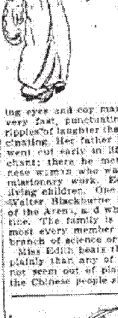
A VISIT TO CHINATOWN

Edith Eaton, Known as Sue Seen Far (Chinese Lily), Here from Montreal.

SHE REALIZES AN AMBITION

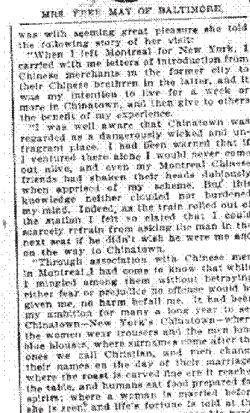
And Spends a Week with the Women in Mott Street—There Are 28 Chinese Wives from China.



HE most interesting little woman just now in the city is Miss Edith Eaton, known by Chinamen as Sue Seen Far (Chinese Lily), and when she reviewed by a Recorder reporter into more bright things in a minute about Chinatown than a New Yorker would be able to discover in weeks.

Miss Eaton is a tiny, brown-eyed baby, with a very gentle voice, laughing eyes and coy manners. She talks very, very fast, punctuating her sentences with ripples of laughter that make her indeed tinkling. Her father is an Englishman who went out early in life to China as a merchant; there he met her mother, a Chinese woman who was then in China doing missionary work. Edith is one of twelve living children. One of her sisters married Walter Blackburne Harte, the late editor of the Argonaut, and who now edits the Polk Review. The family is a remarkable one, almost every member being skillful in some branch of science or art.

Miss Edith bears the Chinese stamp more plainly than any of the others, and it does not seem out of place that her interest in the Chinese people should be very great. It



MRS FREE MAY OF BALTIMORE.

was with seeming great pleasure she told the following story of her visit:

"When I left Montreal for New York, I carried with me letters of introduction from Chinese merchants in the former city to their Chinese brethren in the latter, and it was my intention to live for a week or more in Chinatown, and then give to others the benefit of my experience.

"I was well aware that Chinatown was regarded as a dangerously wicked and untragrant place. I had been warned that if I ventured there alone I would never come out alive, and even my Montreal Chinese friends had shaken their heads dubiously when apprised of my scheme. But this knowledge neither clouded nor hardened my mind. Indeed, as the train rolled out of the station I felt so elated that I could scarcely refrain from asking the man in the next seat if he didn't wish he were me and on the way to Chinatown.

"Through association with Chinese men in Montreal I had come to know that white I mingled among them without betrayal, either fear or prejudice in offense would be given me, no harm befall me. It had been my ambition for many a long year to see Chinatown—New York's Chinatown—where the women wear trousers and the men long blue blouses, where surnames come after the ones we call Christian, and men change their names on the day of their marriage; where the roast is carved one cut it reaches the table, and humans eat food prepared for spirits; where a woman is married before she is born, and life's fortune is told at the hour of birth; where a man cures his headache by knocking his forehead, and incense is burned for 'the Gambling Cash Tiger.'

"I arrived at the Grand Central Station at 10 o'clock, and a conductor on the lighting express, of whom I inquired the easiest way to reach Pell street, advised me, with almost brotherly kindness, not to venture there at that time of the night. 'I'd be afraid to go myself,' said he. 'You'd better put up at the Grand Union.'

"A little later, when I stood on the station platform, my valise by my side, and the clatter of a big city's life in my ears, it was a toss up in my mind whether I should be the hotel or Pell street, and the former was uppermost when I heard a voice—the voice of a hack driver—'Did you wish for a cab, lady?'

"'I don't think so,' I replied, hesitatingly. 'I think I'll go to the hotel across the way, if you will please find a boy to carry my valise there.'

"'All right, ma'am; just wait a minute,' he answered, and darted across the street, returning at the appointed time, not with the boy I had asked for, but with a cab.

"That settled the question of where I should lodge for the night, and, upon being ordered by the arbiter of my fate to enter the cab, I humbly obeyed, and handed, at his request, to the driver to No. 16 Pell street.

"As I neared my destination, I became slightly nervous. I was not afraid of what lay before me, but a woman passing through the lowest part of a strange city cannot feel quite comfortable. I gazed out upon the unintelligible crowd and listened. It was all so tuneless, and when we turned the corner of the Bowery and Pell street and I caught a glimpse in this dark of some of the haunts of unprosperous vice, my spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak.

"Ten Pell street!" called out my driver, coming to a standstill. I alighted, and a fair number of inconventional folk gathered around, scanned the red signs and Chinese names hanging before me. Several Chinamen stood near.

"'Does Mr. Ju Chu live here?' I inquired of them. Mr. Ju Chu was one of the merchants to whom I had been given a letter of introduction.

"'No, he three doors past—No. 16,' was the answer.

"Followed by my cab driver leading his horse, and a growing crowd, I proceeded a little further up the street. There, perceiving the sign of the Quang Wang Wo Company, I pushed open the door and intruded myself into the midst of a group of Chinamen, whose astonishment at my sudden appearance was expressed by dumb silence.

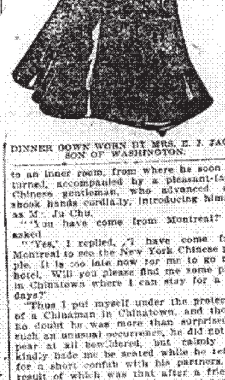
"The cabman deposited my valise on a counter, received from me the sum of $1.50, grinned and left me alone in my glory.

"I summoned my wits together and presented my letter of introduction to an imposing Chinaman, who had a red button on his cap. He nodded slowly, and the others gathered around him while he read. The effect of the reading was magical, smiles appeared on all faces, and every Chinaman seemed to have something to say to all the others, though not a word for me.

"A forlorn-looking object I stood in the middle of that Chinese store, with its rows of Chinese shoes and bundles of tea. I looked at the strange company, wondering what they would do with me.

"At last the red-buttoned one retreated in-

MME. DE VALANGALY, WIFE OF THE RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR AT ROME.



DINNER GOWN WORN BY MRS. E. J. JACKSON OF WASHINGTON.

to an inner room, from where he soon returned, accompanied by a pleasant-faced Chinese gentleman, who advanced and shook hands cordially, introducing himself as Mr. Ju Chu.

"'You have come from Montreal?' he asked.

"'Yes,' I replied, 'I have come from Montreal to see the New York Chinese people. It is too late now for me to go to a hotel. Will you please find me some place in Chinatown where I can stay for a few days?'

"Thus I put myself under the protection of a Chinaman in Chinatown, and though no doubt he was more than surprised at such an unusual occurrence, he did not appear at all bewildered, but calmly and kindly bade me be seated while he retired for a short confab with his partners, the result of which was that after a friendly chat I was escorted by him to a tenement house on Doyers street, near the corner of Pell, where he left me in the hands of a motherly colored woman, who rose from her bed to see them near midnight—and made me as comfortable as she could.

"Ah! that night! Shall I ever forget it! There were six hundred Chinamen lodging in the same house, and the Chinese voices above, below and around me, the sound of footsteps ascending and descending, the knowledge that I was peacefully alone in the heart of Chinatown, drove sleep away and taught me what it was to realize an ambition.

"When the morning came I looked out of my little window. I could see very little but the backs of squalid houses, girdled by the beautiful morning sunshine. But the colored woman, housekeeper for the two hundred Chinamen above mentioned, informed me that those roofs sheltered some of the sullied souls in the world, which intelligence, though shocking, I was cynic enough to consider somewhat doubtful.

"After breakfast I scaled on mirror chop and paddled myself down five flights of stairs and found myself on Doyers street, and a target for the eyes of representatives of many different nationalities. The sign of the Quong Wang Wo Company on Pell street looked like the consoling face of a friend standing by, so I ran across into the shop and received a hearty welcome from the Chinamen there, who all rose to say 'Ha ie' (good morning).

"Mr. Ju Chu inquired as to whether I had slept well, and expressed his regret at being unable to make me comfortable in his own place on account of his not having a single bedchamber. He was just as nice and gentlemanly as he could be, and offered to take me around to see the Joss houses and Chinese theatres. I thanked him, and said I would not trouble him more than I could help, but if he would lend me one of his young Chinese clerks to point out the places I desired to see I would be the morning in visiting the other Chinamen to whom I had letters of introduction. He complied with my request, and I started out for my first ramble in Chinatown, which means Mott, Pell and Doyers streets.

"We visited the Chinese stores, the theatre and the Joss house.

"I am afraid one of the high priests was in bad company the night before we visited there. I don't like to tell, but I've got to tell, for that is the only wicked option I ever saw on an altar. That seemed to me that I was not invited to any opium or gambling dens while in Chinatown.

"Upon the second day of my stay in Chinatown I had the rare fortune to see about twenty real Chinese women at their American homes. I had had some difficulty in gaining access to them, for the Chinese men, into whose good graces I had insinuated myself, were all either bachelors or married widowers, and as it is not considered proper by the Chinese for a woman to be on terms of acquaintanceship with any man but her husband, not even with her husband's friends, they were unable to help me.

"To leave Chinatown without seeing the Chinese women after having learned there were thirty-eight married in this city, I would not, and just as I was desperately contemplating braving all dangers and sleeping alone through some of the dark alleys on Mott street, in the hope of finding a 'lo pore' (the Chinese name for wife). I came across a girl, the wife of a Chinaman and daughter of a Chinaman, yet not in the true sense a Chinese woman, for her mother was Spanish, and the girl herself had been born and bred in New York's Chinatown.

"This interesting little person could speak both the English and Chinese languages. Though the mother of two children, she appeared to be still in her teens, fair complexioned, with wide open, brown eyes and soft brown hair. Mrs. Toy, she told me, was her name. Being half Chinese, she is known by all Chinatown.

"The English-speaking people, even the dissolute women and fast men, like and respect her, and she is the trusted friend and confidant of all the Chinese women who live in New York. She calls herself Chinese, and says she is proud to be the wife and daughter of honest Chinese men.

"Besides having the cares of her young children, she helps her husband, who is a chop man, to make a living. Her life is hard, but her gentle, girlish face wears a contented expression, and she laughs blithely. I, suppose, never having known a brighter lot, she has grown to love the shade.

"There are I know and believe many wicked places and people in Chinatown, but it is a part of God's earth, and so some flowers bloom among the weeds even there.

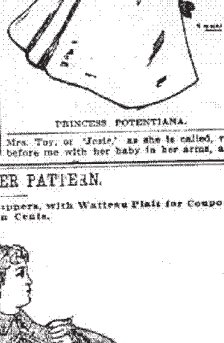
"With the daughter of Chinatown as my guide, I threaded by way through the dirty passages and unventilated rooms of the Mott street tenements. Women with histories, some exceedingly beautiful, others wicked, depraved-looking old hags, gazed with curious eyes at me as we glided by. I heard a drunkard singing, and saw grisly at half negro, half Chinese; half Chinese, half white, and half white, half negro children playing together, making pandemonium. Chinatown does not mean a colony of pure Chinese people; there's a plentiful sprinkling of whites and blacks.

"The pure Chinese women seem to have congregated in Mott street. They each have their own apartments, and within those four walls they spend their lives. whenever we came to one of the apartments she would loudly call the name of the occupant. The door would be opened, we would be invited to enter, and I presented with a cup of tea. I drank twenty cupfuls in all that afternoon, and do not forget it, for I saw three women with little feet.

"Some of the ladies who had families brought their little round-headed babies to me, and I felt like the poor little woman in one by one, and looked at their bright eyes and the tufts of hair in the middle of their little heads, and thought: 'Deary me! what a queer world this is!'

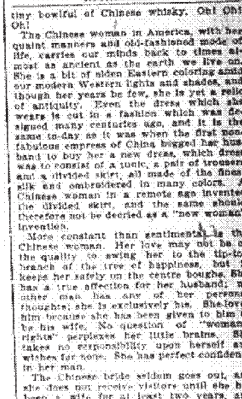
"When Mrs. Toy explained that I was the daughter of a Chinese lady, my hostesses looked very pleased and interested, and some of them, after inspecting me from head to toe, declared that I had eyes and hair just like a Chinese girl. They were very surprised and sympathetic upon learning that I had no 'lo poen'—husband—and some were most anxious to know if I would marry a Chinaman.

"I enjoyed a 5 o'clock lunch with a Mrs. Tom, who lives at 4 Mott street. It was a Chinese lunch, prepared in a Chinese restaurant. We had duck, pork, chicken and rice served in Chinese fashion and eaten with chopsticks. I also drank a



PRINCESS POTENTIANA.

Mrs. Toy, or 'Jesie,' as she is called, ran before me with her baby in her arms, and



MRS. HAROLD MCCORMACK, NEE MISS ROCKEFELLER.

tiny bowlful of Chinese whisky. Oh! Oh! Oh!

The Chinese woman in America, with her quaint manners and old-fashioned mode of life, carries our minds back to times almost as ancient as the earth we live on. She is a bit of olden Eastern coloring amid our modern Western lights and shades, and though her years be few, she is yet a relic of antiquity. Even the dress which she wears is cut in a fashion which was designed many centuries ago, and it is the same to-day as it was when the first nonfabulous empress of China hugged her husband to buy her a new dress, which dress was to consist of a tunic, a pair of trousers and a divided skirt, all made of the finest silk and embroidered in many colors. A Chinese woman in a remote age invented the divided skirt, and the same should therefore not be decried as a "new woman" invention.

More constant than sentimental is the Chinese woman. Her love may not be of the quality to swing her to the tip-top branch of the tree of happiness, but it keeps her safely on the centre bough. She has a true affection for her husband; no other man has any of her personal thoughts; she is devotedly his. She loves him because she has been given to him to be his wife. No question of "woman's rights" perplexes her little brains. She takes no responsibility upon herself and wishes for none. She has perfect confidence in her man.

The Chinese bride seldom goes out, and she does not receive visitors until she has been a wife for at least two years, and sometimes, if she has no child, she is supposed to hide herself from the gaze of her countrymen. After a child has been born to her, her wall of reserve is lowered a little. She is considered quite proper for cousins and friends of her husband to drop in occasionally and have a chat with "the family."

Not all the chinese women in America are brides. There are some who have been born here, others are merely secondary wives, the first wives having remained behind in China, and then there are a few elderly women who were married long before leaving home. The majority, however, are what are called by the Chinese call young married females, "new women."

In some hatter halls I found a little slave girl or hand woman. The word "slave" girl does not have the same meaning to an Oriental that it does to a Westerner, and the little girls are treated more like daughters of the family or sisters of the wife than as servants.

On the whole the Chinese people of Chinatown are a great, great deal more like people than I had expected to find them. The odor of opium permeates many of the houses, but all nations have their vices, and I do not deem it my duty to exaggerate the Chinese man's, especially as there are many persons who are only too willing to look after that matter for me.

Peace to Chinatown! The unsavory smells, the rows of funny signs, and the sadness, madness, badness of a life which cannot rest will ever have a place in my memory.

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