men mingled with the merry laughter of the hidden houris; from their retreats came an occasional twang of a shrill guitar, accompanying a high falsetto shriek in guise of song, which rang out loudest as I detected, amid the curtain folds, carefully held, a black sparkling eye peering at the foreign monster. Native artists usually portray this fearful being, the bogey of Celestial infants, as of gigantic stature, with fierce rubicand countenance staring from out red tangled locks and beard, breathing fire and smoke from his nostrils. By the stifled tittering and giggling, I was pleased to learn that I inspired amusement rather than terror. Opinions, like creeds, vary with one’s stand-point, the abbé Huc relates that after twenty years absense in the interior of China, his first impulse, on returning to Canton, was to burst with laughter as he looked upon the foreign residents in their ungainly close fitting clothes, solemnly plodding, like mules in a mill around the little garden in front of the honghs diligently bent on exercise; their garb seemed delightfully ludicrous to his eyes, accustomed to oriental amplitude of dress, and the unnecessary exertion was simply ridiculous. “Why don’t they get their servants to do it for them?” was the puzzled inquiry of a Chinise dignitary, when gazing at the, to him, extraordinary, and shockingly indecorous spectacle of a foreign ball.

with the shades of evening, when  
day had put on his jacket, and around  
his burning bosom, buttoned it with stars,

came the crowning event. A Chinaman loves conviviality, and the dinner bell is the “tocsin of the soul.” “How has your rice passed?” is the familiar daily salutation. The popular god of Longevity, whose laughing face beams at every festival, is a jovial god, with huge round paunch by many ‘a good capon lined.’ To be fat is to be beautiful and proportionately envied and admired. The Chinese place the seat of courage in the stomach, and very valiant trenchermen were our friends. Each guest testified to the others of his affectionate regard by deftly popping into his neighbor’s mouth rare tid bits, of whose delicacy he could vouch from previous trial and all gave tokens of appreciation by sounds unmentionable to ears polite, but which, among Oriental gourmands, it were the height of ill breeding to omit. Cups of

heated wines and samshoo <sup>6</sup> circulated freely, and one challenged the other by snapping, perhaps three fingers & calling the number, *sam*, while his neighbor, raising perhaps five, shouted back the total *oong* (eight), or if he failed, drained a bumper. <sup>7</sup> There was no restraint but a genial freedom and familiarity, surprising to foreign ideas. The Book of Rites enjoins self control and consideration for others, and the Chinese, among themselves, while observing a punctilio more scrupulous than that of a Spanish hidlago, are singularly mild and gentle with their inferiors. Contrast of manners between them and Western nations is not so striking in this particular, but in daily life there is a long series of queer contradictions. White is their mourning color, they write, and their books are printed, with single characters for each entire word, placed in perpendicular lines, running from right to left, and the title page is at the end of the volume; their seat of honor is the left; they beckon with the fingers turned downwards; they box the compass from East to West, by the South; they ennoble a man's ancestors, never his posterity; they keep the head covered in entering a house, or in presence of a superior; they wear the stockings outside the trousers; if they can afford a watch, they must have two, which dangle outside the dress; they consider it polite to ask one's age; they shake their own hands, but never clasp a friend's. The servant precedes the master; the tailor pushes his needle from him; the carpenter draws his plane towards him; the soldier bears his sword on the right side; the cavalier mounts his horse from the right; a grandfather only may wear moustachios, and boys, in playing ball, strike it with the foot. Women stay at home, friends ignore their existence, and men never see their wives' face until after marriage. In dates, the year precedes the month and day; in fractions, the total number precedes the fractional, thus, of ten three parts, instead of three tenths; the family name precedes that of the individual; the physician is paid as long as the family is in health, his stipend ceases during illness. In arguing, or in stating a case, the commence with the conclusions, and the reasons follow;<sup>8</sup> the highest expression of Confusian philosophy is 'do no evil to your neighbor,' ignoring the sublime maxim 'to do him good.'<sup>9</sup> Even in nature, the birds have brilliant plumage, but rarely sing, and flowers are of every hue, but seldom have fragrances. It would seem as if, living at the antipodes, the Chinese were in habits,

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<sup>6</sup>Ed's note: samshoo or samshu is a Chinese liqueur distilled from millet or rice

<sup>7</sup>Identical with the Italian game of "Mora"; whether it originated in China or Italy is a matter of discussion.

<sup>8</sup>Ed's note: not unlike the modern "executive summary"

<sup>9</sup>Ed's note: This suggests comparison with the maxim of Hillel "Do not unto others as you would not have them do unto you" and the subsequent inverted form of Jesus.



manners and methods of thought antipodal to Western races.

But meanwhile the sickening fumes of opium made the air below unbearable, and I took refuge in the captain's cabin on deck. We steamed out before the dawn and down the narrow Woosung, out upon the broad estuary of the Yang Tze—the ocean's child, and long before we felt the swell of the Yellow sea, land on either side had disappeared. The wind was sharp and piercing; there are no hills nor forests to break the chill blasts from the frozen plains of Mantchuria, or to temper their keenness; they sweep every cloud from the heavens, and puffs of escaping steam shone out against the steel gray sky in plumes of dazzling whiteness, vanishing like an electric flash in the crisp, dry air.

Lounging in a bamboo chair, drowsily listening to the captain's yarns, as he conned the ship and kept a sharp lookout for the Saddle Islands, I was pondering over past and coming changes, and over the refolution threatening the, so called, immutable East, as Western civilization was pounding, with shot and shell, at its closed gates. Already, on the China coast, steam was supplanting sails; the bold mariners, who had there won fame the world over for matchless seamanship, cool daring, and contempt of danger were rapidly disappearing; they might have been brave compeers of Drake and Frobisher, ready, in the terrible typhoons of Eastern seas, to reach the cheering cry of Sir Humphrey Gilbert to the crew of his sinking ship, "Courage! my friends, we are as near heaven on sea, as on land!" but their successors were of meaner sort, and the evolution was not the survival of the noblest. Just as our monger craft, half steamer, half sailing vessel, was a sorry, though doubtless a profitable, substitute for the dashing clipper whose name she bore, so our captain was of degenerate type. He was a man of infinite jest, and of imagination as vivid as it was eccentric, in person, he was tall and blond like a viking of old, possibly as brave and daring, but with a keener eye to the ??? chance; he had been all things in turn and nothing long, a midshipman in the navy, filibuster in Nicaragua, gold digger in California, now, barely thirty, he had subsided into a merchant skipper, drawn to the seas of the far East by tales of fabulous profits to be realised, than by love of wild adventure. There was the difference subsequently noticeable between "Chinese" Gordon and the filibuster Ward<sup>10</sup>; the one prompted by chivalric, unselfish sense of duty, the other by personal ambition and pecuniary interest.

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<sup>10</sup>Ed's note: born in Salem, Mass. in 1831, died in Tzeki, China 1862, Ward was an adventurer and soldier. After serving with Walker in Nicaragua, he appeared in Shanghai in 1859, where he developed a native army to oppose a local rebellion and too Shanghai. He was mortally wounded in battle, but his army remained intact and formed the core of the forces later led by General "Chinese" Gordon

As we braced round the yards and squared away South past the saddles, we caught the full strength of the North East monsoon, sweeping down from the pole. The little *Antelope*, everything drawing, bowled along before it, rolling and plunging like a think of life. Before we rounded Turnabaout, and bore away to the West of South, we had gradually the left the turbid wake of the Yellow Sea, coloured for hundreds of miles by the outpour of the mighty Yang Tsze, and ran into the blue and pellucid waves of the Pacific; the air was milder, and the nights were almost tropical in their loveliness. In the moonlight the phosphorescent glare at the plunging of the boss, and the churning of the screw, turned the waters to a sea of silver, a boiling, bubling, seething, mass of molten metal, whose luminous glow made the fresh breeze seem the cooler. The coast here towers in giant hills, clad to their summits with short close grass, but without a tree or bush. This absence of forests is a peculiar feature of Chinese scenery; only around some hoary temple, buried in a secluded valley, or where orange groves and fruit trees thrive, does the eye find relief in luxuriant foliage, from the bald, barren aspect of denuded hills, from the rich, but tiresome, monotony of cultivated fields.

Yet the landscape has often a singular beauty of its own, similar to that seen on the coast of the Mediterranean, and along the Corniche road, but it is more varied and vivid in its colouring. In the spring time, before the summer sun has drawn the summer moisture, roses, camelias, azalias bloom in riotous profusion; the meadows and hills are carpeted with wild flowers of every hue, and the whole country side glows in wide, gorgeous expanses of color, as seen through a mighty prism. Later, when the little mountain torrents, unprotected by forest shade, are dried by the scorching heat, the withered herbage and scrubby bushes assume faded, neutral, autumnal tints, and conceal from a near view, the myriads of tiny hardy flowers, and microscopic berries, of scarlet and crimson, which they shield. At a distance, however, and when the suns rays strike direct on the hil side, these hidden brilliant hues are revealed, and shine out in glowing harmonious combination, with the yellow and russet grass and heathre. Despite the teeming population, one seldom meets with a human being away from the villages, and the solitude, the deep solemn silences unbroken by voice of man, song of birds, or murmuring of brooks is most impressive.

Night was falling as we entered the Lye-moon, the gate of the carp's mouth. We wound our devious course between heights, now opening out in in a broad expanse, now closing frowningly, as if to bar the passage, while here and there a tiny cascade, tumbling noisily down the precipice, buried itself in a rare cluster of trees at the bottom of a ravine. A last

time, and we are in the magnificent harbor of Hong Kong, were all the navies of the world might ride in room and safety.

Imagine a Scotch mountain lake about six miles long and two miles wide, here and there an island, the coast line daubed with jutting promontories and minor bays, land locked on every side with lofty hills, almost mountains, above which the giant peak, Victoria, towers and casts its dark shade over the town below, whose white houses clamber up its side, and rest seemngly embraced on its bosom.

Slowly we threaded our way among the shipping, leaving a broad phosphorescent wake, flashing like diamond dust in sunlight. The silence was intense, broken only by the crunching of the screw and the ships' bells striking the hours. It was unusual, for generally, in all chinese waters, there is a hum of life throughout the night, as well as the day. Chinamen are sociable and gregarious being, and the teeming boat population is never quiet; one would fancy they never slept. Now it is a wedding feast with lanterns, fire works, and music, or a funeral wake with as noisy, and scarcely more doleful, accompaniment. Here a lovesick waterman intunes, in high falsetto strain, a sonnet to his mistress' eyebrow; or sings of her golden lilies, whose 'gain is as the nodding of the water lilly,' while another twangs his three stringed guitar, or pipes on his still more melancholy and piercing flute. Gongs and fire crackers welcome the coming, and speed the parting junks, whose crews as energetically respond to thank the favoring god, or propitiate the hostile demon.

This night all was hushed and the unnatural stillness seemed ominous, yet the lights of the town shone brightly, and all seemed tranquil onshore. I noticed however that the quay was deserted, and no boats lined the wharves, no sampans clustered around the steamer as she swung to her anchor, no uproarious boatment scrambled for the ladder, clutching with their bamboo hooks at every hole or ring bolt, regardless of the screw, in frantic eagerness for a fare. Distrubed by a vague feeling of anxiety, I stood on the quarter deck, peering for the gig which should, as usual, be readiness for us, when I heard the measured stroke of a man o'war's crew and immediately the hoarse hail, "Steamer, ahoy!" A moment afterwards an officer sprang on deck, armed to the teeth, and in the launch at the gang-way I saw the gleam of muskets in the moon light. The lieutenant gave orders to allow us boats alongside, and forbade all communication with the shore until after daylight. All this meant news, portended danger, and we excitedely pressed for an explanation. It was concise and terrible; our preconceived notitions that this war was to be but *une promenade militaire*, a picnic

with a spice of adventure, were rudely dispelled, and we stood face to face with the grim reality.

The Canton authorities, encouraged by the withdrawal of the English troops, had reoccupied the forts, and were attempting to take the offensive. The fleet in the river had been repeatedly attacked, and had been in serious danger from fire ships. The Thistle, a little postal steamer, had been captured by Chinese soldiers, disguised as passengers, its crew massacred, and their heads carried off. A regular tariff had been set on foreigners' lives, ranging from fifty to a thousand dollars, and, that morning, an attempt had been made to poison the entire community. The principal baker of Hong Kong, Ah Lum, who supplied nearly every family, had mixed arsenic with the flour, the bread had been distributed, while he and his family had disappeared. Unreasoning panic succeeded the dream of fancied immunity from danger; a rising of the native population was feared, to prevent which they were closely confined to their own quarter under special guard, and no one was allowed in the streets without a pass. All Chinese craft were ordered away from the shore, and a belt of clear water was kept open along the harbor frontage, while all communication with the shipping was forbidden between sunset and sunrise. Every military precaution, short of martial law, was enforced afloat and ashore, the harbor was patrolled by the man o'war, and the streets of the town by the garrison. As to the poisoning, the officer knew only that it had been discovered at an early hour, and he believed that timely precautions had prevented very serious consequences.

I paced the deck for the rest of the night with feelings better imagined than described. I could see the lights of my brother's house on a spur of the mountain above, and my fevered fancy ran riot over possible scenes of suffering, — perhaps worse. The intense stillness, the calm beauty of the scene, seemed a tantalizing mockery of my anxiety, and the houses had no end. With the first rays of the sun I was on shore, hurrying up the hill, eager, yet dreading, to know the truth. There was not a soul visible in the town, where the busy stir of awakening life begins before dawn; not a sound, save the tramp of the patrol and the sentry's challenge. I remember that unconsciously, in the dual state characteristic of intense preoccupation, I read familiar signs along the streets, listened for the usual morning cries of barbers and peddlars, and vaguely wondered not to see the itinerant vendors of hot greasy cakes, near whose portable ovens I had often laughed at the discomfiture of the coolies, who gambled their scanty cash for a double portion, and lost both money and breakfast. The place seemed all changed, — asleep and dreaming under the spell of sorcery, but ever and

anon the realisty rose up before me; I felt a cold thrill that stopped the heart's beat, and I gasped as, full of anxious forebodings, I pressed on with increased haste. Suddenly from a verandah, overhanging the steep ascent, I heard a hail; —“A, hulloa! we are all right!” and I recognized my brother's voice. A moment later we had each other by the hand.

As mere cessation from severe physical pain brings a sense of positive pleasure and enjoyment, so sudden relief from great mental anxiety is accompanied by a glowing feeling of exhilaration and joy, and the horror aroused by this attempt at wholesale murder was tempered by a curious perception of the ludicrous, blending strangely with the lugubrious, when I learned that no fatal results had yet transpired.

Ten pounds of arsenic (as was subsequently established by government reports) had been mixed with the dough, and this enormous quantity had, in many cases, been its own antidote, while, in othes, the prompt discovery of the crime had permitted the timely application of powerful remedies.

My brother's experience had in it an element of absurdity, which, taken in contrast with possible tragic consequences, was irresistibly funny.

He, and a friend D., partook as usual of their early breakfast in the verandah, soon after sunrise. They sat, chatting over their cheroots, enjoying the cool morning breeze, and the glorious view over the sea and the distant mountains, glowing in the early rays of the sun, while the town below, and the harbor, were yet plunged in the shadow of the peak. Suddenly their equantimity was disturbed by the abrupt entrance of the butler, who rushed in with strange forgetfulness of the proprieties which a Chinese servant *de bonne maison* so carefully observes. “Hi, yah! Misse H., look see!” he explained, presenting a huge placard, on which was inscribed in large letters,—

### **Caution!**

**The bread is poisoned. Antidote, powerful mustard emetic and white of eggs.**

**Harland, Surgeon-General**

The two victims, as they supposed, stared blankly at each other, and at the remains of their morning meal, in utter bewilderment. They sent for the compradore, and ordered the mustard and eggs. The compradore, I should explain, is the head of the Chinese staff, a man of substance and respectability, who engages, and is responsible for, all the Chinese in the establishment, often a hundred or more. This compradore, who inherited the post from

his father, was well entitled to the entire confidence of his employers, and on many previous occasions, at heavy cost to himself, had given proof of his loyalty to "his salt."

Meanwhile, the mustard and eggs were brought, and my brother, of an excitable and nervous temperament, swallowed the noxious draught, but D., more sceptical and phlegmatic, demurred. "I don't half believe the story," said he, "anyway, I feel perfectly well, and I'll wait before I make myself sick."

When the comprador made his appearance, he was calm and outwardly self-possessed, as befits a Chinese gentleman, but was evidently laboring under intense, although well repressed, excitement. "Well, comprador, how fashion?" "My hav' hear talkee this pigeon, Missee H., juss' now now no savey tlué how fashion. My tinkee no fear. My can secu allo man insi' tiss housee; tlué, he allo good man. Suppose hav' got bobbely, he no got sha' insi'. My can secu!" --

"B'long you pigeon," replied my brother, "Juss' now can man man, look see; but suppose my catchee sick, suppose makee die, my killum you fus! No use plentee talkee; you look see revolve; suppose my muss' makee die, my vecu' you die fuss'; so fashion you stop 'long my, my us pay you go outsi!" --

The poor fellow turned as pale as his copper colored complexion would permit, but made no remonstrance. "Can do"; said he, and quietly sat himself down to wait, accepting, as perfectly just, this Chinese doctrine of responsibility.

The antidote had begun its work, and H. was in the agonies of its operation. Just then there was a violent commotion below, and the Portuguese major domo, de Lança, came rushing up the stairs, followed by the native servants, who fully understood the gravity of the occasion, and realized the serious position of their chief. "It is all right, Mr. H." shouted de Lança as he burst in; "Our bread is all right, and there is no danger. I had a row with Ah Lum a week ago, in settling his accounts, and for the last three days we have had our bread from Ah How!"

A loud laugh from D., and his exclamation, "I was lucky not to have taken the mustard!" broke the nervous strain which, for a moment, held them in its spell. Masters and servants joined in mutual congratulations, and the comprador, making his obeissance with no other sign of emotion than a slight flush mantling his yellow face, said, "You see, Missee H, my talkee tlué! but Missee H. was in a state of collapse."

‘All’s well that ends well,’ but it was far otherwise in the town, where nearly every foreigner was ill, either from the arsenic, acting by its excess as its own antidote, or from medicines administered. There had been but few fatal cases, and they occurred in low boarding houses, and among the dregs of the foreign population, whose powers of resistance had been weakened by abuse of alcohol, or where, in ignorance, remedies were not applied in season. Congratulations however on this apparent immunity were premature; the governor’s wife, Lady Bowring, and many who were rejoicing in their fancied escape, never recovered from the effects of the poison, but, with shattered constitutions and ruined health, dragged on suffering existence for a year or two, and were eventually its victims.

The early discovery of this dastardly attempt was almost accidental; there were but few physicians in the colony, and they were hastily and simultaneously summoned to numerous cases of illness among the moormen and Indian Jews, whose first repast is taken at dawn; the similarity of the symptoms, the fact that the patients had all eaten bread from Ah Lum’s bakery, soon excited suspicions, quickened by the feverish feeling of apprehension in the community. It was speedily ascertained that Ah Lum, and his family, had left for Macao, the same morning, by the steamer *Shamrock*, and that he had been busily engaged, the day preceding, in setting up his affairs. His shop was closed, in itself a suspicious circumstance, but all doubt of his culpability was apparently removed by the detection of poisoned dough in the kneading troughs. Immediate action was imperative if he were to be caught, and, fearing official delays, Robinet, an energetic private citizen, chartered the steamer *Spark*, and started in pursuit.

During the run of four or five hours to Macao several instances of violent sickness occurred on board the *Shamrock*, and it seemed to be produced by the bread, which was supplied by Ah Lum. The suspicions of the Captain, Antonio, were excited, and recognizing the baker and his family among the passengers, he determined to detain them on board pending news from Hong Kong. By his action the *Spark* arrived in time, and, at Robinet’s request, Ah Lum was taken in charge by the Portuguese authorities; soon after the steamer *Queen*, dispatched by the English government, brought a police force with a warrant for his arrest; he was surrendered to their custody, and carried back to Hong Kong in irons.

Lynch law had suddenly become popular in that staid English community. The Anglo-Saxon race has its innate peculiarities which, however disguised under the varnish of habit and civilization, will, under similar provocation, rise to the surface, and the grave law-

abiding British merchants were as eager for the blood of this villain as Texan rangers could be to string up a horse thief. He was however protected by a strong military guard, and incarcerated in the gaol to await a regular trial.

During the few weeks which intervened before he was arraigned, a change came over the spirit of the community; a sense of security had again succeeded to the season of panic, the usual reaction after a period of violent excitement; the crime had, as was then believed, been without result, and a spurious sentiment of pity was aroused for a poor devil, alone, in the midst of a hostile race. At the trial Chisholm Austy, the Attorney General, who, years before, had been pilloried by Punch as the most long winded orator of the House of Commons, wearied out the jury by his wearisome plea, and Ah Lum was acquitted. The grounds of his acquittal were that he was not proven to have mixed in the poison with his own hands, or to have caused it to be so mixed; the only direct evidence was Chinese, and the witnesses, in their own interests and loyal to their master, would swear to any thing. Ah Lum declared, in his defence, that the crime was committed without his connivance, probably by a workman bribed by the Canton officials; he explained his sudden flight by pleading his natural terror of the consequences when he discovered the act, consequences for which, by universal custom in China, he, as proprietor of the bakery, would be responsible, and he alleged that, had he been guilty, he could easily have escaped to the mainland, where pursuit would have been fruitless, whereas he left Hong Kong openly, and was making for his native village, back of Macao, only as a temporary refuge.

The court ruled in his favor to vindicate, even before barbarians, the principle of English law, and the jury accepted the ruling of the judge.

Notwithstanding possible insufficiency of legal proof, no doubt of his responsibility for the crime existed in the minds of the public, both English and native, and a Chinese tribunal, less lenient, would not have hesitated to apply the old maxim of Roman jurisprudence: *qui fecit par aluim, fecit par se.*

Old things are passing away, and all things are becoming new. This decision of the highest authority in the land had a profound effect upon the Chinese community, we, one and all, had expected to see Ah Lum suffer the penalty which, in their estimation, whether personally guilty or not, he fully deserved. It was the commencement of the new order of things, and, more than any single incident, it brought about the change which, in the last thirty years, has taken place in the relations between foreigners and the Chinese.



Responsibility of the superior for his inferior, from the lowest grade to the highest, in successive ranks, is a principle universally reconginzed by Chinese law and Chinese custom, it regulates today all internal matters of the Chinese community in California; it was, from the commencement of foreign relations with China, the safeguard of foreign interests. Now it has given way to the practice of civilized countries, of personal responsibility, with what result, with what diminuation of security in all mercantile affairs, at least, I leave those who now dwell in the Flowery Land to say. The privileges, immunities, and nice legal disinctions of modern European communities have been extended to a half civilized, half barbarous race. The better portion of it, who inherit the virtues of the Howquas, the Cumwas, of a former generation, lament the change; the others cunningly avail of the advantages proffered them, and find it easy to avoid the penalties.

To inexperienced foreign eyes Chinamen are as alike as two peas are to each other, and one might as well hope to pick out a needle from a haystack as to arrest a fugitive. His real name and belonging are generally unknown to the merchant with whom he deals, and once he has plunged into the vast ocean of his country men, he is swallowed up and disappears like a rain drop in a river, while they are as ready to shield a delinquent-brother from pursuit, as they are likely in turn to need protection.