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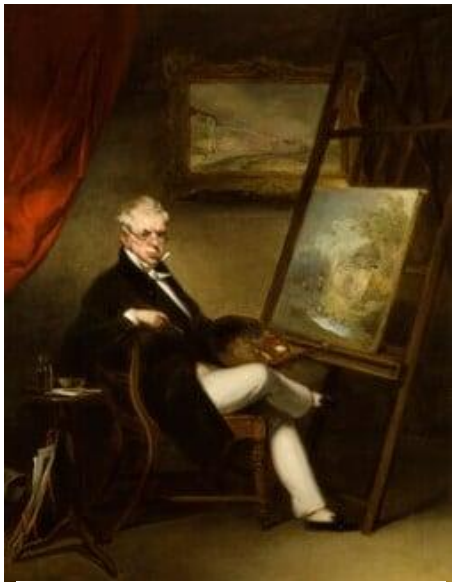
Some contemporary observations on George Chinnery: *"....his words and manner equalled his skill with the brush, while to one of the ugliest of faces were added deep-set eyes with heavy brows, beaming with expression and good nature."*

The American businessman, William C Hunter (1812-1891) arrived in China in 1825, remarkably still only thirteen years old (the same age as young George Staunton by the end of the Macartney Embassy). He spent 18 months studying Chinese at the Anglo-Chinese College at Malacca before returning to Canton to enter business. In 1829 he joined the firm of Russell & Co in Canton, handy dealers in opium. He became a partner in the company in 1842 and continued living in Macao after the 1842 Treaty that ended the first Opium War. Hunter had intimate knowledge of life and business in the Canton factories through the 1830s and 40s, and in later life in the 1880s wrote two lively books on his experiences, before dying in Nice in 1891.[1]

[Hunter, William C] ***An Old Resident.*** *The 'Fan Kwae' at Canton Before the Treaty Days 1825-1844. London, Kegan Paul, 1882. Cordier 2284.*
Hunter, William C*. Bits of Old China. London, Kegan Paul Trench, 1885. Cordier 2284.*
Both books were republished in 1911 at Shanghai, with prefaces by his son.

Hunter's second book, containing anecdotes, observations, history and of life in Canton and Macao in the 1820s and 30s ,is entertaining and informative, often leading you into the by-ways of Canton and the Factories in ways that more formal accounts could never do. Towards the end, almost as though he has been waiting all this time and at last can get it down, he writes 10 pages on his good friend George Chinnery, the great artist of the Empire in India, and of Canton and Macao their people.

While Hunter's entertaining piece can be read in isolation, it will be better with a few facts of Chinnery's life. The principal biography is that of Patrick Conner[2], and there are early accounts available of Chinnery's family[3]. Chinnery was born in London in 1774, trained at the Royal Academy schools, moved to Dublin in 1796, and married Marianne Vigne, daughter of his landlord, in April 1799. He returned to London in 1801 without family and then, still alone, to Madras in 1802, his brother already in India, employed there by the East India Company at Calcutta.



George Chinnery. Self portrait, c. 1840. National Portrait Gallery, London.

In June 1807, Chinnery was commissioned to paint the portrait of Sir Charles Russell, the new Chief Justice in Calcutta. He moved there from Madras and is reputed to have fathered two sons with an unknown Indian woman.[4] He lived in Calcutta and Dacca through to 1812, building a considerable reputation for painting portraits and scenes of Indian life and the Empire.

Chinnery's daughter Matilda eventually followed him to Calcutta, in 1817, followed by his wife in 1818. Matilda married James Cowley Brown of the Bengal Civil Service in Calcutta on 27th September 1819 and moved up country to Chopra, eventually joined there by Marianne. His son John, who also came out in 1821, died a year later. Chinnery made good money from his painting, didn't drink alcohol, yet lived a life of extravagance. In 1825 he fled, again alone, to Macao, £40,000 in debt. After his death, as Hunter records, he left an oil painting of the Bund at Calcutta, featuring the figure of a man, Chinnery himself, bowing to the city, hat in hand. A scroll across the top said 'Thermometer 200 too hot for me'. Sadly the painting seems to be hidden in a private collection today.

Chinnery clearly had a problem with his wife, and when he heard that she was wanting to follow him to China, he moved to Canton for a period, where European women were not permitted. Eventually, she never turned up and he never saw her or their daughter again. But he did dine out, as you will read below, on the relationship. Chinnery continued to paint and became a famous fixture in Macao, many travellers recording their visits with him, and he was close to local businessmen in Macao and Canton. He died in Macao in 1852 and is buried there, with his legacy of portraits, and Indian and Chinese scenes, now recognised as a major feature of English 19th C art.

In the final pages of Hunter's *Bits of Old China*, we find a series of anecdotes and memories of Chinnery, which, while not recording a lot about the art, do give us a picture of a self-deprecating, though at the same time, amusing and flamboyant figure. Not everything is accurate, and it ends with Hunter at Chinnery's deathbed. The stories have doubtless been retold, but its worth reading Hunter directly.

> "To the subject of the following lines justice cannot be done but by a much more nimble pen than mine. I have reserved for an old Indian, doubled with an old Chinaman, a place apart in these feeble efforts to revive memories of the past, of which he formed so conspicuous a feature.
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> This gentleman was George Chinnery, by birth an Irishman[5], by profession an artist, whose works in portraits, crayon sketches, and paintings in oil may yet have a universal Eastern renown. As a 'story-teller' his words and manner equalled his skill with the brush, while to one of the ugliest of faces were added deep-set eyes with heavy brows, beaming with expression and good nature.
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> He arrived at Madras in 1802, where he acquired, as he was wont to say, 'his first experience in natural history,' which made our hair stand on end as he related it. Dining one evening with some friends in the broad hall of a bungalow, he occupied a chair at the foot of the table opposite the host. Overhead was the punkah, moved by invisible agency, the punkah wallah being in an adjoining room; in a corner the topee and cane-stand. Towards the close of the dinner, all the servants having left but one behind the host, Chinnery became aware, as he said, 'of a snake making acquaintance with his ankle by twisting itself about it. Noiselessly and unseen it had glided in from the verandah behind him on which these reptiles were often found. He signalled silence to every one, and in a voice scarcely above his breath, directed the servant to bring him a bowl of milk and a cane; his manner and look assuring silence, he deliberately placed the former on the floor a short distance from his chair and as quietly lowered the cane close to it, while still holding it by the handle. The odour of the milk attracted the snake, which immediately uncoiled itself from the ankle on the stick. In another moment, 'while in the enjoyment of its unlooked-for feed,' he sprang from his chair, 'jumped on the bowl and on the head of the uninvited guest, destroying it and its dinner in the twinkling of an eye.' So common were poisonous snakes at the

time, that it was customary (Chinnery *loquitur*) for every bungalow to be provided with a number of sticks having loose iron rings at the lower end, that anyone going out in the evening could take one with him, so that while crossing a pathway or a lawn he could frighten away these nuisances by shaking the sonorous metal rings.

After an uneventful life at Madras, beyond this narrow escape, he removed to Calcutta in 1807. There he took to himself a wife[6], and to him was born a daughter who subsequently married a gentleman named Brown, of the Honourable East India Company's Civil Service, Bengal Establishment. Calcutta was then the headquarters of the rank and fashion of John Company, and where 'curvature of the spine' was, as Chinnery said, a permanent complaint, 'and some bad cases of it too in my day.' At a reception or ball at Government House there were notable examples. 'When presented to the Governor-General, for instance, the curvature was often most marked, and at times a matter of doubt if the new-comer would ever again be able to resume the upright position' ..... '[7]

Chinnery lived at Calcutta until 1825, when, after 'serious troubles,' and being tied, as he would say, 'to the ugliest woman he ever saw in the whole course of his life,' he disappeared and came to Macao. Threatened by his wife, however, that she would join him there, he packed up and came to Canton, and there I first made his acquaintance. 'Now,' I heard him say, 'I am all right; what a kind providence is this Chinese Government, that it forbids the softer sex from coming and bothering us here. What an admirable arrangement, is it not? ' he asked. 'Yes, Mr. Chinnery,' I replied, 'it is indeed;' he rolled up his eyes and exclaimed *'Laus Deo*.'

At Canton he became a general favourite, his anecdotes of Indian life, his powers of description, his eccentricities, made him a much sought for guest. Mr. B. C. Wilcox, of Philadelphia, then an old resident, and like Chinnery always wearing the high white cravat and corresponding coat collar then so much in vogue, took to him immensely, and they became the best of friends. 'You'll dine with us this evening at half-past seven,' he would say. 'Much obliged,' answered Chinnery, 'I would do so with indescribable pleasure, but at the moment I have not such a thing as a suitable coat.' 'Come then,' replied Wilcox, 'in your shirt; it will be a novelty; but come. Suy-pee will find something for us to eat, and you some one to chat with.'

I happened to sit near Mr. Chinnery the same evening. When rice and curry were served he transferred to his plate nearly all the rice. Observing it from the head of the table, 'Chinnery,' called out Wilcox, 'you are taking all the rice; twice as much as you can manage.' 'I always do so,' replied Chinnery, 'that while I am eating one half, the other half will keep it warm.' A splendid dinner it was, as in fact all were at Canton, where the bazaar was of the most diversified kind in all sorts of provisions, tame and wild, in the season, with curries matched only in India, from whence they were introduced. When over, and the decanters placed at both head and foot of the table, as was then customary, Suy-pee was ordered up. 'You dinner No. 1,' said his master; 'all man contentee.' 'Too muchee chin-chin, all man,' replied the chef; then disappeared smilingly and delighted. This celebrated Chinese Ude entered the service of Russell & Co. soon after Mr. Wilcox left for the United States in 1827.

After two years' residence in the Imperial Hong, during which Mr. Chinnery made remittances to his wife ('there goes another thousand rupees,' he would say), and having arranged for a yearly sum 'to keep her quiet,' he took up his quarters at Macao, but for some time after kept a trunk ready packed with which to fly to the provincial city, if, as he would say, 'my Thalia[8] should try to surprise me;' and on one or two occasions he did fly to the haven of safety, and returned when the scare was over. What fun all this created! He would join heartily in it himself, merely saying, 'Was any man ever so tortured as I am? ' or, 'Another *false alarm*, may it not be followed by *fire*

some day or other? Who was ever so persecuted? ' At last came the dreadful news that Mrs. C. was positively coming on in a vessel about to sail. Another ship, however, anticipated that one, by which he learnt that the cabin had been secured by a well-known gentleman named Brown, and consequently Thalia was prevented from coming. Brown was a well-known personage who made many trips between India and Canton, and as a great stickler for 'Hodgson,'[9] all which acquired for him, indifferently, the nicknames of Calcutta Brown, Canton Brown, and Beer Brown, and a very jolly fellow he was. He used to say, 'I have faced more typhoons in the China Sea than half the skippers out of Calcutta,' and this added to his other sobriquets 'Blow-hard Brown.' These nicknames, en passant, were quite common amongst the Chinese about the Factories. From some personal or professional peculiarity, Mr. William Jardine was 'the Iron-headed Rat', John R. Latimer, 'the Gong,' from the habit of going to and fro in quest of news and to talk. Mr. Oliphant was 'the Idol Devil,' and 'the Devil who worshipped God.' Wilcox, who was very tall, 'the high Devil', A Captain Samuel Gover, who commanded Messrs. Jardine, Matheson, & Co.'s station ship the Samarangdit Lintin, 'the fat Devil.' When the missionaries Bridgman and Abeel came out, they were immediately christened 'Old Story-telling Devils.' When the ship which brought Brown anchored in the roads of Macao, and he had landed, away went Chinnery to call upon him. 'Brown,' said he, 'I owe you one;' when he was interrupted by the latter, who assuming not to be in family secrets, began to apologise for having secured the cabin, thereby depriving him of the great pleasure of cordially welcoming Mrs. Chinnery after so long an absence. 'Excuse me, Chinnery, my business was unusually pressing;' and, 'Excuse you. Brown!' said C. 'Your hand, my good fellow; you have played a card I shall never forget. You'll breakfast with me to-morrow; grateful thanks for the immense and never-to-be-forgotten service you have rendered me. Chin-chin and good luck to you; may your shadow never grow less and your Patna yield you 1,000 per cent. Sharp 12.'

There was something quite refreshing in such amusing episodes of a married life; the treatment of his own by Chinnery was as rich as a play. In the year 1831, being ill, I was the guest at Macao of Mrs. Low, wife of Mr. W. H. Low[10], the chief of Russell & Co., with whom I was then a juvenile purser, as the local term was. Mr. Chinnery was frequently at breakfast; facile in expression, quick in comparison or illustration, he always made himself welcome with his amusing stories of local as well as of Indian life, but spoke of Mrs. C. with unfeigned indifference or ridicule. As, for instance, I heard him say, 'Her beauty, Mrs. Low, even surpasses my own.' Mrs. Davis, the wife of the then Mr. John Francis Davis, the last chief of the Honourable East India Company's Canton Factory, afterwards Sir John, the first governor of the island of Hong-Kong, was a frequent visitor of Mrs. Low. One morning she came to breakfast when Mr. Chinnery was present, and sat opposite to him. No one hesitated to ask after or to refer to Mrs. Chinnery, while he himself was anything but displeased; it gave him an opportunity to reply. 'Really,' said Mrs. Davis, 'you say Mrs. Chinnery is such a fright. It is not very gallant, at least now tell us, is there the least bit of exaggeration in what you say of her appearance? Be candid.' Dropping his knife and fork and looking steadfastly at her, he replied, 'Mrs. Davis, Mrs. Chinnery's appearance cannot be exaggerated. She was an ugly woman thirty years ago; what in the name of the Graces must she be now.?'

In 1825 arrived at Canton an American gentleman named W. W. Wood.[11] He and I first fell in with one another in the Ombay Passage[12], both of us on our way to Canton, he on board the Isabella (a bright-sided ship, long since extinct) from Philadelphia, myself from New York in the Citizen. We spoke, and for an hour or two were side by side. He joined Russell & Co. some time after I did, and we occupied an office in common. The poor fellow was awfully pock-marked; his face resembled a pine cone, but his expression was one of very good humour and full of intelligence. He was besides well educated and a most gentlemanly young fellow. He was the son of the famous tragedian of Philadelphia. Soon after he joined us, we formed a trio in our special office by the coming in of young Mortimer Irving, a nephew of Washington Irving. Wood was very clever

at draughting and sketching; thus on his visits to Macao, as well as in Canton, he met Chinnery constantly, and, being brother chips with the pencil, of similar tastes, besides being a most amusing fellow, and a toss up in respect to looks, they became fast friends. Wood was quite equal to Chinnery in wit and metaphor, while over their mutual disfigurement each one insisted that he was the most marked of the two. Meeting one day at Macao, Chinnery assumed an air of displeasure, held up his clenched hand, and shaking it at him, exclaimed, 'Oh, you wicked man! I was some one until you came. You are marked, it's true, but I was remarked. Passers-by would say, "There goes old Chinnery; what an ugly fellow." Poco poco, my title became undisputed. What a triumph! now you would carry off the palm. Oh, you ugly piece of wood.' There followed, of course, a deal of fun. Wood became one of Chinnery's most welcome friends, and in the latter's studio, where we met so often at breakfast together, nothing could surpass their mutual good feeling.

We all came to know that differences between Mr. and Mrs. Chinnery were not exclusively the cause of his disappearance from Calcutta. There were differences with his creditors too. Certain laws, considered so absurd by debtors, restricted their movements, while if the City of Palaces became too hot to hold them and they could manage it, they would take a change of air.

Macao was then the asylum of the East, open to all, bond or free, and thus it became a proverb, Macao is the paradise of Debtors and of Tan-Kas[13]. Wood, looking in one morning, just from Canton, found his friend lying on the sofa in apparently a towering rage. 'Come here,' exclaimed the latter, and taking up a late number of the 'Bengal Hurkaru,[14]' which was lying on the floor by his side, he pointed out an advertisement in it. 'Read that,' he said. 'Was there ever such an insult! It is insufferable'. Wood read, 'Notice! Whereas George Chinnery, an absconding debtor, is hereby required,' &c. 'Well, you know, Chinnery, these things will happen. What with bad luck and losses, you know, debts are hard to avoid, but 'What's hard? What do you mean? ' roared C.; 'is that all you see there? Debts, what on earth are debts? Fiddlesticks for your debts! ' (with emphasis). 'Think of George Chinnery, neither Mr. nor Esquire; of George Chinnery, without head or tail; that is too much to bear! Now then, the best news from Canton? ' Wood then related something fresh that he had brought down.

Our doctor there was a Philadelphian named Bradford[15], a youngish man, but a careful physician. He had very little to do, so he passed much of his time in wandering from Hong to Hong to pick up news and to chat, and now and then, after giving some one a punch in the side, if the punched one cried out he would say, 'Ah, I see, liver; a little medicine would do you no harm,' and soon after was sent in what we called 'two and one.'[16] 'I received my two and one' said Wood, 'and a day or two after in came Bradford.' 'Ah ! well, Wood, you seem all right now; see what it is to follow my prescription.' 'I did no such thing, Bradford,' I replied, 'had I followed it, I should have broken my neck; I threw it out of the window.' Chinnery was immensely tickled with this story, which completely blotted from his thoughts the insufferable insult he had read in the 'Hurkaru.'

In 1834 Wood left China for Manila, and there passed the rest of his life, making a trip to Europe and back, and a visit to myself at Macao in the meantime, but always corresponding with Mr. Chinnery. Years passed, eighteen more years from the departure of Wood, when our old friend became seriously ill, and it was too evident that his days were drawing to a close. Patrick Stewart[17], for many years Resident of Macao, to which place he had come more than twenty years before from Bombay, and Hurjeebhoy Rustomjee[18], a Parsee, who had passed a long time at Canton, both being old friends of Chinnery, and myself remained with him the last night of his life. He died at half-past four A.M. of May 30, 1852. After seeing his effects placed in his studio we sealed the doors, left his servant Augustine and several Chinese in charge, and I came home to bed at five o'clock. During the whole time that Mr. Chinnery had passed amongst us, twenty

seven years, he had been remarked for two characteristics, one of being an enormous eater, the other of never drinking either wine, beer, or spirits. His sole beverage was tea, oftener cold than hot. Everyone supposed therefore, from his wonderful eating powers, that his stomach would be found in a most deranged state. An autopsy was made by Doctor Watson, our Macao medico, who attended Chinnery in his last illness, the morning of his death, about ten o'clock, at which Stewart and myself were present. On examining the brain it was evident that he had died of serous apoplexy, while the stomach was wonderfully healthy.

A few days after his death Doctor Watson and I were requested by Judge Cavalho, chief judicial officer of Macao, to look through his books, papers, trunks, &c., in case a will might have been left, but there was nothing of the kind. Several camphor wood trunks, however, were found, filled with pen-and-ink sketches and very choice oil-paintings. Amongst the latter was one finished with great care, and which no one of us had seen. It represented, left, the Bund at Calcutta, a ship's boat lying at it, a Lascar crew on board with oars tossed, all ready to go alongside of a vessel lying in the river, with her Blue Peter at the fore and fore-topsail loose. In the distance, right, the City of Palaces, with foliage about it, and on the end of the Bund, centre, a European, with a serious curvature of the spine, a portfolio under one arm, and a sola topee in his hand, bowing towards the city, while at the top of the painting was a scroll, in which were the words, 'thermometer 200°,' evidently 'too hot for me.' At length, there being no claimant for his effects, they were sold by order of the judge, when this painting was purchased by Mr. John Dent, then chief of the old Canton and Hong-Kong house of Dent & Co., in whose possession it probably is now."

Mrs Chinnery deserves some restoration. There are at least three possible images of her which certainly don't depict an ugly woman, showing up Chinnery's use of her looks as a reason for his neglect of her, and as the subject of his party jokes. The Royal Dublin Society holds a portrait *'Attention, Portrait of Miss Vigne,1800'.* Although thought to be Marianne's sister, it has been suggested that it could be of Marianne herself.[19]

It is very similar to a portrait of Marianne published in Peter Moss's book on Chinnery[20]. This comes from the collection of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking corporation art collection, digitised by Hong Kong University Library.[21]

A pencil and watercolour drawing of a young girl signed, and dated 'Geo. Chinnery Dublin 1801' was sold at Christies in 2006, with the suggestion that it might be Marianne Chinnery.

Mrs Chinnery was not frightfully ugly, and George Chinnery played upon that conceit likely to help downplay his social and financial indiscretions. But then he wouldn't be the first to be forgiven his behaviour for the sake of his wonderful art.

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[1] https://prabook.com/web/william.hunter/3759218

[2] Conner, Patrick. George Chinnery, 1774-1852: artist of India and the China coast. London, Antique Collectors Club, 1993.

[3] https://corkhist.ie/wp-content/uploads/jfiles/1933/b1933-001.pdf

[4] https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac .uk/archives-and-library/damaged-and-destroyed-stories/george-chinnery

[5] Chinnery was born in London.

[6] This is Marianne whom he married in Ireland, and their daughter Matilda, both who followed Chinnery out to India. It is strange that Hunter who professed to know Chinnery intimately should get the latter's marriage details wrong. It says something for Chinnery's story-telling.

[7] This recurring joke is about Chinnery's scornful view of the obsequious nature of young men when confronted with high-ranking superiors.

[8] In Greek mythology, Thalia was the muse of poetry and comedy.

[9] Hodgson was a London brewer famous in the development of India pale ale and other brews used by the British in the East.

[10] Abigail Low. Her niece Harriet also travelled to Macao with her aunt and her diaries have been published: Lights and Shadows of a Macao Life: The Journal of Harriett Low, Travelling Spinster Part One and Two. Low, Harriet / Nan P. Hodges and Arthur W. Hummel [eds]
Washington, The History Bank, 2002.

[11] William Wfhtman Wood, (1804 -), son of the actors William B and Juliana Westray Wood. He had a substantial career in China as a businessman, journalist and poet, founding the Canton Register in 1827, and later the Chinese Courier. He was an unsuccessful lover of Harriet Lowe.

[12] Ombai Strait, a deep water strait near Timor.

[13] Tan-kas were boat dwellers, ubiquitous in Coastal ports such as Macao, and often depicted by Chinnery in his port landscapes

[14] Major English-language newspaper published in Calcutta from 1795 to 1866.

[15] Probably Dr James. H Bradford, who pioneered clinics using Western medicine for treatment of local people in Canton.

[16] Patent medicines common in the 19th C reputed to cure problems such as blood and bowel conditions, etc.

[17] Scottish shipowner and businessman, heavily involved in the opium trade. He died in Macao in 1857.

[18] Leading businessman in Canton and Macao, agent for the Bombay company Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, Sons and Co.

[19] https://digitalarchive.rds.ie/exhibits/show/artcollection/item/3852

[20] Moss, Peter. Chinnery in China. Hong Kong, FormAsia Books, 2007

[21] https://digitalrepository.lib.hku.hk/catalog?q=chinnery&collection=bn99gf12q&collection