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THE DINGY HOUSE

London is like a large company, where it is necessary for the master or mistress of the house to introduce a great many people to each other. Everybody in that overgrown metropolis has things within a few doors of his residence, which, if they were suddenly described to him, he would hear of with deep interest or extreme astonishment. There is a plain back street near the Haymarket, bearing the title of Great Windmill Street, in which there is a large, dingy-looking house standing somewhat detached, and not appearing to be in the hands of ordinary tenants. Very near this, is a distinguished haunt of gaiety, very well whitened, and looking very smart, but which would be no index to the character or purposes of the dingy mansion. A group of dirty children will be found disporting at marbles or pitch-and-toss on the paved recess in front; but neither would that scene be found in any kind of harmony with the house itself. It is evidently a house with a mystery.

Very few people would be found in the course of a day to pass out of or into that house. A blind would seldom be raised. A fashionable carriage would not once in a twelvemonth be seen rolling up to the gloomy portals. Supposing, however, that any one were to be so curious as to watch the house for an afternoon, he would probably see two women in extraordinary dresses come up to the door, apparently laden with some heavy packages, shrouded under their wide black cloaks. He would see the door opened with some caution, and the two women would then walk in, and be seen no more for that day. He might speculate for hours about the business in which these women had been engaged, but in vain. He might make inquiries in the neighbourhood, but probably with as little result; for, in London, it must be an extraordinary family indeed which provokes any inquiry among neighbours, and most undoubtedly the inmates of the mansion would never think of proclaiming what they were, or how they lived.

Having perhaps by this time excited some curiosity, we must endeavour to satisfy it. We happened by mere chance, when spending an evening with a friend in a distant part of the town, to hear of this house and its tenants; and the doings and character of its inmates struck our mind as something so extraordinary, and in some respects so beautiful, that we resolved, if possible, to pay it a visit. We did so a few days thereafter, under the conduct of a young friend, who kindly undertook to smooth away all difficulties in the way of our reception. We can, therefore, give some account of the dingy house, with a tolerable assurance that, strange as the matter may appear, it is no more than true.

This dingy house is possessed by ten women, chiefly natives of France, who form a branch of a religious society of recent origin in that country, entitled, *Les Petites Sœurs des Pauvres* (*Little Sisterhood for the Poor*). They have been in this house only for a few months, but are already fully engaged in the business to which they have devoted themselves—which is the care and nurture of infirm and destitute old women. The extraordinary thing is that the Sisters, though most of them are in their education and previous habits *ladies*, literally go about begging for the means of maintaining these poor people. Everything is done, indeed, by begging; for on entering the sisterhood they renounce all earthly possessions. They have begged the means of furnishing their house, and paying their rent, which is not an inconsiderable sum; they daily beg for the food, clothes, and cordials required for themselves and the objects of their charity. What is even more singular, these ladies in all respects *serve* the old women, wash for them, cook for them, act as their nurses. They treat themselves less kindly, for out of the broken victuals on which exclusively the house is supported,

the old women always get the first selection, and the ladies only the remaining scraps. It is altogether the most striking example of self-denial and self-devotion which has ever happened to fall under our attention in this country.

We were received in a faded old dining-room, by a Sister whose age surprised us, for she did not appear to be above five-and-twenty. Her dress consisted of coarse black serge, and a linen cap, such as is worn by poor old women in the country. She was evidently a well-educated and refined English lady, who, under a different impulse, might have very probably been indulging at this moment in the gaieties of Almacks. With great courtesy, but without for a moment departing from the serious manner in which she had first addressed us, she conducted us through the house, and explained its various arrangements. We were first shewn into a large hall in the rear, where we found about thirty little beds, only a few of which were occupied, the greater number of the inmates being able to sit up and move about the house. Nothing could exceed the homeliness of the furniture, though everything was remarkably clean. In another dormitory up stairs, we found ten or twelve bedrid women, one of them within a few months of completing the hundredth year of her age, but able to converse. Another was a comparatively young woman, who had three months ago had a limb amputated. A Sister, in her plain dark dress, stood in this room, ready to attend any of the poor women. We were next conducted to a large room, where a number of the inmates were at dinner. They rose modestly at our entrance, and we had some difficulty in inducing them to resume their seats. We were curious to see the viands, knowing that they were composed solely of the crumbs from the rich man's table, and having some idea, that as most of the Sisters were French, there might be some skill shewn in putting these morsels into new and palatable forms. We did not, however, find that the dishes were superior to what might have been expected in a workhouse. The principal article was a pudding, composed of pounded scraps and crusts of bread, and bearing much the appearance of the oatmeal porridge of Scotland. Ladies attend the old women at table, acting entirely as servants do in a gentleman's dining-room, though only in the limited extent to which such services are required at a meal so simple. It is only after this meal is concluded, that the ladies sit down to their own equally frugal fare. We were curious to know if they indulge in tea, considering this as a sort of crucial test of their self-denying principles. We were informed that the article is not bought for them, on account of its being so expensive. Used tea-leaves are obtained from the tables of certain families of rank, and are found to be of service for the comfort of the more infirm women. After the inmates are served, if any tea be left, it is taken by the ladies.

We next descended to the kitchen, and there found a young woman at work as a cook, not a Sister, but one who may be so ere long, if she passes her novitiate successfully. The magazine of crusts and lumps of bread, of broken meat and cold soups, coffee and tea, which we saw here, was a curious sight. We were also shewn the pails and baskets in which the Sisters collect these viands. Two go forth every morning, and make a round of several hours amongst houses where they are permitted to apply. Meat goes into one compartment, bread into another. A pail of two divisions keeps a variety of things distinct from each other. Demurely pass the dark pair along the crowded thoroughfares of the metropolis, objects of momentary curiosity to many that pass them, but never pausing for a moment on their charitable mission. The only approach to a smile on our conductress's face, was when she related to us how, on their return one afternoon, a poor woman who had lost a child, traced them to the door, and made a disturbance there, under a belief that the cloak of one of them, instead of covering a collection of broken meat, concealed her infant.

We were curious to trace the feelings which actuated these ladies in devoting themselves to duties so apt to be repulsive to their class. Viewing the whole matter with a regard to its humane results, we did not doubt that benevolence was the impulse most concerned, directly or indirectly, though we of course knew that a religious sanction was essential to the scheme. In a conversation, however, with our conductress, we could not bring her to admit that mere humanity had anything to do with it. The basis on which they proceed is simply that text in which Christ expresses his appreciation

of those who give a cup of cold water in his name. It is professedly nothing more than an example of those charitable societies which arise in connection with the Catholic faith, and in obedience to its principles, and which require that entire renunciation of the world which to a Protestant mind appears so objectionable. We have little doubt, nevertheless, that a certain amount of benevolence is a necessary, though it may not be a directly acknowledged pre-requisite for the profession; for it is admitted that some novices find that they have not the *vocation*, and abandon the attempt; while others, by the grace of God, are enabled to go on. We cannot regard this idea of 'vocation' as something entirely apart from the inherent feelings.

So far as we could understand, the Sisters regard more expressly the value of the act of obedience to the injunction of Christ, than the feeling from which, we would say, the injunction sprang—an error, as we most humbly think, though one of a kind which we do not feel called upon to discuss in the presence of results so much in accordance with our own best feelings. We would only say, that there is something disappointing in finding how much the whole procedure is beheld by these self-devoting women, as reflecting on their own destinies. It appears that their patients often grumble both at the food and the attendance which they receive. The Sisters say, they like to meet an ungrateful old woman, as it tries their humility and forbearance: it makes the greater merit towards an end in which they themselves are concerned. Now, we would put all this aside, and think only of the divinely recommended sentiment of the text, as calculated in some degree to make our life on earth an approach to that of its author. It is really hypercritical, however, even to intimate these dissenting remarks, especially when our main end is, after all, merely to bring the public into knowledge of an extraordinary phenomenon in human conduct, going on in an age which seems generally of so opposite a character.

The Society of Les Petites Sœurs is, it appears, a new one, having originated only a few years ago in the exertions of an old female servant, who, having saved a little money, thought it could not be better employed than in succouring the aged and infirm of her own sex. Her idea was taken up by others of her own order, as well as by women of superior grade. The society was formed, and establishments were quickly set up in various parts of France. It was only in 1851 that a detachment of the sisterhood came to England, and settled themselves in Great Windmill Street, where, whatever be their motives, it must be admitted they contribute in no slight degree to the alleviation of that vast mass of misery which seems an inseparable element of large cities. They had, at the time of our visit, forty-seven old persons under their care.

At a subsequent period of the same day, we visited an establishment somewhat similar at Hammersmith—at least similar in the repulsive character of the duties, though externally much more elegant. It is housed in a range of good buildings secluded in a garden, and is devoted to the reception of unfortunate young women who, under penitent feelings, wish to be restored to respectable society. The Sisterhood of the Good Shepherd, as they are called, entertain in this house nearly 100 such women, who, while undergoing the process of religious and moral regeneration, employ themselves in washing, so as to contribute to their own support. We saw the whole engaged in their humble employment, excepting a few who were under training in a school. At all times, in their bedrooms, at their meals, in their work-rooms, in their play-ground, they are under the immediate eye of some of the Sisters; but the general treatment includes as much kindness as is consistent with the object held in view. One trait of this kindness struck us as involving a remarkable delicacy: there is never, from first to last, one word of reference made to their former life. They are accepted as so many children coming to school for the first time. Even their names are sunk out of sight, and new ones applied. The Sisters speak of them as 'the children.' We learned that Protestant women are welcomed, but are expected not to stand out in inconvenient dissent from the ordinary rules of the house. We walked into the garden under the care of the mother-superior, and saw their little burial-ground, marked with low wooden crosses inscribed to Laura, to Perpetua, to Mary of the Seven Dolours, and other such names, indicating so many unfortunates who had here found a rest from their troubles. We likewise

visited the chapel, the body of which is arranged for the use of the sisterhood; while a wing running off at the side of the altar, and concealed from view, is provided with seats for the penitents. The whole establishment is characterised by remarkably good taste. There is here a more cheerful tone than in the Great Windmill Street institution. The Sisters spoke, as usual, of being entirely happy—that unaccountable phenomenon to a Protestant mind.

We do not need to inform the reader, that conventual establishments are not now so thin-sown in England as they were a few years ago, or that they occasionally draw into their circle individuals who started in life with very different prospects before them. The whole subject is one worthy of some inquiry, as a feature of our social state, by no means devoid of political importance; and it is for this very reason that we draw attention to the subject. Instead of contemptuously ignoring such things, let them, we say, be made known and investigated in a calm and philosophical spirit. It is for want of a steady comprehension of facts of the kind here adverted to, that an illusion is kept up respecting our existing social condition. It is heedlessly said, and every one repeats the error, that the age is a hard, mechanical one, which shines only in splendid materialities; but is it compatible with this notion, that there is ten times more earnest religious feeling of one kind and another than there was thirty years ago; that antiquities, mediæval literature and architecture, are studied with a zeal hitherto unknown; and that such mystical writers as Carlyle, Tennyson, and Browning, carry off the palm from all the calm-blooded old-school men of letters? We rather think it is the most romantic, supra-material age that has yet been seen. The resurrection of conventual life, in some instances Catholic, in others Protestant, appears to us as one of the facts of this unexpected reaction, which doubtless will run its course, and then give place to something else, though not, we trust, till out of its commixture of good and evil some novelty hopeful for humanity has sprung.

THE LATE EMPEROR OF CHINA

The announcement of a work by the late Dr Gutzlaff, entitled the *Life of Taou-Kwang, late Emperor of China, with Memoirs of the Court of Peking*,¹ excited a good deal of expectation; but for our own part, now that the book is published, we must confess our disappointment on finding it not a well-constructed memoir, but a volume bearing the appearance of a collection of materials put together just as they came to hand, with a view to re-arrangement. Declining health probably prevented the author from perfecting his plan, and hurried his pages to the press; death has now removed him from his labours. But a collection of authentic historic facts is valuable, however loosely embodied; and few writers have enjoyed such favourable opportunities as Dr Gutzlaff for obtaining them.

Referring first to the personal history of Taou-Kwang, we find that his education was more Tatar than Chinese. He was one of the numerous grandchildren of the imperial house of Keelung, but without any expectation of filling the throne, as both his mother and paternal grandmother were inferior members of the imperial harem. The discipline under which the royal family was trained, was of the strictest kind. Each of the male children, on completing his sixth year, was placed with the rest under a course of education superintended by the state. Though eminent doctors were engaged to instruct them in Chinese literature, yet archery and horsemanship were considered higher accomplishments, and the most expert masters from Mongolia and Manchooria trained them in these exercises. They were treated as mere schoolboys, were allotted a very small income for their maintenance, were closely confined to the apartments assigned to them, kept in entire ignorance of passing events, and allowed little intercourse with the court—none with the people. Not till each had passed his twentieth year, was there any relaxation of this discipline. Taou-Kwang was about this age when his father ascended the throne, in consequence of the somewhat capricious appointment of Keelung, who abdicated, and soon after died. The new emperor surrounded himself with buffoons, playactors, and boon-companions. The debaucheries, jealousies, and cruelties of his reign, remind us of what we have half sceptically read of Nero and Caligula. But Taou-Kwang kept aloof alike from the frivolities and the intrigues of his father's court: he seemed to have no desire ungratified so long as he had his bow and arrows, his horse and matchlock; and even after he was unexpectedly nominated heir to the throne, in consequence of having personally defended his father from a band of assassins, his new expectations made no difference in his frugal and modest way of life. The emperor at length died; it did not clearly appear by what means, and it would perhaps have been troublesome to inquire: the empress-dowager waived the claims of her son; and Taou-Kwang ascended the throne without bloodshed. The luxury of the preceding reign now gave place to sobriety and economy; though the usual ceremonies of the court were strictly observed, they were conducted in the least expensive manner; and the ruling passion of the monarch soon appeared to be avarice.

Taou-Kwang had no taste either for literature or the arts; and he jumbled together in one large magazine the beautiful pictures, clocks, and musical instruments accumulated by his ancestors. To explain and repair these, there had always been Europeans, chiefly Portuguese, in attendance; and to some of these we have been indebted in times past for memoirs of the court of Peking; but Taou-Kwang dismissed the last of them. It is believed that an undefined dread of Western power had much to do with this distaste for the products of its ingenuity.

The only orgies which the emperor seemed desirous of maintaining, were feasts for the promotion of Manchoo union; on which occasions, the Manchooes assembled to eat meat without rice—in order to maintain the recollection of their Nimrodic origin—and to drink an intoxicating liquor made of mare's milk. He had a favourite sequestered abode at no great distance from the capital, where he had allowed the vegetation to run wild and rank, in order to make it a rural retreat, instead

¹ London: Smith, Elder, & Co.: 1852.

of an imperial park. All business was excluded from the precincts, and here the emperor spent much of his time, wandering solitarily on foot among the trees, amusing himself with the friends of his youth, or sailing, with some of the ladies of his family, along the mimic rivers.

According to traditional usage, the monarch must perform a pilgrimage to the tombs of his ancestors. The astronomical, or rather astrological board having ascertained the month, the day, the hour, even the minute, when the stars would prove propitious, the cavalcade set out. The princes of the blood, the ladies of the palace, and the favourite ministers of the court, formed part of the train, which was attended by at least 2000 camels. But even an emperor cannot travel through waste and desert lands without inconvenience; and though great preparations had been made beforehand in erecting temporary dwellings where no villages were to be found, yet his Celestial majesty, with his court, had often to bivouac under tents in the open air. The people crowded in thousands to see their sovereign—a liberty which, it is well known, may not be used in Peking, where every one must hasten to hide his head as from the fabled Gorgon. The ancestral tombs at Mookden, where the imperial manes repose under care of a large garrison, were at length reached. And now Taou-Kwang became a family man, abandoning the forms of state and the pomp of empire, and mingling in familiar intercourse with his relatives and attendants. Such particulars prove that we must receive at very considerable discount the descriptions hitherto published concerning the extreme sacredness of the emperor's person, the monotonous routine of ceremony to which he is condemned, and the impossibility of his 'indulging in the least relaxation from the fatiguing support of his dignity.' Turn we now to public events.

By a series of unexpected conquests, the three largest empires in the world have been gradually approaching each other's frontiers in Asia. England, from the distant West, has formed military establishments bordering on Thibet; China, from the remote East, has come to take that country under its dominion; while Russia, the colossus of Europe, has traversed the ice-fields of Siberia, and furnished an extensive northern frontier to Mongolia and Manchooria, the Tatar dominions of China. These powers, by their combined influence, keep within bounds the lawless hordes of Asia, by whose frequent irruptions in past ages vast regions of more civilised territory were overwhelmed, and whole nations extirpated. The empire that effects most in this way is China, and that with the smallest amount of means. Its frontier army is indeed but a burlesque compared with the well-appointed warriors of England and Russia; yet the Usbecks, Calmuks, and Kinghis are kept in subjection. The volume before us gives some insight into the mode in which this is accomplished.

A formidable insurrection, excited partly by religious enthusiasm, broke out in the western parts of Chinese Tatory in 1826. An able leader was found in Tehangir, a descendant of one of the former princes. He proclaimed himself the deliverer of the faithful from the infidel yoke, drew multitudes to his standard, and proceeded victoriously from city to city. The imperial army sent to quell this insurrection cost on an average L.23,000 of our money per day; and though victories were, as usual, reported, there was no appearance of the war coming to a termination. What prowess could not effect was accomplished by bribery. The Mohammedans were themselves divided into rival factions; and the Karatak ('black caps') were induced by Chinese diplomacy to turn against the Altktak ('white caps'), to whom Tehangir belonged. He was betrayed, taken to Peking, and cut to pieces in presence of the emperor; after which, nearly the whole of Turkistan was laid waste by fire and sword. After twenty more of the rebels had been decapitated, the emperor enacted new laws for the country, with the view of attaching the people to himself by the mildness of his rule. The black caps were promoted either to offices of trust in their own country, or to places of distinction in the Chinese army. When Turkistan again became the seat of trouble in 1830, the emperor at once sent 4000 camels with 2,000,000 taëls of silver (about L.700,000) to settle matters, which was considered much wiser than to engage in a long and expensive war. A similar policy was pursued in 1847, when a formidable rising occurred, during which Kashgar was taken, and the Manchoo forces routed. The Mohammedan leaders agreed to accept the emperor's bounty; and on condition of all lives being spared, the imperial troops were allowed to recapture Kashgar as by military force. A splendid victory was of course announced in

the *Peking Gazette*; and in the subsequent distribution of rewards, the diplomatist was raised ten steps above the general.

It is commonly believed that the Celestial Empire dwells in perpetual peace within itself, as the fruit of that universal spirit of subordination and filial obedience which is the great object of all its institutions. Nothing, however, can be more erroneous. Not only do the restless Tatars frequently break into revolt, but in China itself, the extortions of the mandarins, or the occurrence of famine, frequently excites a village, a city, or even a large district to rebellion; and there are cases of an infuriated population actually broiling their magistrates over a slow fire. The usual policy of Taou-Kwang in all such cases was to send an army, but at the same time to set the leaders at loggerheads by administering suitable bribes, and inducing them to betray each other. In this manner, a civil war can be brought to a speedy conclusion; and then the cruelty of the victorious government knows no bounds. 'The treatment of political prisoners,' says our author, 'is really so shocking as to be incredible, if one had not been an eye-witness of these inhuman deeds.'

The volume affords us some amusing particulars connected with the collision with England. When the British fleet was expected in the Chinese waters, the imperial orders were, to 'listen to no proposals, but fire on the ships, and annihilate them at once.' To the great emperor, it would have appeared quite ridiculous to condescend to negotiation with so inferior a power as Britain: he had given his orders; these must be obeyed; and his minister had himself written a letter to Queen Victoria, that she might not plead ignorance of the high behests of his Celestial majesty. It was not till the fleet appeared at the mouth of the Pei-Ho, and the capital was in danger, that Taou-Kwang deigned to seek an accommodation by means of his smooth-tongued minister Keshen, who negotiated an armistice, promising that all wrongs would be redressed by a commission appointed to meet the British representatives at Canton. But as soon as the fleet turned southward, the danger was considered visionary; and again the cry arose to punish the insolence of the Western barbarians, as the English were politely designated. The empress-dowager, who was never before known to meddle with state affairs, told her son that 'the English and Chinese could not co-exist under the canopy of heaven; that the Celestial Empire must assert its superiority over these barbarian robbers; and that unless he waged war to their utter extermination, his ancestors would never acknowledge him in Hades.' Keshen was now denounced as a traitor to his country for having come to any terms; he was sentenced to death; and though his execution was deferred, yet his whole property, amounting in silver alone to the value of three millions sterling, was confiscated; his very wives were sold by auction; and he who had been one of the richest men in the empire, had not the means of buying himself a jacket.

Elepoo, the imperial commissioner at Ning-poo, opposite Chusan, was also denounced. His crime was, that he had, according to the terms of the truce, surrendered the English prisoners, notwithstanding the counter-orders he had received to send them to Peking as trophies of victory, to be cut to pieces according to custom. Among them was a captain's wife, who had been wrecked, and had thus fallen into his power. A happy thought struck some of the mandarins—that she might be passed off as the sister of the barbarian Queen. She was accordingly put into a cage, and carried about for exhibition; but Elepoo delivered her from the excruciating death she would have suffered as Queen Victoria's sister, and restored her to her countrymen. The whole cabinet was indignant; he was summoned to appear immediately before his exasperated sovereign, and sentenced to transportation to the deserts of Manchooria.

When it came to fighting in earnest, and there was for the Chinese, as we know, nothing but utter defeat, still there was no report sent to court but of victory. But as million after million of taëls vanished, and grandee after grandee disappeared, the emperor was obliged to be informed of the real state of affairs, and his wrath knew no bounds. In vain he threatened utter destruction to the barbarians, if they did not instantly leave the coasts; in vain called on the people to arm themselves *en masse*

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