

The Celestials in Sunday School

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An article about the Sunday School established under the direction of Rev. T.A. Griffin in 1870 for the instruction in Religious and Secular knowledge for approximately 100 Chinese shoe-workers brought to North Adams by Mr. Calvin T. Sampson from California

THE CELESTIALS IN SUNDAY-SCHOOL.

ONE of the most interesting Sabbath services in New England, and very likely in the Union, is that held each Sunday afternoon in Messrs. Sampson & Co.'s shoe factory at North Adams, Massachusetts, and known as the "Chinese Sunday-school." The interest is not confined to the casual visitor, or those engaged in the school, for here, week by week, is being wrought out the solution of that problem which agitated many earnest minds when the "heathen" first landed on Puritan soil—"Can these men be Americanized?" Very many Christian men who were not alarmed by any other aspect of the Chinese question, and who cared for no other, shook their doubting heads when they spoke of the strange language, different social customs, and benighted spiritual condition of the new-comers.

But a very brief observation showed that the Celestials were willing and anxious to learn of that which pertained to their temporal welfare, and hearts inspired with true zeal at once determined that this trait of character should be made the means of their advancement in other directions, as well as in the making of shoes. A consultation between the different pastors of the village and Mr. Chase, the partner of Mr. Sampson, resulted in the

opening of a Sunday school in the Chinese quarters. Mr. Chase, aided by the clergymen, and especially by Rev. T. A. Griffin, of the M. E. Church, naturally fills the place of superintendent. In the various Sunday-schools of the village a call was made for volunteer teachers, and a general response came.

It was very easy to volunteer—not so easy to teach the "heathen." Scarcely one of the Celestials, with the exception of the interpreter, Charley Sing, knew a word of English, and very surely the teachers knew nothing of Chinese. But not disheartened even by this unpromising state of affairs, the self-appointed missionaries set to work, and now, after the lapse of something like five months, we look in upon them.

A graveled walk around to the rear of the three-story brick building which Mr. Sampson converted into a shoe factory, brings us directly to the Chinese quarters—a suite of large rooms in the rear portion of the building. Passing first through the sleeping-room, with which we have nothing to do, we enter another apartment, and find ourselves at once in the midst of the school.

The school-room is some thirty feet in length by half the width, and ten tables, five

upon each side, are already surrounded by teachers and pupils. It is now half-past four, and school has just commenced. Upon one side of the room a number of gas jets give an uncertain light, while the other tables are illuminated by lamps, candles, whatever may be impressed for service.

Each table has from four to six of the yellow-skinned pupils, all dressed in their best, quite a number of them appearing in neat black suits of the latest American style. There are nearly an equal number of teachers, very few having more than one scholar, none more than two. And here the usual experience of schooling is reversed. The Celestials are all young men, of small stature, and to the stranger appear quite as much alike as so many peas. There is the greatest diversity among the teachers. At one side of a table sits a dignified, middle-aged man, judge of the district court, earnestly laboring to impress new ideas, or ideas in a new form, upon the mind of his single pupil, and laboring not in vain. Not far away is a little Miss, not yet requiring two figures to write down her age, who is now and then impatiently shaking back her golden tresses, as she labors to impress upon the mind of her pupil the strange combinations of the English alphabet, looking up into his half-pleased, half-puzzled Asiatic countenance, herself in doubt whether she has succeeded in making the point as clear to him as it is in her own mind. At the same table may be a school-boy, a year or two older, just getting conscious of his rights as "Young America," and as wild and mischievous as one often sees; but his heart is large and true, and just now he is patiently leading the mind of his charge through the rudiments of the omnipresent primer.

There are very few young men among the teachers, but the same cannot be said of the young ladies. At no gathering of equal numbers will a larger proportion of the beautiful, refined, intellectual young ladies of the village be found. From the delicate child to the middle-aged woman, and from the affluent to the poor, all classes and ages are engaged in this work of charity.

It is not a quiet place, this school-room. Fifty teachers are earnestly laboring with

about an equal number of scholars, as though the fortunes of lives depended upon utilizing this Sabbath afternoon hour. Then there are fifty or more visitors or lookers-on, who must needs learn the whole history of the school, and express their individual opinions for the general benefit of those present. So that the imaginative mind receives a very good idea of that grand confusion upon the plains of Shinar.

Passing down the room, we have an opportunity to observe the individual members of the school at their studies. First of all, we are impressed with the spirit of earnestness, in many cases amounting almost to enthusiasm, which pervades the whole assembly. Here and there one, a trifle duller than his neighbor, it may be, or with a teacher less gifted to impart information, sits gazing upon the strange symbols before him, or repeats mechanically the promptings of the teacher, looking all the while like a personification of stupid patience. But generally the quick flashing eyes, the earnest nods of assent, indicating comprehension, and the general light of intelligence, shows an understanding of the subject beyond the scholar's ability to express in the yet unmastered language of his adopted country.

Each teacher follows the bent of his or her own preferences in regard to the method of instruction, but, generally, reading forms a principal part of the hour's pursuits. Here the ordinary school primer is brought into service, and, judging from the progress made by many of the pupils, nothing could be better adapted to the purpose. A few of the learners read quite readily where words of two syllables abound, while others are not yet able to master the mysteries of three-lettered words.

A great deal of object-teaching is here employed, and very advantageously. In fact, it is rendered a necessity by the want of language in common between teacher and learner, and principally upon the ability of the tutor in this direction depends the success of the student.

In connection with reading and object-teaching, writing is employed in some cases. A slate with one or two sentences written upon it lies before the Celestial. A dimly-burning candle sits upon an adjacent table. "What is that?" the teacher asks, pointing

towards it. "Candle," replies the novice. "Find the word upon your slate." The yellow finger passes slowly along, and soon rests upon the word. "Now spell it and write it yourself." A few moments' application, and the word is written in characters which would put to shame the handwriting of most men who live by the pen, and the pupil looks up with a bright sparkle of the eye for the reward he is sure to receive, the smile of approbation from his teacher.

The peculiar faculty for imitation possessed by the Chinese as a nation makes writing an easy branch of their studies. Once having learned the letters which make a given word, and recollecting their written forms, the Celestial writes the word very readily, and very neatly. Simple problems in mental arithmetic, names of days and months, as well as many object lessons which circumstances may suggest, fill up the hour. There is no lull or hush. Each moment is saved, for the time is brief, and it will be a whole week before another opportunity for such instruction and pleasure will present. But in the midst of the exercises a single stroke of the bell is heard.

What a silence ensues! Instantly every sound is hushed, unless it may be some visitors have not quite finished their conversation, in which case they will be expected to continue, giving those present the benefit of their wisdom, and the example of their good-breeding. If a clergyman is present, or a visitor who has anything to say, he can address the school through the interpreter, Charley Sing. The teachers unite in singing "There is a happy land," or some simple song of that class, and frequently the pupils, so far as able, join.

After the close of school, which is informal, a song in Chinese is sometimes given by one of the pupils, for the gratification of visitors. The air is very simple, peculiar, though not unpleasing, and the words, which appear to be monosyllables of all kinds mixed together, convey about as much sense to English ears as does a great deal of the popular singing at our own language.

"Come next Sunday," frequently in its abbreviated form—"Sunday," is the parting request of the scholar to his teacher. And generally the latter is quite as interested as

the former in her weekly missionary hour. The attachment between the scholars and their teachers is in many cases noteworthy. Not only is this manifested in little acts of kindness, and such trifling gifts as they are able to make—fans, coins, and multitudes of little trinkets—but sometimes their feelings find expression in more substantial manner. On Thanksgiving Day a number of the teachers were astonished at the reception of fine plump turkeys as tokens of the estimation in which they were held by their disciples. Generally, a Celestial will not attend the school unless assured that his teacher will be present. From some convenient nook in the sleeping-room, or elsewhere, he watches the door until the familiar form appears, when with a glide and scramble he hurries into the accustomed seat, and is waiting with boyish eagerness for the commencement of his exercises.

Should the Chinaman fail to learn with the rapidity of his more fortunate companion, no impatience or discontent marks his conduct. The failure is all attributed to his own stupidity, and yet he does not become discouraged. The general anxiety to learn the language, written and spoken, as well as the manners and customs of the people among whom their lot is cast, strikes us at once as an omen exceedingly favorable in its nature. Although they enjoy but one hour's teaching per week, their study does not end with that hour. Evenings and spare moments are very often given to the primer, and such progress as can be made unassisted is worked out by the persevering shoemaker. It is to be hoped that ere long some means may be devised by which they shall receive two or three additional hours of instruction during the week, and if this can be done, beyond all doubt their progress towards Americanization will be very much accelerated.

We have thus attempted to describe the most interesting and important hour of the week to the Chinese in New England. From the record of that hour logical deductions may be made regarding their future. It is not our purpose to draw these conclusions, since we do not intend to discuss the Chinese question—only to draw aside the veil, that the world may have a peep in upon their

inner life. That they are highly satisfied with their situation as laborers seems very evident; that they are much pleased at the efforts being put forth to instruct them cannot be doubted. Their intention to adopt American customs may be seen in the use of our own style of clothing in place of theirs. That they are capable of thorough culture and religious impression, Charley Sing, a perfect gentleman and a member of the M. E. Church, is a living and indisputable witness. That they are naturally temperate is suffi-

ciently proven by the fact that of the seventy-five employed by Messrs. Sampson & Co., none used strong drink in any form, not even as a medicine.

What part they are to play in our future history cannot be told; but so long as they love the school and its associations, are open to kindly Christian influences, are temperate and industrious, we see no reason why our broad territory, a haven for the oppressed of every clime, should be denied to the Celestials.

THE OUTCAST.

BLEAK winds of winter, sobbing and moaning,
 Pluck not my rags with your pitiless hand;
 Here in the darkness, cold and despairing,
 Homeless, and friendless, and starving I stand.
 Scourged by the white icy whips of the tempest,
 I wander forlorn on my desolate way,
 Forgotten of earth, and forsaken of heaven,
 Too frozen to kneel, and too hungry to pray.

I look at the stately and palace-like dwellings
 That line with their grandeur the pathway I tread,
 I fancy the brightness and warmth of the hearth-stone,
 The plenteous board with the wine and the bread:
 I see the heads bow'd with a reverent meaning,
 A blessing is breathed o'er the sumptuous fare;
 Will it rise to the ear of the pitiful Father,
 Or die of the cold, like the vagabond's prayer?

Hark! midnight. The chime from the church-tower above me
 Drops solemnly down through the whirl of the storm:
 If one could but pass through the gate to the portal,
 Could sleep there, and dream it was lighted and warm.
 Give way, cruel bars! let me through to a refuge!
 Give way! but I rave, and the fierce winds reply:
 "No room in His house for His vagabond children,
 "No room in His porch for an outcast to die."

No room in the dwellings—no room in the churches,
 No room in the prison—for hunger's no crime;
 Is there room in the bed of the river, I wonder,
 Deep down by the pier in the ooze and the slime?
 Mock on, taunting wind! I can laugh back an answer,
 An hour, and your bitterest breath I defy;
 Since bars shut me out of God's house among mortals,
 I will knock at the gate of His home in the sky!