New York's Favorite Slumming Expedition

Now that Lent is On, It Will Go to Chinatown to See the Great Actor, Fon Chong Mai—Chinatown is Now Celebrating Its New Year.

For some reason New York society's dearest aspiration seems to be towards things Bohemian. Weary of the conventionalities of life with its dinner dances and cotillions, its Sunday evening dinners at Sherry's and its approved charities, it longs for the unconventional, and at last it has found it.

Now when the ceaseless round of ordinary society functions becomes irksome the members of the 400 do not, as heretofore, make a brief expedition into that mysterious land that lies just beyond the fringe of respectability, but, instead, they pay a visit to the Choy Ting Quoy on Doyers street, and spend an evening in witnessing the wonderful performance that is given by Fon Chong Mai and his company of famous Chinese actors.

And society could do worse, for Fon Chong Mai is a great actor. Luk Ling says that he is the greatest actor in the world and after you have seen him you are inclined to believe that there are many worse critics than the almond-eyed little manager of the Doyers street playhouse.

This week there will be special performances for the Chinese New Year is on; and Fon Chong Mai is kept busy.

The plays that are presented at the Choy Ting Quoy are centuries old and they are presented on Doyers street just as they were acted hundreds of years ago in China. And that is where Fon Chong Mai proves himself a great actor. He adheres strictly to the traditions of his ancestors who laid down inviolable rules providing that each thing should be done thus and so, and he is great in spite of all the obstacles with which custom has surrounded him.

The visitor to the Choy Ting Quoy dives into the basement of a typical Chinatown building, and finds himself in a big barren room, in which the only seats are plain board benches, without backs, rising tier upon tier from the platform upon which the performances are given. Every night this barn-like theater, bare as to decorations, is filled with stolidly interested spectators, all wearing their black slouch hats and all smoking or nibbling at the Chinese dainties that are sold by the ushers during the performance.

If every seat is filled the overflow of spectators step placidly upon the stage, grouping themselves about in the most picturesque manner, sometimes almost hiding the orchestra that plays a strange and guttural although not entirely unpleasant accompaniment to the performance from the back of the stage.

In China these plays last for months, sometimes for years, but Fon Chong Mai has assumed the right of the artist and cuts his month-long plays to fit into a week.

There is no curtain in this unique playhouse. There is no scenery or other accessories to assist the mind in bridging the chasm between the real and the ideal. Fon Chong Mai relies wholly upon his power as an actor to make his auditors forget the realities and live with him the life he is portraying. That he is successful there can be no doubt.

One glance at the strange audience is enough to prove that they only see the picture as he paints it, while even the American stranger who has drifted into the theater out of curiosity or in search of new sensations, and to whom the words of the players is nothing more than gibberish, can understand the pantomime and follow the course of the strange drama from act to act, comprehending nearly all that is done by the performers.

Fon Chong Mai has the power to do this and so Fon Chong Mai is a great actor. Could Richard Mansfield or Irving or Beerbohm Tree do more when a piece of red paper attached to a post is the only indication that one act has ended and that 10 years have elapsed? By walking twice around the stage could they give the impression of having taken a two days' journey? Could they do more than succeed in creating an illusion on perfectly bare boards, without scenery, footlights or curtain? And think of the brain a man must have to be able to memorize not one but 30 of these month-long pieces, and Fon Chong Mai's repertoire contains more than half a hundred of these classic Chinese dramas.

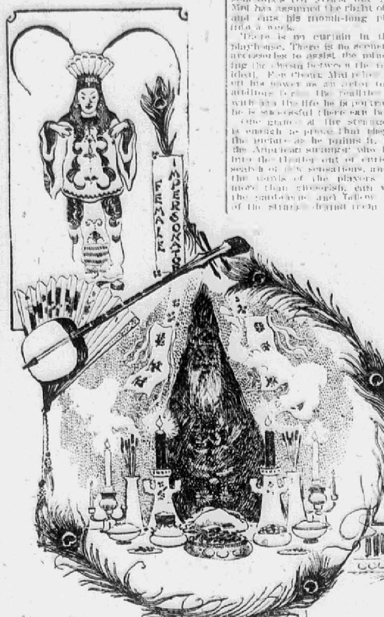
Like all great Chinese actors Fon Chong Mai is a female impersonator, and if he has no scenic accessories he certainly has many gowns of gorgeous splendor. Some of these costumes were worn by his father and his father's father, for all his ancestors for many generations have been great actors. These gowns are marvels of Oriental art and luxuriousness, silks and satins of every hue, heavily embroidered in solid gold and silver. Several of them are worth more than $1,500 each.

Fon Chong Mai had never seen a foreign play until he came to New York, when Augustin Daly invited him to occupy a box at his theater. The invitation was accepted and Fon Chong Mai witnessed a presentation of the "Merchant of Venice" with Miss Ada Rehan as Portia. During the performance the Chinese actor sat as if spellbound and when the curtain fell he said:

"I walk as in a dream. Here is the best that the world can give. Better than this is only in the realms of the gods. For three hundred years my people have been actors before me, but I am a humble one of the Brethren of the Pear Orchard."

In these phrases so Oriental in their extravagance the son of the east bowed before the daughter of the west, and one great actor paid his tribute of homage to another. Harry Germaine.

Fon Chong Mai, the Highest-Priced Chinese Actor in the World.



A Real Dinner on the Stage.

This is the Actress whom Fon Chong Mai said was the Greatest Artist he had ever seen.

A View of the Stage of a Chinese Theater.

The House Built Upon the Sands.

The Marvelous Fortune of the Head of the "Sugar Trust" and His New Fad for Building a Modern Venice.

If they ever talk shop in the Havemeyer household, and it is to be presumed they do, they must occasionally paraphrase a good old English expression and say, "there's nothing like sugar." Our humorists have long since exhausted the field wherein grew the jokes about sugar being made out of sand, or otherwise it would be pertinent to remark that the Havemeyer house was built upon one of the products of sand, and which, in contradiction to the biblical adage, has shown no signs of moving from its foundations.

In the financial world of late years there has been no period when the name of Henry O. Havemeyer has not been an important factor in the money market. But even these men who are accustomed to talk of and deal in big sums were startled a short time since when, after the annual meeting of the American Sugar Refining company—the corporate title of what is popularly known as the "Sugar Trust"—it became known that the company had empowered H. O. Havemeyer to take for his use, as "working capital," $25,000,000. By "working capital" was meant a fund to fight the capitalists who were opposing the trust in its particular line of business. With twenty-five millions to work with H. O. Havemeyer is likely to do some very effective fighting before the next meeting of the company comes around.

But there are times when the sugar magnate stops thinking of sugar. And then he goes in with all the vim he puts into business during business hours, for his two hobbies. These hobbies are golf and his new country house, or colony, on the south side of Long Island, which is usually alluded to in that section as "Havemeyer's Venice." For he is planning and working to turn a low marshy point of land on the Great South Bay, on Long Island, into a little colony that will be a veritable Venice. His golfing fad can hardly be called an expensive one to a man of his wealth. But as to the ultimate cost of the Long Island "Venice" only time and his architects can tell.

Havemeyer's devotion to the ancient Scottish game is very well known. He was one of the earliest advocates of the sport in this country, was one of the founders of the United States Golf association and was the president of that body for several years. The annual meetings of the U. S. G. A. are always held in his New York residence at Fifth avenue and Sixty-sixth street and he has been extremely liberal in giving valuable trophies for tournament play and in advancing the cause of the "fair game" by every means in his power. To golfers generally, the U. S. G. A. and the name of H. O. Havemeyer are usually linked together in affection and respect.

For a number of years Mr. Havemeyer was one of that colony of wealthy New Yorkers who have summer homes at Stamford, Connecticut. Two years ago, however, on one of his visits to the south side of Long Island he became interested in property in that section and through the mildness of the climate was born the novel idea of his new "Venice." At that time Bayberry Point, the place he had selected for the site of his new summer home and accompanying colony, was a sandy strip of beach on the Great South Bay near West Islip.

It was at that time, about as barren and uninviting a place as one could find and a good part of it was submerged at high tide. When the work that is contemplated is completed, however, it will be without doubt, the handsomest colony along the Atlantic seaboard.

The "Point" is more properly a corner and covers an area about a mile long and half that distance in width. The main feature of the new Venice is two canals, one on the eastern border of the tract and one running directly through the center of it. To dig one of these has cost $160,000 and a like sum has almost been expended in excavating the other. The central canal is 2,000 feet in length and has a uniform width of 100 feet. The material dredged out has been deposited on the lowlands which, together with a substantial seawall, will prevent any damage from the tides.

With the completion of the second canal will begin the work of improving the landscape. A broad boulevard will lead to the grounds from the north. At the entrance the road will divide and after leading off on either side will run directly to the bay. The space enclosed by the roadways at the beginning will be converted into a handsome little park, adorned in every way that the landscape gardener can devise.

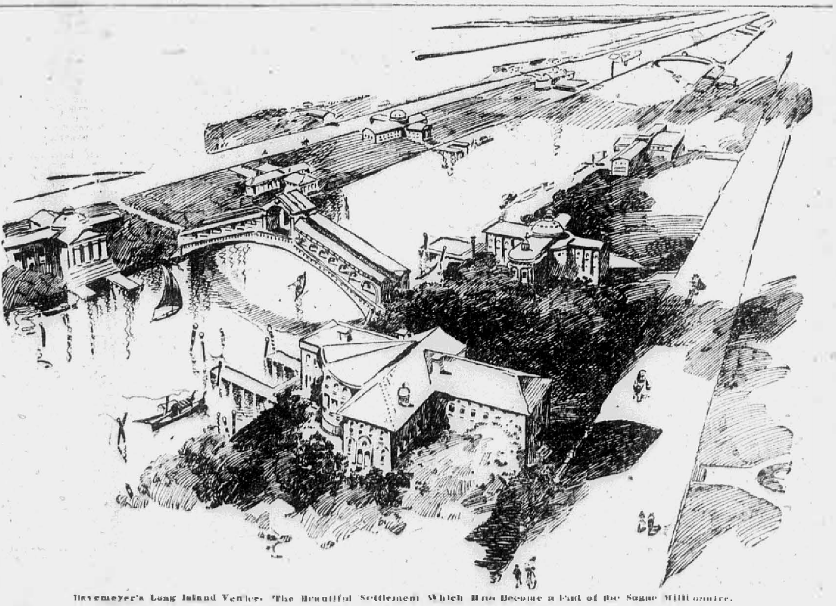
Between these roadways on either side of the canal will be the villas of the colony. Twelve of these sites are laid out, each plot containing one and a half acres with a frontage of 200 feet on the canal. The villas will be placed 150 feet back from the waterway in the center of each plot, thus adding to the general effect of space and roominess.

In the construction of the villas this same idea will be carried out. The general architectural idea of Mr. Havemeyer's own house is that of an Italian villa, the simplicity of which may be judged when it is stated that it is to cost only $11,000. The villas will be all of this same design and will be covered with staff, the same as the buildings at the World's Fair.

In front of each house and extending to the water's edge will be a court, surrounded by a low wall or hedge, and having between its pathways flower beds, fountains, and other adornments. This work was begun by Mr. Havemeyer in 1897. The amount of progress made in the last season warrants the belief that the entire place will be ready for occupancy by the coming summer.

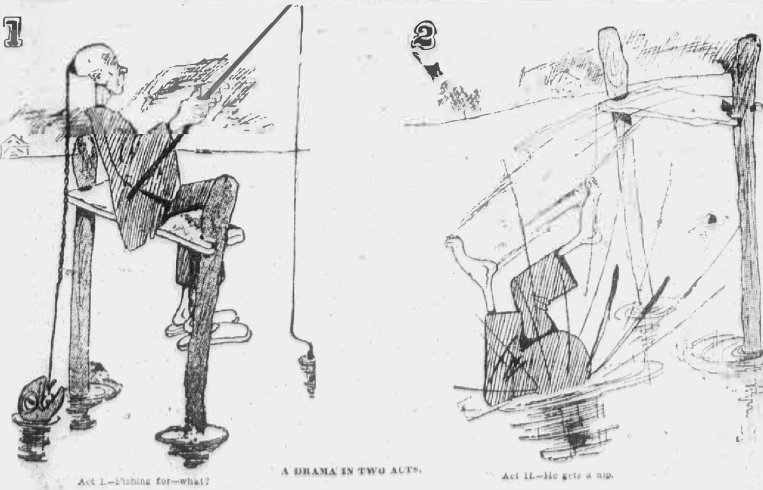
Although Mr. Havemeyer will probably derive as much enjoyment from his $11,000 house in his new Venice as he does from either his Stamford or New York home it will never rival them in the slightest degree from the point of magnificence. His town house at No. 1 East Sixty-Sixth street is one of the show places in that section of Fifth avenue. It is luxuriously furnished and has been the scene of many delightful social functions, for in private life Mr. Havemeyer is extremely amiable and inclined to a most liberal hospitality. The place he has hitherto taken the most pride in, however, is his Stamford residence.

This place has been in Mr. Havemeyer's possession since 1890. The grounds are 90 acres in extent and were owned by two families before he purchased the place for over 125 years. Of these 90 acres about 50 are devoted to lawn and meadow about the house, the remaining 40 being given over to pasture for the fancy cattle of which he has been a highly successful breeder. The house is a three-story building facing 150 feet toward Long Island sound and is built of gray stone. The first floor is devoted to an entrance hall, reception room, library and dining room, with a private office for Mr. Havemeyer at one end of the building where he transacts a great deal of business. The second floor contains all the suites of sleeping rooms, a feature of which are the numerous windows commanding lovely prospects over meadow, lawn and the broad sound. The near-by village of Greenwich has been the recipient of many benefactions from Mr. Havemeyer, one being the gift of a $50,000 school house and another a parsonage for the Presbyterian church.



Havemeyer's Long Island Venice. The Beautiful Settlement Which Has Become a Fad of the Sugar Millionaire.

H. O. Havemeyer Explaining the Plans of His Venice.



A DRAMA IN TWO ACTS.

Act I.—Fishing for—what?

Act II.—He gets a nip.