

But, perhaps, the most interesting figure among the Su-chou dignitaries was Chin T'ai-tsin, the magistrate of the 'Independent Department' of Su-chou, a lively and witty man between fifty and sixty, full of culture and practical common-sense. His very dress and the furniture of his Ya-mên betokened taste and refinement. Clothed in dainty pale silks befitting the season, showing me with a connoisseur's joy his fine porcelain cups, flower-pots, and other 'things of merit,' he looked the very embodiment of a well-bred and cultured administrator. Of his scholarly attainments he made no show, though they had earned him a rank superior to that of his Tao-t'ai, out of tactful regard for whom he never wore his proper hierarchical button. But from his questions and quick grasp of points of historical interest I could see how wide were his reading and his mental horizon.

The light collation to which he treated me when returning his visit, was far more entertaining than the great dinner jointly given by the three official 'chiefs' of Su-chou. Out of an excess of polite attention, they had fixed upon my 'own' temple hall as the scene of the symposium. The very morning after I had pitched my camp at the 'Spring of Wine,' I had noticed with surprise the rapid, though, of course, very superficial, process of patching-up which the neglected old hall was undergoing. When my hosts had gathered with all their following, filling the temple court with a gaily dressed crowd, huge umbrellas and other trappings of office, and I was duly invited to my own reception hall, I could scarcely recognize it in its refurbished elegance.

It was an imposing banquet, lasting to my dismay from 4 P.M. until nightfall. I soon gave up counting the dishes with all their expensive and far-fetched dainties. Chin T'ai-tsin, who, as the junior in the official trio, had charged himself with all arrangements—and, I fear, also with their expense—could be trusted to do things in style. He and the genial General rivalled each other in enlivening the Petronian feast with amusing stories drawn for my benefit chiefly from their Turkestan experiences. Even the meek old Tao-t'ai, who was allowed to sip his tea instead of the superior arrack presented to the rest of