

# CHINESE SCHOOLMATES

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THE fact that in Hartford, both in the District School and in the High School some of my most intimate friends were Chinese boys seems strange as I look back. When I entered the West Middle School, I found a considerable number of Chinese boys there; it seemed natural to have them for playmates. This may have been partly owing to the attractive qualities of these Orientals, and their genius for adaptation.

A distinguished Chinese gentleman and scholar, Yung Wing, was living in Hartford, and it was through his influence that this large group of Chinese boys came there to study and to learn American ways. Every one of them was a patrician, of good family in China, and had as a rule much more spending money than most of the Americans. They had excellent manners, were splendid sportsmen, alert in mind, good at their studies, good at athletics. I do not think I have ever known a finer group of boys and young men. After graduating from the High School at Hartford, they entered Yale, when suddenly the command came from China, and they were all forced to return home.

These boys were dressed like us, except that they wore long queues. When they played football, they tucked these queues inside their shirts and sometimes tied them around their heads; for if the queue got loose, it afforded too strong a temptation for opponents. All our games were of course new to them, but they became excellent at baseball, football, hockey on the ice, then known as 'shinny,' and in fancy skating they were supreme. When the bicycle was invented, the first boy at school to have one was Tsang; and I can see him now, riding this strange high machine up Asylum Avenue.

I remember them individually; King, Kong, Se Chung, Kai Kah Wong, Chuck, Cho, Tsang, and all the rest. Mun Yew Chung, a little older than the majority of them, was in the class of 1883 at Yale, where he was universally respected. He became coxswain on the Yale crew, and steered the boat in the races as coolly as if he were out for a practice spin. It is said that he was told he must swear at the oarsmen to make them row their best; for he usually sat in his place in silence. Swearing did not come naturally to him, for he was grave and impassive; but finally, being told he must curse them, he would, at the most unexpected moments, and without any emphasis mechanically utter the monosyllable 'damn!' whereat the crew became so helpless with laughter, they begged him desist. He was coxswain of the victorious Yale crews of 1880 and 1881; and at some Yale-Harvard meeting many years later, when a Harvard man expressed doubt as to whether Mun Yew Chung had even seen a university boat race, much less taken part in it, the Chinese suavely confessed he had never seen a Harvard crew row; and after a pause, explained that they were always behind him. Mun Yew Chung became a prominent statesman in China, and occasionally visited the United States as a diplomatic representative of his country.

I can well remember, when we used to 'chase up sides' at football, how the first choice invariably went to Se Chung, a short-thick-set boy, built close to the ground, who ran like a hound and dodged like a cat. What Se Chung had in grace and speed, Kong had in bull strength. Built broad and strong, eternally good-natured and smiling, he would cross the goal line, carrying four or five Americans on his shoulders. In baseball, Tsang was a great pitcher, impossible to hit; King was a tower of strength to any nine, and even little Chuck, much younger than the others, took to a baseball as an infant takes to the bottle. My most intimate friend at High School was a splendid Chinese boy named Cho—dignified and serious, who even at that

time was more a sophisticated man of the world than I shall ever be. To hear that young gentleman translate Caesar in the classroom was a liberal education. Every Saturday Cho and I used to go shooting in West Hartford, after meadowlarks and yellowhammers. He had a huge gun that weighed over twelve pounds, which he would carry uncomplainingly all day long; and bring down birds on the wing at a prodigious distance. When these boys, to our infinite regret, were recalled to China, Cho gave me his great gun as a pledge of eternal friendship. In China he entered the Navy, and where he is now I wish I knew. We kept up a fitful correspondence for some years.

These boys not only excelled us Americans at athletics; you should have seen them cutting the double eight and grapevine! They cut us out in other ways that caused considerable heart-burnings. When the Chinese youth entered the social arena, none of us had any chance. Their manner to the girls had a deferential elegance far beyond our possibilities. Whether it was the exotic pleasure of dancing with Orientals, or, what is more probable, the real charm of their manners and talk, I do not know; certain it is that at dances and receptions, the fairest and most sought-out belles invariably gave the swains from the Orient the preference. I can remember the pained expressions on the faces of some of my American comrades when the girls deliberately passed them by and accepted the attentions of Chinese rivals with a more than yielding grace. Personally, I rather enjoyed this oft-recurring situation, for my father and mother would not permit me to learn to dance, and this racial struggle appealed to my dramatic instinct. And the Orientals danced beautifully.

Thus the pleasant recollections of my boyhood are full of Chinese memories: and although, by the time I entered Yale, these fine fellows had gone home, I vainly hoped they might return. There was only one Oriental in my college class, Yan Phou Lee, who had an amazing command of English, and whose articles in the '*Lit.*' and speech at the Junior Exhibition, and later on the Commencement state, attracted attention far outside academic walls.