

HOME LIFE of the CHINESE

BY WILL P. SHAFER

KNOWLEDGE of the home life of the denizens of the Chinese empire is very meager. The author met a young man, a member of the highest aristocracy, who had spent some time in Europe and America, studying these countries with the intention of using the knowledge thus gained in bettering the condition of his countrymen. A long voyage afforded many opportunities for intimate intercourse with this young man, who was certainly a most amiable Chinaman. As he had learned to appreciate the progress in foreign countries, he returned home with a good idea concerning the defects of the great empire.

Before continuing the journey to Shanghai we concluded to stop at Hongkong, where he had relatives. Nothing could be more charming than the manner of reception by these amiable, and, to me, highly interesting persons.

In his homelands found the long wished for opportunity to make a personal study of life in Chinese families, as well as the customs and habits of the general public. Thus the author was indebted to accident for affording to me this most welcome opportunity of gaining insight into the life of this highly interesting people.

The Chinese conception of beauty is certainly peculiar in many ways. The young men pull out the hairs of their growing beards by the roots, but when they reach the mature age of 40 they permit their braute ornament to grow quite long, as this is supposed to give an air of wisdom and dignity. The familiar braid of hair grown on the crown of the head dates back to the time when the Tartars compelled the Chinese to shave the rest of their heads.

While obesity is considered a mark of beauty in a man, it is looked upon as a great defect in women, who strive by every means in their power to preserve their slenderness of figure. Men of high rank and scholars cultivate enormously long finger nails, to show that they are not engaged in manual labor.

Chinese women of rank are seldom seen by foreigners. At home they amuse themselves by adorning their hair with artificial flowers and gold and silver chaplets, as well as chains. Their hair is either confined in a net or allowed to hang loose.

A large percentage of Chinese make their



and American customs, the parents of the girl are not expected to give her a marriage portion, but the prospective bridegroom is required to pay to them a stipulated sum, which is then expended in purchasing the bride's wardrobe, etc. All the preliminaries concluded, the marriage ceremonies may proceed.

First of all the relatives and friends send congratulations in the shape of presents and cards, at the same time inquiring after the names of the prospec-



tive bride and groom. This is, of course, a mere formality, as they have usually known them for a long time.

After this the relatives discuss the date of the wedding, and, being very superstitious, they consult the almanac so that a lucky day may be chosen. In the meantime the young man occasionally bestows costly presents upon his future wife, whom he has never seen.

This, at least, is the custom in well-to-do families.

When the wedding day arrives the bride is handed into a sedan chair, which is magnificently adorned with garlands and artificial flowers. This is followed by the servants bearing her belongings, which consist of clothing, ornaments and jewels. Some of the servants carry lighted torches, though the hour may be high noon.

The sedan is preceded by a band of musicians, followed by the relatives and guests. The nearest relative of the bridegroom holds in his hand the key of the sedan, which is locked, the windows being grated.

When the bridal party reaches the house it is met at the door by the bridegroom, who, upon receiving from his relative the key, unlocks the door of the sedan, and now for the first time beholds the bride chosen for him.

It is not difficult to picture to one's self the eager expectation with which the young man opens the door of the stage that holds her with whom he is destined to live the rest of his life, and once in a while it happens that he is so disappointed at the sight of the woman chosen for him that he slams the door of the sedan and sends back the undesirable bride to her parents. Such cases are rare, however, as the bridegroom forfeits the money paid to the parents and the presents bestowed upon the girl.

When the bride-to-be alights her future lord takes her by the hand and leads her into the hall.

In the hall at one wedding a special table was reserved for the bridal couple, the guests being seated at small tables, the men in one room and the women in another.

Before taking their seats the young couple bowed four times profoundly to an imaginary spirit, Tien, supposed to preside over heaven.

When they finally sat down they each had to pour a glass of wine on the floor before they were allowed to eat. A plate of food was also set aside for their gods.

As soon as they had tasted the viands the bridegroom arose and invited his bride to drink, in response to which she also arose, returning the compliment. Two goblets of wine were now brought in, from which both bridegroom and bride drank alternately, pouring the remainder on the floor. This last ceremony made them husband and wife.

After a while the newly made wife joins the women, while her husband invites the men to another apartment, where he entertains them. In China it would be just as preposterous for a bride to wear white as it would be in other countries were she to appear in black at the altar.

A wife who deserts her husband is sentenced to be flogged, and may be regarded as a slave of her husband; but if she marries the man with whom she elopes her former husband can have her strangled.

Grounds for divorce include a violent temper, a vicious tongue, disobedience or theft. Although divorce is authorized by law, it is rarely appealed to by the better class. Chinese husbands are so extremely watchful that the wife is not allowed to speak to any man, not even to a near relative, except in the presence of her husband.

The different branches of a family usually keep house together under the same roof for reasons of economy. For poor persons, who live entirely on vegetables, this joint house-keeping means a great saving.

The lot of the peasant women is indeed a sad one. The men tyrannize over them, keeping them in constant subjection. When a husband thinks he has reason to be displeased with his wife or there has been a quarrel, he compels her to stand before his chair at meals and wait on him. Besides this, she is made to eat with the servants.

The older women always live together with the young ones, in order to nip in the bud any show of temper, and implicit obedience is demanded. In every house a set of rules for moral guidance is hung up in the common hall, where the male members of the family assemble from time to time.

A characteristic trait of the Chinese is their clanishness, and family reunions are encouraged by periodical visits to the graves of their ancestors. A genealogical tablet is found in every house, and in conversation frequent reference is made to the deeds of the departed.

To work for their parents is the duty of the children, and if any of their brothers or sisters should be in trouble they must go to their assistance. There is no written law to this effect, but nonfulfillment of this sacred filial duty would entail such lasting disgrace upon the offender that no one would

dare to evade it. Funeral solemnities in China are worthy of observation. When a person of rank dies the body is embalmed and enveloped in costly robes, after which it is placed in a costly coffin, in which it lies in state on a catafque, surrounded with lighted torches and a profusion of beautiful flowers.

Here the women, relatives and friends prostrate themselves, touching the ground with their foreheads, while the air is filled with clouds of incense.

The Chinese make provision for their coffins during lifetime, even the poorest finding ways and means to prepare for their last resting place, for a Chinese coffin is very costly and a magnificent affair, as anyone who has ever seen a funeral will know.

In order to show his filial respect a son will often keep the embalmed body of his father in the house for two or three years. The father exercises authority over all the son possesses, including his children, whom, if they offend him, he may



sell. A funeral procession is always preceded by a large number of persons bearing little pasteboard figures representing slaves, camels and horses. The departed is supposed to meet spirits who have the power of imbuing these figures with life, so that they may both serve and entertain him. Then follow the daughters, the wife and the other relatives, all in sedan chairs. These women fill the air with howls and lamentations, so that if they cannot be seen they certainly make themselves heard.

When a mandarin of high rank celebrates his birthday the members of the Chinese "400" assemble in sections and repair to the official's residence, where they line up in the hall. Then one of them, presenting a glass of cordial to the mandarin, says:

"Behold the wine; may it bring the joy!" Another presents him with candies, saying: "We bring the sugar of long life!" and then the rest follow suit. The offerings consist for the most part of candies and such things. When one mandarin meets another of high rank he at once stops his sedan and salutes his colleague with profound bows.

When two of equal rank meet they salute each other in their sedans by crossing their hands upon the chest and bowing, which they continue as long as they can see each other.

At the large dinners of state given from time to time by high officials small tables, one for each guest are set in the hall.

The Chinese may be great epicures, but it would take an American stomach a hundred years or more before it could learn to relish such things as silkworms, the larvae of the sphinx moth, earth worms and jelly fish.

Another delicacy much prized by the Chinese is a species of giant spider.

They care very little for milk, cheese and butter; neither do they eat much beef, veal or lamb.

Toward the close of the banquet our host led the way into the garden. In the meantime the servants cleared the tables and carried water, for on our return to the hall there was a general washing of hands, one of the servants holding the bowl, while another poured the water. This ceremony performed, we sat down to enjoy a really delicious fruit, winding up with tea and cigars.

But there was still another surprise in store. At the end of the feast the servants went around among the guests taking up a collection for the benefit of their master in order to defray the costs of the banquet. Other countries, other ways!

And yet the Chinese think their habits and customs so perfect that they look down on all foreigners as being far behind in civilization. At least this was the case until just a few years ago.

INSPECTION OF OILS

HOW RAILROADS WILL HELP STATE TREASURY.

NEW RULE UNDER NEW LAW

Railway Commission Hears From Interested Parties—Other Matters at the State Capital.

Railroads in Nebraska will have to pay for the state inspection of oils, such as gasoline and kerosene, in future. This will mean a big sum going from the railroads into the state treasury.

Under the old law only oils to be sold were required to be inspected in the state. Under that the Union Pacific paid for the inspection of one care of gasoline a month, and none of the other roads paid for any inspection at all.

The new law passed by the legislature, however, provides for the inspection of oil for "sale or use" in the state.

Deputy Oil Inspector Arthur Mullen visited the legal departments of several of the railroads and informed them of what he intended. He says that he anticipates no resistance.

The oil inspector's department turns into the state fund about \$1,000 a month from inspections. The fee is 10 cents a barrel in lots of more than fifty barrels. The new law provides for higher rates for smaller quantities. Cars average about 115 barrels, so that inspection of a car would fetch over \$10. Just how many cars of oil the roads use in a month, Mr. Mullen is unable to say, but with the Union Pacific's motor cars, oil burned in lamps, in small towns, etc., he figures that this will materially increase the state's income.

Another effect of the new law has been to bring in a quantity of gasoline from Kansas and lower its price by from 3 to 5 cents a gallon.

The test was lowered from .68 to .62 by the new law. Previously the Kansas oil could not quite meet the test, and therefore all of the oil used in this state had to be shipped in from the east with additional freight charges.

Railroad Men Are Heard.

The railway commission announced after hearing railroad men and others on changes in classification proposed by railroad companies, that if the western classification is made the basis the commission will not issue an order within thirty to sixty days. This time will be allowed to permit shippers and others an opportunity to be heard.

The commission last year refused to adopt western classification No. 45 and for nearly one year No. 44 is the classification that has been in force. The numerous changes in articles from one class to another and the changes in the car load weights made by the proposed classification No. 46 caused the commission to issue an order to retain No. 44 in force till a new one can be agreed upon. The commission desires to follow the example of railway commissions of other states and make one of its own. The present hearing is for that purpose. Classification No. 44 is used as a basis by the commission in adopting one of its own.

Contract for State Fair.

The contract for the erection of one-half of the first large building the state is to furnish for the state fair grounds was awarded by the board of public lands and buildings. The legislature appropriated \$50,000 for a live stock judging coliseum. The fair board decided to expend this for the construction of one-half of the proposed building. The board asked for \$100,000 to erect a building such as other states have. There were four bidders on the building proper, but W. J. Assenmuer of Lincoln was lowest at \$27,438. Hollenbeck & Thompson of University Place were lowest on the steel work at \$14,575.

Complaint Dismissed.

The railroad commission has dismissed the complaint of Adolph Franzen of Funke, against the Burlington for not getting stock from the Phelps county town to Omaha as soon as he thought it should. The road has agreed to give freight facilities needed on Monday, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and with this understanding the matter was settled.

To Value Railroad Property.

The State Railway commission has selected Elbert C. Hurd of Lincoln chief engineer to value all railroad property in Nebraska at a salary of \$400 a month. The selection was made by Commissioners Clarke, Winnett and Cowgill, with the approval of the governor. The legislature appropriated \$40,000 for the work of valuing railroad property and provided that salaries should be paid only to persons approved by the governor. Mr. Hurd is at present manager of the Omaha, Lincoln & Beatrice interurban railroad.

Rock Island Plans.

Together with the announcement that the Rock Island railroad is soon to retore the two passenger trains between Lincoln and Chicago which were taken off last October, after a ten weeks' trial, comes additional information that the road is preparing to make extensive enlargements and improvements in its freight properties here. The scheme in contemplation, if carried out, will double Lincoln's importance as a freight point on the Rock Island and materially promote chances of securing new industries.



home entirely upon the water, many of them being fishermen. The latter are clad merely in cocconut leaves, one of these tied on the back, thus serving as an umbrella, without hindering them in their work. The fashion of carrying fans, so universal throughout China, has been adopted by other countries.

Dress to some extent is regulated by law, certain colors designating the rank or social station of the wearer. Thus the right to wear yellow belongs exclusively to the emperor and princes, and certain mandarins are the only persons entitled to wear garments of red satin, but only on certain occasions.

White is the color of mourning, and cannot be too much soiled, in order to show how indifferent the mourner is to personal appearance, and that all his thoughts and feelings are centered in his grief for the departed.

The colors worn by the populace are blue and black. The Chinese show great respect and deference for the aged, and are as a rule of humane and gentle disposition. The merchant is thoroughly honorable in his dealings, and, above all, invariably keeps his word. The honesty of the Chinese laundresses is beyond question; everything is returned without exception, even neatly mended.

The so-called "washer girls" live in little boats, called "sompans," that usually house several families; men, women, children and household utensils all being crowded together in a small space, and one often sees the fat father smoking and loafing in comfort while his wife propels all alone the heavy craft with a single paddle, sometimes with a baby strapped on her back.

Courtship and marriage ceremonies differ essentially from ours. In the first place the young people have nothing at all to do with settling everything. Contrary to European