

ABOUT CHINESE GIRLS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "CHILD-LIFE IN CHINESE HOMES."



THE PAI-LOW.



CHINESE girls! what a cloud of faces seems to rise up before us as we begin to think of them!

The girls shut up within the high, prison-like walls of many a noble and wealthy home! the girls of middle-class families, strictly secluded also from the

eyes of strangers and of men!

Besides these, there are the girls of the farm-houses, brought up in the freer life of the country; and the girls of the poorer classes, who from their earliest days have to work hard for their daily bread.

Small children there are, who stagger about with heavy babies on their backs, or spend their days, from early dawn till dusk, in pasting together the soles of Chinese shoes, plaiting silk to lengthen men's "pig-tails," making lanterns, or fancy boxes, and paper money. A considerable number also spend the days of their young lives closely confined to the embroidery frame, their eyes being often permanently injured by the long working hours consumed in this ill-paid industry.

Last of all come the poor children who first see the light beneath the roof of some frail mat shed

—the outcasts of society, who are brought up to beggary as a trade.

How wide, then, is the range over which we glance when we speak of these Chinese girls! and yet, though divided by so deep a gulf in most respects, some circumstances of their lives are alike in every case.

Whether the eyes of our wee Chinese lassie open first beneath the roof of some proud mandarin or in a beggar's wretched hut, the welcome she receives is rarely a cordial one; indeed, she is looked upon as an intruder, and not infrequently she disappears, and is seen no more, after the first hour of her existence.

But, supposing that she is able to tide over the numberless fatalities which seem to beset the early days of so many Chinese girl-babies, then, if it be true, as is sometimes asserted, that children who are watched the least carefully thrive the best, then surely Chinese baby-girls should flourish amazingly.

When the Chinese infant is about a month old, the day of naming arrives—an occasion celebrated with general rejoicings when the little stranger is a boy; but who would think of making any special demonstration of joy at the addition of a girl to

one's family? Still, the baby must have a name, even if it be only "Daughter Number One, Two, or Three," as the case may be.



CHINESE GIRL AND BABY.

Not unfrequently, however, she receives some such suggestive cognomen as "Beckoning a brother," "Lead along a brother," or "Come, younger brother." "White Water-lily," "Beautiful Pearl," "Better than Gold," are also some of the names not infrequently bestowed upon girls.

In many parts of China all the girls, from the children of wealthy parents (not of Tartar race) to the daughters of common beggars, undergo the torture of foot-binding, with the idea of producing the "golden lilies" which Chinese taste admires. The gait of these daughters of the Flowery Land is most uncouth to Western eyes; but in the poetical language of their native country, the movements of a girl thus deformed resemble "the waving of the willows," or are like "the green bamboos

stirred by the summer breezes."

Chinese girls have, not infrequently, pleasing faces; but this applies more particularly to those of the middle and upper classes. The younger children wear their luxuriant raven tresses twisted into a heavy plait hanging down behind, secured with many yards of twisted scarlet cord. Up to the time of marriage, girls part their hair smoothly at the forehead, as the sign of their single estate; but when the wedding-day arrives, the young bride's hair is drawn back, and all the short hairs are pulled out by tweezers, with the idea of making her forehead appear broad and high.

With regard to dress, a Chinese girl is little troubled by any considerations of fashion. There is a slight difference, scarcely apparent to Western eyes, in the cut of the costumes of the girls and women of different provinces; but, speaking generally, the same attire is worn by the aged grand-dame and her year-old grand-daughter, by the mandarin's child and the daughter of a poor coolie. Their clothing differs, not in shape, but in the material of which the garments are composed and the manner in which they are ornamented. With reference to this question of dress, a well-known American missionary lady, who has lived and worked for many years in China, writes:—

"In one thing the Chinese woman is exceptionally blessed—she has inherited from former generations a style of dress at once modest, economical, and becoming. It takes but eight yards of yard-wide cloth for

a complete suit of winter garments, and there is no waste in cutting nor in unnecessary appendages. Its truest economy, however, is in that saving of mental worry which comes from always cutting by the same pattern and the obviation of all need of fitting. It allows unrestricted play to every muscle, is of the same thickness over the whole body, is not in the way when at work, and it has little weight, while it has all needful warmth." Probably some of my English girl readers may hold different opinions upon this subject, and think there are two sides to this, as to most other matters.

As regards the instruction of Chinese girls, the general idea is that they are incapable of receiving a liberal education, being considered greatly inferior to their brothers intellectually.

"The feminine mind is unsteady in purpose, and easily swerved from the right," gravely asserts one ancient authority; while another informs the women of China that they do not need to study much beside the Four Virtues and the Three Obediences; the Four Virtues relating to the girl's behaviour, conversation, deportment, and employments, and the Obediences concerning a girl's dutiful subjection to her parents, a wife's to her husband, and a widow's to her son.

In the "Nu-Er-Ching," or "Little Girl's Primer," which is used by all girls who are taught to read at all, one of the maxims runs thus: "If, after marriage, you have no son, it will be your duty to persuade your husband to take another wife!"

From the age of eight or nine, little girls of wealthy families are usually kept closely guarded within their own homes. "Women should keep within the threshold of the inner apartments—even to old age they should not go beyond the doorway," says one of those Chinese authors who have handed down to posterity the fame of women of ancient times, who are considered types of what women should endeavour to attain to.

The superintendence of the kitchen is always noted by these ancient authors as one of a woman's most important duties. She should see that the vegetables are fresh and properly washed, that the meats are well flavoured, and that the whole meal is well served.

The example of an aged lady of rank, who used to go to her kitchen at daybreak to prepare gruel for her servants, lest they should suffer from cold while prosecuting their work, is quoted as worthy of imitation.

A woman's duty, it is said, is to make shoes for herself and her children, to spin and weave, to cut out and make her own clothing and that of her husband, to wash the clothes of the family, and to care for the silkworms.



A CHINESE GIRL'S FEET.

Hospitality is strictly enjoined by the example of a good lady of ancient times, who always pressed her guests to remain longer, however lengthy the period they had dwelt beneath her roof. Her family was in poor circumstances, and on one occasion, when cupboard and barn were alike bare, she emptied the straw from her mattress to obtain fodder for a guest's horse, and cut off her own hair to obtain the wherewithal to purchase wine and food for the refreshment of the gentleman himself.

In the annals of Chinese history, moreover, there are not a few examples of women who have been familiar with the literature of their country. Many of them were famous for their acquaintance with the classics, and especially the Historical Books; some were poets of no mean order; while the sage remarks of others on various subjects are not infrequently quoted. Yet, at the same time, while Chinese writers are fond of giving instances of women of past ages who have displayed extraordinary virtues, or been the possessors of exceptional talent, very sarcastic remarks about the sex frequently appear upon the same page, such as: "Women have no right to form an opinion upon any subject; silence alone becomes them." It is considered advisable, moreover, that girls should not, as a rule, be taught to read, "lest they should suffer from the contaminating influence of bad books!"

A widow, or betrothed girl whose intended husband dies, even if only a child in years, is always exhorted ever to remain faithful to the memory of the departed. They are advised to follow the example of those heroines of antiquity who disfigured themselves by cutting off their ears and noses rather than marry a second time; and even in the present day



IN A MISSIONARY SCHOOL.



THE MANDARIN'S DAUGHTER.

young girls are constantly warmly praised for "their constancy and purity" when, under these circumstances, they commit suicide.

The current numbers of the *Peking Gazette* constantly contain accounts of cases of this kind which have been brought before the notice of the Emperor. They are invariably applauded, and usually an Imperial command is issued to honour their memory by the erection of a "Pai-low," or ornamental archway. We can hardly wonder, therefore, at the weird attraction which suicide seems to possess for many Chinese women.

As an instance of the great care bestowed by one of the eminent ladies of the past in bringing up her children, it is noted that her little daughter, who had been betrothed at the age of six, hearing, when she was thirteen years old, of the death of her affianced husband, stole away in the twilight of the day on which the news had come, and drowned herself in the lotus pond in the garden.

The extraordinary idea that sick parents will recover from an illness if their child—unknown to them—cuts off a piece of his or her own flesh and mixes it with their food, is the occasion of many curious paragraphs in the Chinese papers of to-day (curious, that is, to Western eyes). One constantly sees cases of this kind mentioned as having been brought under Imperial notice, and the girls in question—for it is girls who most frequently perform this "act of filial piety"—are generally honoured with a tablet to commemorate their filial devotion.

But time would fail me to tell the many strange stories of women or girls worthy of most honourable mention, from a Chinese point of view, for their unselfish devotion to their parents or betrothed husbands.

Very numerous, too, are the instances of noble women of ancient times, who were brave and courageous in times of extreme danger, humane and filial beyond the ordinary lives.

And, beside these, there is the maiden of Chinese

romance. The ideal in most cases differs from the real; but, surely, rarely is the discrepancy so wide as we find it here.

The maiden of popular, almost classical, Chinese stories is a surpassingly beautiful damsel—"her eyebrows long willow-leaves, her cheeks almond flowers, her lips the blossoms of the peach."

Moreover, her eyes have "the wistful brightness of a lake in autumn," while "her footprints are like the flower of the lotus." The heroine of all Chinese romances is almost invariably a remarkably clever young lady. She is quite able to compete with her admirers in the composition of elaborate poetry, formed, according to custom, upon given *bouts-rimés*.

An English translation of a short poem which one charming young lady—Yao Sien by name—composed and wrote upon a scroll on which some willows were cleverly painted for the adornment of the walls of her father's summer-house, runs as follows:—

"The mournful willows beside the pond,
Tell me who planted—tell me, who?
The flying bats flit beyond, beyond,
They trouble the waters in passing through;
But the willows are there, with their light blue leaves,
And the men depart—who grieves? who grieves?"

These lines are introduced to the notice of the young gentleman by the father of the lovely poetess, with the thoroughly Chinese remark: "Can't you honour this rubbish with a laugh? Are the lines not terrible nonsense?—wretched rhymes, too?"

But he goes on to observe that his poor garden is just then honoured by the presence of a youth of extraordinary talent, who, if he will but deign to leave behind him a memento of his visit in the shape of a poem from his elegant pencil, will indeed lend an irresistible attraction to his poor belongings.

In compliance with this flattering request, the young man matches the young lady's rhymes as follows:—

"The willows wave to the winds of spring,
Their branches ruffle the pond below;
But can a beautiful living thing,
Behind her crimson portal, know
The sorrow and suffering, night and day,
Of one who is sighing far away?"

After a variety of adventures, the heroine of this story is at last united to the young student who so satisfactorily "paired" her rhymes.

On the day after the wedding, however, she warmly urges upon her bridegroom the duty of marrying another beautiful young lady, who had been betrothed to him by mistake, and upon hearing a report of his death, had attempted suicide rather than consent to another betrothal. The marriage took place, but, by the Emperor's special intervention, both young ladies were allowed to rank as first wives.

Their state of felicity is enlarged upon in the last chapter of the story—"they were supremely happy, and rivals only in beauty and grace."

They used to address complimentary verses to each other; and, indeed, says the writer, it would not be possible to describe their perfect happiness.

In another popular love story, unmeasured scorn is heaped upon the head of one poor young applicant for the fair lady's hand because he possessed no imagination, and was quite unable to compose the poem required of him. The art of rhyme-making forms, indeed, a part of every Chinese student's course. The heroine of this story, after passing through many alarming adventures, is at last on the eve of marriage with her betrothed.

"She shows her generous and noble spirit" by putting her dearest friend in her place. This is as easily done in China, where the bride's face is closely veiled, as it was in Midian of old.

Some such climax as this frequently occurs in Chinese stories, giving them a quite unique, and by no means agreeable, character of their own. These few glimpses between the covers of widely read, almost classical, Chinese romances will give some idea of how the maidens of the Flowery Land are taught to look upon marriage, of how wide as the poles apart are her ideas upon the subject as compared with those which are instilled into the heart of an English girl, and consequently, how difficult is the work of Christian missionaries, who have to contend against the mass of heathen customs and superstitions which for thousands of years have dominated the Chinese nation.

MARY I. BRYSON.

DOROTHY'S VOCATION.

BY EVELYN EVERETT GREEN, AUTHOR OF "MONICA," "OLIVER LANGTON'S WARD," ETC. ETC.

CHAPTER X.—SICK CHILDREN.

FOR one long, strange week Dorothy lived as in an indescribable shifting dream, in which day and night were inextricably mixed and blended, and nothing was clear save a very real anxiety, and the necessity for constant watchfulness.

Wilfred was very ill indeed, the throat symptoms being so severe as to raise the gravest fears for his life. Winnie was quite sufficiently ill too, though never in danger; and though the eldest and youngest

had the fever more slightly, they were ailing enough to be very wretched and miserable; and poor little Bernie fretted sadly whenever Dorothy was out of sight.

As the three boys were all in the same room, and Dorothy's anxiety for Wilfred kept her constantly at his bedside, Bernie was tolerably well satisfied; but if ever he awoke to find her absent, his little wailing cry would always begin, and often she was called up from her much-needed rest by one of the worried nurses, because "Master Bernie *would* keep crying and disturbing Master Wilfred."