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# CHINESE SLAVERY IN AMERICA.

BY CHARLES FREDERICK HOLDER.

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AMONG the factors which have aided in producing industrial unrest on the Pacific Slope during past decades has been the almost unrestricted pouring in of alien races, particularly the Chinese. The question has assumed grave importance, especially in California, where almost every political contest during the past twenty years has had some bearing upon the so-called colonization of the Chinese in America and their usurpation of the industrial field of the American citizen.

While this aspect of the question has been the disturbing and dominating feature continually before the public, there is another and darker side to this alien movement, one which shows the Chinese in America to be a constant menace to law, order, and morality.

Several months ago the Chinese Consul of San Francisco waited in some state on one of the missions in that city and demanded the release of a fugitive slave, for the "honor of China and the Chinese." The representative of the Emperor was rebuffed, and he retired to advise his countryman who owned the woman by right of purchase to apply an American method known as the writ of *habeas corpus*. This was done, the woman being taken into court and fought over for several weeks, during which the world at large became aware that there existed in America a system of slavery as obnoxious and debased as could be found in any slave-dealing country of to-day. There was nothing remarkable in the action of the Consul, as the peculiar and elastic code of morals possessed by the Chinese permits slavery, recognizing it as an institution to be protected and fostered, especially in America.

The large Chinese settlement in San Francisco has made this

traffic in human beings not merely possible, but a business followed as a means of profitable investment, under the protection and patronage of two Chinese societies, and here, in the heart of an American city, we find one of the best-organized slave marts of modern times, fostered by as motley a band of criminals as could be produced in any portion of the uncivilized world; a band numbering at least three thousand, who derive their support directly or indirectly from the sale and barter of female slaves.

The Chinese population of San Francisco is estimated at 20,000. Of these 5,000 are factory hands; 5,000 claim to be merchants; 4,000 are domestic servants; 3,000 are the criminals referred to, and 3,000 are women and children. Of the 2,500 females it is estimated with more or less accuracy that 1,000 are legitimate wives, the remaining 1,500 being slaves in the fullest sense; girls kidnapped in their homes in the Orient, brought to America by fraud and imposture, passed through the custom-house under false oaths, in fear of death or dire consequences, put up at auction before professional slave merchants, knocked down to the highest bidder, and condemned, in the majority of instances, to a life under duress in the Chinese brothels of an American city.

Such a slave the Chinese Consul referred to demanded. The woman had been sold and believed that she was a slave; but when her master attempted to sell her six-year-old child on the ground that she gave it too much care, and that it interfered with her work, she fled to one of the missions and asked for shelter and protection; there learning for the first time that she was a free woman under the laws of the United States. After a long legal contest she was returned to the charge of the Methodist mission.

A young Chinese girl, from nine to twelve years of age, in San Francisco to-day has a market value of from \$150 to \$500. A girl from twelve to sixteen, if attractive, is quoted on change among the high-binders, who constitute the brokers in this unique American Exchange, at from \$500 to \$1,500, while for girls over this age the prices range up to \$3,500, which has been paid on the very good ground that such an investment will return a profit of twenty or thirty per cent.

Slavery has existed among the Chinese in California for years, and continues almost unrestricted. As these lines are written

the courts of San Francisco are fighting over the case of a slave named Fong, who claims to have been kidnapped in China, brought to America, and sold to the highest bidder. She finally escaped to one of the missions, that has so far successfully defied her owners, and, as a result, the question of Chinese slavery will undoubtedly be thoroughly ventilated.

The investigation of this and other cases, and examination of the records of the Chinese-American missions, show that slavery of the most horrible and debased nature is being carried on wherever the Chinese have a foothold. From authoritative sources it has been learned that slaves are, as a rule, badly treated, and the court and mission records abound in citations showing gross cruelty. The slaves are of two classes—young girls, used as household drudges, and adults, held for immoral purposes by their owners, who rent or sell them.

This criminal or slave-dealing class constitutes an important element in Chinatown, and has an organized system so elaborately and cunningly devised that so far it has been impossible to stamp out the practice. It seems incredible that slavery should be boldly advocated and carried on with all the elaboration and system that characterize any successful commercial project; yet America is the principal field of the Oriental slave dealer, and San Francisco the headquarters for those engaged in the traffic. Here, on Dupont Street, until within a short time, was an apartment known as the "Queen's Room," in reality a public slave mart, where the victims were brought and exhibited to dealers and would-be purchasers. The two societies already mentioned have systematized the business in such a manner that it is a very simple process to evade the American law. The headquarters are in San Francisco, agents being stationed at Canton, Amoy, and other large Chinese cities. These, in turn, have sub-agents in the suburban districts, whose duty it is to kidnap the victims and forward them to the agent at the shipping ports, who usually consigns them to a travelling or confidential agent, whose duties lie not alone in guarding the human property, but in instructing the women so that they will be able to pass the Custom House authorities. Unfortunately the Chinese law and custom of marriage aids the kidnapper. A wife rarely sees her husband before marriage; the affair being a business arrangement, pure and simple, and the

girl bargained for by the agent of the prospective husband. The agent of the San Francisco dealer, in the fulfilment of his duty, pretends to represent a wealthy man searching for a wife. In this guise he approaches a country girl, to whom he holds out the inducement of a rich husband at Canton. Inexperienced, her imagination excited by the picture of a life of luxury or ease drawn by the agent, she consents to accompany him to meet her husband and leaves her home never to return. Arriving at some port, the agent invents a story to the effect that the husband has been called away to another place, and has left word for her to follow. Still unsuspecting, she is shipped on an American steamer with others in charge of another agent. When far out at sea the victim usually rebels, but is quieted by the agent, who now informs her that she is in the greatest danger ; that if she cannot succeed in passing the American officials at San Francisco she will be thrown into prison and subjected to torture. There is one opportunity to escape, she is told, and that is by pretending that she is a married woman returning to her husband after a visit to China. She is also given a forged certificate and a slip containing the name and address of her supposed husband in San Francisco. This story the victim is forced to learn and adhere to under threats of violence or death, and the terrified girl readily enters into the scheme to deceive the American Custom House officers, who are supposed to enforce a vigorous examination in each case ; but despite this there are hundreds of illegal entries. The Hon. John H. Wise, Collector of the Port of San Francisco, in reply to a letter from the writer, said : " We have nothing to indicate the character of Chinese women who come here for the purpose of landing. Those who have come since I have had charge of this office claim to be either married women or native born. The question of the right of either to land is determined by the proof presented. If there are any prostitutes among them they would be generally found among those who claim to be native born, and we frequently hear of girls so landed being in houses of ill fame. But there is no way to reach them, because they come and land as native born, and while they can submit ample proof of nativity the government is unable to produce evidence to the contrary."

The girls who are examined before the collector for admission are valued at from \$150 to \$3,500, the latter sum having been

paid in one instance ; consequently every effort is made by the consignee to bring them through the ordeal successfully. This accomplished, the girl, who, perhaps, still expects to meet her promised husband, is taken to a boarding-house, provided with a rich wardrobe and rendered as attractive as possible. She is now (or she used to be, before the place was closed by the police) conducted to the "Queen's Room," which she is told belongs to her husband and where she is to receive his friends. The girl is now really on exhibition for sale, and is critically examined by high-binders, slave-dealers, speculators, brothel keepers, and others interested in the sale. Finally a price is agreed upon and she becomes the property of some man whom she supposes to be her husband. The plot is not discovered by the credulous victim until her master hands her over to the keeper of a brothel. In four-fifths of the cases of slavery this is the method of procedure, which, it is needless to say, is invariably effective, the victim rarely if ever escaping.

A typical instance is that of a girl who was kidnapped in Canton. The Chinese agent received \$185 for her, and handed her over to Gue Ka Sheng, a professional slave-dealer. Gue had no certificate, so he invoked the American law and brought the girl ashore on a writ of *habeas corpus*, where, after some controversy in the courts, she was released and spirited up the country by her master's wife, who sold her to a man for \$600. Her new owner beat her persistently for "moral insubordination," or for refusing to debase herself, and, finding her rebellious, sold her to a Chinaman who agreed to marry her and pay for her on the instalment plan, which he finally did.

It might be assumed that the tribulations of this slave woman were over, but about the time of the last payment her husband made a journey to China, leaving her in the care of his brothers. The latter, in the course of time finding themselves in need of money, determined to sell their sister-in-law, but the woman made such a vigorous resistance that they were prevented from carrying out their plan. They then began systematically to beat her, so that she would run away and they could claim that she had deserted her husband. Failing in this, they hired a professional high-binder and murderer to kill her. This man fired at her once and, failing, lost his courage. Another hatchet-boy was employed to kill her, but being paid in advance he warned

the woman and fled to China with the money. Another attempt would have been made, but at this juncture she was rescued by the Rev. N. R. Johnston and taken under the protection of the Chinese Mission in San Francisco with one child, the other, fifteen months old, having been sold by her husband's brothers despite her opposition.

The records of the missions abound in similar accounts, a series of horrors which should arouse a protest all over the land. The instance of the girl Woon Tsun illustrates the tenacity of purpose which characterizes the slave-dealer. Since the enactment of the Restriction Act it has been more difficult to introduce slaves, and girls who formerly brought but \$150 are now valued at \$800. The father of the girl in question had borrowed a certain sum of a slave-dealer named Kum Moh, and, being unable to liquidate the debt, gave his daughter, six years of age, as full payment. The child was discovered in one of the worst dens in the famous Bartlett Alley in San Francisco, from which she was taken by the Presbyterian Mission authorities on an order of arrest, the charge being that she was a minor in a house of ill repute. This child was valued at \$1,500, and her owners began a legal contest which well demonstrated the power and influence of the society of slave-dealers. Kum Wah, through an American lawyer of ability, attempted to have the guardianship of the Presbyterian Mission superintendent set aside, and Mah Sing, a keeper of a brothel, appointed in her place. For weeks this case was fought by the Chinese slave-dealers and the Christian women of the Presbyterian Mission, the American lawyer attempting by every means to drive the latter from the court. The Chinese societies engaged in this traffic have a large fund for the prosecution of disputed cases, and aided by American lawyers and the writ of *habeas corpus* they are often successful in regaining possession of these human chattels. To fight these societies several denominations, notably the Presbyterians and Methodists, have established missions in San Francisco, where slaves are taken and every effort made to break up the nefarious practices of the slave-dealer. But the manager of one of the missions recently stated that the law was almost inoperative; that women and girls were still being bought and sold and condemned to a life of shame, and that instead of being an asylum for the oppressed, America, or that portion peopled by the

Chinese, was as black a slave market as any the world had yet seen.

The missions of San Francisco and their managers are, naturally, the object of attack, and the high-binders and slave-dealers make every possible attempt at retaliation. Repeated efforts have been made to kidnap rescued girls, the managers threatened with death and marked by the hatchet-boys for destruction. But their good work goes on, girls and women being rescued by the law, and by force when the law is not applicable to the case.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to present adequately the full horrors of this practice of slavery, yet they should be known, and doubtless the mission authorities will tell the whole story to those interested in philanthropic work.

The life of the slave is a chapter telling of total debasement and ill treatment. The mission managers have found girls who have been burnt with red-hot irons, dragged about by the hair, and had their eyes propped open with sticks. Slaves that are resold are sold by a contract, a document which, while unfit for publication, is a most remarkable paper, showing that the sale of women is looked upon in the same light as that of the lowest animals. At the present time every effort is being made to suppress this traffic, but under the existing law little can be expected. The women are brought in boldly on forged certificates or false oaths of their nativity, smuggled in at the Mexican and Canadian borders, and without some extraordinary effort slavery will continue uninterrupted on American soil.

CHARLES FREDERICK HOLDER.