

L.C. ARLINGTON

(ET LUX PERPETUA LUCEAT EI)

EXCERPTS FROM

**THROUGH
THE
DRAGON'S EYE**

OF PIPEDREAM, PASTTIMES,
CRUELTY AND OPIUM

(1879-1931)



VIIENNE

EDITION ACÉPHALE MMXXII

EDITÉ PAR F. STUMMER ET A. VADIM

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THE NATURE OF THE CHINESE: A RACE WITHOUT NERVES?

(1884-1885)

THE CHINESE are said to be absolutely without nerves. Granted. I have seen a Chinese tramcar driver, for instance, deliberately run over a man; and another such driver just as nonchalantly run over a woman and child, without showing the least sign of “nerves,” or even compassion. Yet the driver would hesitate running over a dog, because within the latter might be the transmigrated spirit of an ancestor. We are therefore not dealing with nerves, but with superstition : in the first case it was the fate (*t'ien-ming*) of the people run over to be killed in just that way, and if anyone had tried to save them, he might be killed instead ; in the second case

under illustration, to kill the dog would involve a penalty for murdering an about-to-be reborn ancestor. Now, it is well known that nervous people are the salt of the earth; men with brains that thrill, feel, are quick in action, men of the highest organisation, the leading men of the world are drawn from the highly tensioned; they are the rulers, whether of the Chinese or of any other nation. The Chinese are essentially a lymphatic race, though an attempt to ginger them up is now being made by the Nanking academics. The Chinese physiognomy is not—save under the influence of hysteria—characterised by energy and intensity of thought and feeling. The passivity—so-called inscrutability—of the Chinese countenance is the reflex of cerebration lying fallow, cerebration gently exercised as required—no more. The Chinese are not, therefore, prone to nerve trouble, and never—and the most sceptical will no doubt bear me out—seem to be able to do more than they are doing. Hence, it is because they are not, in general, highly strung, that they suffer least from nervous diseases. Of course a low level of nervous organisation, or imperfect education, may be the underlying cause, or their excellent husbandry of brain power. The baneful opium habit—said to be on the decline, though not so much as is believed since the prohibition—has exerted no little

influence against nervous irritability; but it is to be feared that as the tension of life becomes more acute, and alcoholism takes the place of opium (which it is unfortunately doing) the Chinese before long will have joined the long list of sufferers from “nervous irritability” and “nervous debility.”

THE CHINESE AND GAMBLING

(1884-1885)

TO RESUME our subject of gambling. Go where you will: on board junk, steamer or *sampan*; into eating-houses, brothels, private or public residences; be it the hovel of a beggar, or the mansion of a millionaire, you will find the Chinese at their favourite pastime. The most curious sight witnessed by me in this particular relation was as recently as 1927, when I was stationed at Nanchang. Just at the rear of where I lived there was a private school for boys and girls, and while they were inside repeating their lessons in a loud voice, the *hsien-sheng* (teacher) was sitting at a table in the yard with several other men—amongst them several soldiers— gambling! Every once in a while one of the pupils came out and walked round the table looking at each of the players' hands and

passing remarks on them. The teacher was so intent on studying his own hand that he never even noticed the arrivals! This seminary was a typical example of the inland educational by-products produced by recent progressive efforts in cultural reforms. I had seen many private schools in China in the old days, and although some of the “teachers” did not worry overmuch as to whether their pupils! studied or not, I never saw or heard of them inviting their friends in for a little “game” to pass away the time during school hours ! If I were asked the proportion of the people that smoked opium, and of those that gambled, I would unhesitatingly reply that 1 per cent, smoke opium, and at least 85 per cent, gamble.

No family is without some member, man or woman, who gambles; whereas there are many families who have not an opium smoker among them. But if the husband smokes opium, it is practically certain that his wife or his concubine—if he has any—smokes too, and if the wife or concubine smokes, it is morally certain that j the husband does. Another factor is that opium is too expensive to be indulged in by many, whereas gambling always offers a hope of winning. Of course, many

Chinese do not gamble regularly, and some do not even understand any of the games, but there are many

temptations—especially to a young man who “goes in company.” He may not be able to distinguish one card from another; but his “friends” insist that he at least “try,” and, if he still refuses, a “friend” will offer to play for him; if he loses, the dupe must pay the piper; if he wins, the “friend” pockets the winnings. Many of the young men educated abroad resent such low actions, and many of them, for this reason, avoid social gatherings as much as possible. Hence they are not *persona grata*, and are called “pro-foreign devils,” or running dogs.

OF INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE

(1889-1891)

ANOTHER CASE where women were concerned also occurred during my stay at Foochow. One day there arrived a Blue Funnel steamer which had on board two returned Chinese students married to English girls. This caused no little flutter of excitement amongst the local whites, and a subscription was collected to send the damsels back to England. The delegation—mostly missionaries—appointed to carry out the order of the community proceeded on board and



KILLING A PIG AND OTHER PASTIMES

(1889)

DURING THE HOLIDAYS – and there were many in those days – we used to go to Chutzulin, Bamboo Grove, on the hills a few miles from Chinkiang. It was a pleasant retreat, heavily wooded with bamboo, pine, scrub oak, and other trees, and here we all spent many happy days. There was a Customs bungalow well stocked with canned food, wines, beer, etc. This was a good starting-point for the “wild-pig” country, as we called it. There were also large numbers of little red deer, and other game, especially pheasants and sand-grouse. But the wild-pig were hard to get, although near at hand. The natives were then, as they are now, a hard lot to deal with, and going to and coming from Chutzulin we frequently got into trouble with the village rowdies, who started a fuss on the slightest pretext. On one occasion a member of the Customs staff, when returning from Chutzulin, was attacked by a gang of local bullies who claimed that my colleague had set the scrub on fire by throwing away a lighted cigar when on his way to Chutzulin three days before. My friend received a severe beating, was then tied tightly on a donkey he was riding and escorted to Chinkiang, where he was handed

over to the British Consul, heavy charges being preferred for damage done—which, on investigation, proved to be nil. Another time an Irishman, while out shooting, got into serious trouble with these bullies because a shot he fired at a pheasant while on the wing, was said to have struck a woman in the face. After knocking down the sportsman and taking away his gun, the village rowdies led him to Chinkiang and handed him over to the British Consul, demanding an indemnity for wounds inflicted on the woman. When she was examined by the port doctor, it was found that she bore a faint trace of a pellet on her forehead, probably the mark of a spent discharge. On this our Irish friend, “Paddy”—who, like most Irishmen, dearly loved a fight—seized one of the principal bullies, and gave him such a hammering that his own mother would not have recognised him. This provided the Consul with a suitable opportunity to impose a fine of \$50 for assault, and the matter ended. Apart from our troubles with the natives, there were amusing incidents in our wanderings through the country. One Chinese New Year, when we used to have from seven to nine days’ holiday, a party of us went to Chutzulin on a shooting tour. It had been arranged between us that only wild-pig were to be shot, and that anyone of the party who shot anything else would be made to pay

the entire expense of the trip. We had not gone far—the party being separated in groups of twos and threes—when my companion, pointing to a small ravine, said: “I have just seen the top of a boar’s head along to the left.” Within a few seconds I saw the greyish head of what I took to be a boar and fired. What was my chagrin to find that I had shot and killed a porcupine! Despite my excuse and explanation that the object looked just like a boar’s head, I was compelled to pay the expenses of the trip, which, under the circumstances, took the pleasure out of it. The following morning I was awakened at about 5.30—it was still dark— by the movements of someone in the room, and, on lifting my head, saw “Paddy’s” boy pushing his master, and, on his awakening, whispering something to him. I lay motionless to see what was in the wind, suspecting that he was calling his master to get ready before we did. And so it turned out. Our Irish friend quietly got up, slipped on his clothing and boots and, hurriedly drinking a cup of coffee already prepared, he grabbed his shot-gun and left the bungalow. I concluded that „Paddy’s“ boy must have given him information that pig were about. Getting up at once and calling to the others of the party, I told them what had happened; when, having hurriedly dressed, and being on the point of leaving the room,

we suddenly heard two shots fired in quick succession nearby. On our way through the bamboos we met our colleague, who, in an excited manner, told us that he had shot and killed a fine old boar, adding that he was on his way back to get a torch. Naturally we reprimanded him for his subtle Hibernian methods. On returning with the torch, we were joined by the monks of the temple next door—they having been aroused by the shooting—and the quarry proved to be the monks' watchdog! The monks, on seeing that their "wonk" was dead, became boisterous and grabbing hold of our crack shot, they demanded compensation to the tune of \$500, reduced the following day, after much bickering, to \$50.

Once while out shooting pheasant in Chinkiang, I shot by accident a water-buffalo. The brute charged immediately, and my only chance was a small grave about 6 feet high; this I made for and, standing on the top, waited for the beast to come. He came straight for me, and, seeing no chance of retreat, I fired both barrels of my shot-gun loaded with No. 5 shot right between his eyes. The buffalo actually stood up on his head after he received the charge and then turned as if to charge again. By this time the villagers arrived with their farming implements, and seemed bent on charging me too.

As I had no desire to be hacked by their rakes and other tools, I simply said: "*Ni-men tou Ch'ih lo fan lo ma*" (Have you all had your food?)—equivalent to our "good morning." "*Ch'ih lo*" (we have fed), they replied ; and I was saved from their wrath. Later on, I gave them a dollar and we parted very good friends. *Ch'ih lofan lo ma* is a good thing to remember in China, when you get into some trouble or other with the peasants. These words, supplemented with a dollar or two, will carry you through almost anything.



THE DINNER OF 1000 DISHES

(1886-1889)

IT IS ONLY FAIR to add, however, that a considerable share of the rewards went in feasts given by the Admirals and senior officers. The former generally gave one dinner each a week, and the latter one every few days; so that we had on an average from four to six special dinners a week. The courses consisted of every conceivable and also inconceivable dainty, and the time taken in consumption was incredible. Usually beginning at six or seven in the evening and lasting until daylight, these Gargantuan meals comprised from 60 to 100 dishes each. Exceedingly elaborate and sumptuous as were the repasts, no doubt they assisted towards good-fellowship, as well as helping to kill our leisure time. Nevertheless, the everlasting gorging, combined with the drinking of all sorts of wines and liqueurs, played havoc with the inner man. Sometimes we had foreign wines, and when these were exhausted, native wine was produced. One or two of the foreigners preferred the *samshu*; and to men who had never tasted anything more refined than “Square-face” gin, no doubt some of the finer native wine, as the matured Shaohsing kind—very delicately flavoured and not

unlike a mild sherry—was a luxury. Although I seldom noticed any drunkenness amongst the Chinese, several of the foreigners — who actually looked for these carousals – overstepped all the known rules of etiquette by getting drunk on every occasion. What edification for the Chinese, who behaved themselves like gentlemen! An added attraction at the dinners were the numerous charming “Sing-song girls” who were invited on board.

They would sit behind our chairs and screech into our ears to the tune of a Chinese three-stringed guitar, a small drum, and castanets. They would play each of us a round or two of *hua-ch'üan* (morra), crack melon seeds, and put the pips in our mouths. During the intermission there would be lively conversation going on all round the table; these girls knew all the local gossip, and the latest scandal, even telling us when the French were expected to make an attack! I was aware, of course, that the “Sing-song girls” were supposed to provide bright spots for tired business men and the officials, but it was a revelation to me to find that they would be allowed on board ships of war, especially during wartime! I have frequently observed since that the Chinese – like the Irish – are very susceptible to the fair sex, and will make love to any woman who will allow them. Whether the average

Chinese can stand more alcohol than foreigners I would not like to say; at these feasts they took glass for glass, yet never once got into that beastly state of intoxication some of our men did. And how they could eat! While we foreigners could seldom manage more than thirty dishes, they would go through the entire menu and look for more! Moreover, we were perforce obliged to over-eat, Chinese politeness requiring that the hosts should pick out the choicest morsels with their chopsticks, and place such in our bowls. The following morning we foreigners were “laid up for repairs,” while our Chinese colleagues would lay down for a few hours – and by nine o’clock the “click-clack” of the dice told us that they were good for another day. Truly a most extraordinary people when it comes to eating and drinking. There must be wonderful vitality in a race which can perform such marathon feats of endurance: a good example of the “survival of the fittest.”



THE DEATH OF 1000 CUTS

(1919-1926)

KWANGSI had for many years past been a hotbed of disturbance, and during the later days revolutionary disorder was merely the normal thing throughout the entire province. Bandits terrorised the people and butchered them without mercy; the farmers, losing their water- buffaloes, were precluded from tilling their fields—many of the younger husbandmen then deserting their farms, joining up with the bandits, and even attacking their own homesteads. From personal

observations at Nanning, I found that, for a radius of some thirty miles, not a patch of ground had been put under cultivation for years because the bandits stole all the water-buffaloes. In a group of villages near Nanning the bandits rounded up a hundred head of water-buffaloes, together with the boys and girls tending them, and disappeared with the entire lot as though by magic. Villages would be attacked almost within sight of Nanning; indeed the bandits looted and set fire to the headquarters of the army chief, escaping with their plunder just as the soldiers appeared on the scene, the latter helping themselves to what remained. Many of my couriers resigned to join the army where, as they informed me, “though they did not get so much pay, they made up for it in loot when they captured a city!” The villagers sometimes had an opportunity for revenge. In a particular case I remember, the soldiers captured a bandit leader who had looted and murdered a number of local people. The bandit was handed over to the tender mercies of the long-suffering, and duly sliced to pieces, those pieces being salted down for palatability and then eaten by way of quid pro quo. Kwangsi, with its estimated population of five millions, had something very like 1,000,000 bandits and pirates. Ch’en King-hwa, who was treacherously shot to death by Lung Chi-kuang at

Canton, told me that when he was magistrate at Kweilin he had ordered over 100,000 of the scum to be executed, and yet had left fully ten times that number for his successor to deal with. One gang, the members of which wore yellow socks and were termed the "yellow socks," were notorious for their atrocities, such as slicing their victims and eating their flesh; and at Kweilin it was a common sight to see dozens of this special brand of desperado taken outside the city walls and shot to death, their bodies being left for the dogs to feed on.

Some of these bandit gangs were led by women, who truth to tell were even worse than the men they commanded. One case came to my special notice, the particulars of which I sent to the China Mail of Hong Kong. The woman—subsequently discovered to be the leader of a band of assassins—together with her paramour, murdered her husband in a most brutal manner. She first gave him small doses of poison, but as these did not work quickly enough to suit her, she and her paramour collaborated in driving one large spike into the victim's brain, and another through his spine. The paramour (a soldier) and she were finally taken in a village where they were in hiding, and brought to Kweilin for trial. Ch'en K'un — who subsequently became Tutu of Kwangsi—was

at that time the Defence Commissioner at Kweilin, and personally investigated the matter, the result being that both criminals were condemned to the *ling-ch'ih* (slicing). I was present at that execution, and it was an appalling sight to witness. The woman, after being sliced from head to feet, was a terrible sight to behold—and as if that were insufficient punishment, a tin of kerosene was poured over her body and fire applied, literally burning her to a cinder. The paramour, however, was merely sliced (which of course was bad enough) the burning process being omitted in his case. I observed here, as I often have, that the Chinese, though very inoffensive in their normal state, turn into perfect fiends when aroused; they resemble half-grown children who, when stung by an insect, will tear out its wings, legs and other convenient parts of its anatomy from pure devilment.

While on the subject of the “slicing process,” I am reminded of a case that also came under my personal observation when at Soochow in 1904. A woman and her son were apprehended for incest and the murder of her husband to boot. They were taken to the execution ground, where thousands of Chinese had foregathered in expectation of the treat that was to come—amongst them being many women with their children in their arms. What a training! Can we wonder

at the callousness displayed by the Chinese to all sorts of suffering, when they at an early age have witnessed the most horrible tortures? In the case I am relating the mother and son were bound before being sliced, the executioners twisting their arms and legs and actually breaking their bones in the process. Several of the Customs staff were present and one, who had brought his camera intending to take a snapshot, became so overcome at the frightful sight that he collapsed and fainted on the spot. This incident attracted the attention of the officials and they ordered us away, saying that we foreigners had no business there." Yes, we had no business there!

A CRUEL LOVER OF WOMEN'S FEET

(1930)

ALL THE REBEL CHIEFS were cruel, but in wanton savagery none approached Chang Hsien-chung. On one occasion at Ma Ch'eng Hsien, he cut off the feet of all the women and piled them in heaps. And at the sack of Wu-ch'ang the slaughter was so great that the waters of the river were strewn with corpses as far as three hundred miles below.



CHINESE THERIANTHROPY: OF SUPERSTITION AND METAMORPHOSIS

(1909-1913)

THE CANTONESE held Lung Chi-kuang in great awe. He was said to be a Miao tzu – a wild aboriginal tribe of Kweichow and elsewhere – and the story got about, and was absolutely credited, that one of his Cantonese servants had seen H.E. taking a bath and that he had a tail about 3 inches long dependent from the end of his spine, proving that Lung was a monkey in disguise! This may appear ridiculous, but such a report is nothing to, people who believe that if a rat eats salt

it will change into a bat, or a spider similarly into an old man, and that a cat that eats a rat will be drunk for three days, etc. It is therefore quite a matter of course, by the same process, for a man with a tail to transmute into a monkey.

Besides, are there not the following cases recorded by a Confucian writer: "Mr. Li of the Sui dynasty 581 A.D. became a bear; Mr. Kuang turned into a three-footed creature; Mr. Po became a dragon ; Mr. Tu, a heron ; Mr. Ai, an ox ; Mr. Pen, a dog ; Mr. Sun, a pig ; Mr. Ku, a frog ; Mr. Lin, a fish ; Mr. Shu, a bird ; Mr. Ma, a serpent."

It is believed by some Chinese that animals came from man, and that this has been the order of transformation from the past to the present, only that men have no tails, fur or horns! It is also believed by many that butchers, when they die, lie on the ground and make a noise like pigs or sheep, and that they are born again in the forms of those animals or as dogs, and that their children are born with sheep's heads, or serpents' bodies, or merely as lumps of flesh.



ACÉPHALE

ET IN ARCADIA EGO