

New Womanhood of Korea is Advancing from Slavery to Freedom



KOREAN WOMAN AND HER CHAIR.

(Copyright, 1909, by Frank G. Carpenter.)
S...-Special Correspondent of The Bee.-The empress of Korea rode yesterday in an open carriage through the streets of Seoul. She was on her way from one of her palaces to another. She sat beside the emperor on the back seat. The sun shone brightly, her face was unveiled and all the world could see. There were thousands of men upon the streets at the time. They formed long lines of white against the black huts. With their big hats and long coats, their yellow faces were turned straight toward her majesty and their almost eyes almost popped out in surprise.

Such an event would mean little in any European country. It marks one of the most striking changes that are going on in Korea. It indicates that the new woman is on the ground with both feet, and that from now on the sex will gradually make its way upward out of its present state of degradation. Until now, no man outside the emperor and the eunuchs of the palace has ever seen the features of Korean female royalty. When I was here twenty years ago, a young American girl had just come out to act as physician to the queen. She was the first woman doctor in Korea, and her majesty awaited her coming rather than have the foreign medical missionaries, who were at that time all men, examine her. When the latter were called in consultation they were not allowed to see the queen, and when they felt her pulse her hands were thrust out through a screen and nothing else was shown.

Where the Ladies Stay at Home. The Korean women are not gaudy. Until now all those of the high and middle classes have been secluded from the females of the Mohammedan harems. They have quarters of their own, which are in the backs of the houses or in special establishments far off from those of the men. Some of the noblest have never been outside their own compounds, and of the middle classes very few go out today except in closed chairs. In the past it has been customary for a man to lay his hand on a woman outside his own family, and any man who looked over the wall of a garden to see the women within was sure to be punished. The husband has had absolute power over his wife and concubines. They have been bound to him by fetters of iron, and today have practically no rights. He has to respect. Indeed, the 10,000,000 women who inhabit this country are still, as far as the laws and the customs which now prevail go, practically slaves. I am told that many of them have such strength of character that they rule their homes. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the men can beat and mutilate them with little fear of the law.

New Woman Appears. All this has been so for ages, and the arrival of the new woman is therefore the more striking. One sees indications of changes everywhere, both in city and country. When I first came here the common women and slave girls working in the fields carried cloaks with them to shield their faces from the sun. Some of them turned their backs and ran away as I approached. On the streets of Seoul those who came out wore green cloaks over their heads, which they held close together in front of their faces, leaving only a crack for one eye. These cloaks had flat, well ironed sleeves which were bordered with white. The sleeves were usually passed into the garments and were used for the same purpose as today. The cloaks themselves were so thin as to be of no value for warmth, and they were used only as veils. Today the common women use the same sort of cloak, but they are not held tightly, and they show a score of female faces on any of the main streets during any working hour of the day. These street women belong to the laboring classes. Many of them are slaves and they are as a rule homely, dirty and frowny.

So far the new woman belongs to the nobility or the upper classes. She is usually the daughter of some yangban who is pro-Japanese or is anxious to ape foreign ways. Many of these gentlemen now dress in European clothes and not a few are anxious to have their wives do likewise. They see the Japanese and European women going about unveiled and observe how they are treated by their husbands as a result and they allow their wives to copy these foreign examples. I attended a court garden party the other day at which many of the royal family were present. There were several princesses, relatives of the emperor, all of his imperial majesty's cabinet ministers, the high Japanese officials and others. The foreigners brought their wives and they wore, of course, European costumes. The Japanese women were dressed in beautiful kimonos. There were in addition about a half dozen Korean women, some of whom wore European dress and the others Korean gowns. Such women belong



KOREAN GENTLEMAN AND HIS WIFE.

came from well-to-do families, and their sisters, aunts and uncles were present to see them. The most of these had cloaks or veils of some kind or other over their faces, but the girls themselves had no such covering, and they exercised without shame.

In the past the women of Korea have been almost entirely uneducated, and today those of the higher class are just beginning to send their children to school. The lower and middle-class women have sent their children to the mission schools for a number of years, and for this reason many of the teachers in the girls' schools, which contain the children of the nobility as well as other girls, are of the lower classes. This is not so of the higher school, founded by Lady Om for girls of the upper crust. It is composed of daughters of the yangban or nobles. There is also a school for girls established by this same consort of the retired emperor, which has only the daughters of the middle class. Both schools are giving a foreign education to their pupils and are doing great good.

About Lady Om.

Just here I wish to say a few words about Lady Om. Until the abdication of the emperor in 1897 she was the leading lady of this land, and as such did much for her sex. While not the empress by actual marriage, she was practically so to all intents and purposes. She is the old emperor's favorite concubine, or consort, as she is called by the Japanese. I understand his majesty is true to her, and that she allows no other of the ladies-in-waiting about the court to come near him. She is the mother of the crown prince, who is now being educated in Japan, and as such she will probably maintain her influence even after that of the old emperor has become less than it is now. Lady Om came into the palace when

she was a girl as one of the court women. One story states that she started in as a hair dresser, but this is denied. She is not pretty, but very clever, and the queen of Korea, who was assassinated by the Japanese, took her up and made much of her. She liked her cleverness, and she also liked her homely appearance, as she thought that would be an obstacle to any love for her on the part of the king, who afterward became emperor.

As the story goes, the king appreciated her as well as beauty. He cast sheep's eyes at Lady Om, notwithstanding the presence of her majesty, and, as a result, Lady Om had to flee for her life. She left the palace and remained away until after the queen was assassinated, and then came back to be the consort of his majesty. I do not know that she herself had anything to do with the selection of the crown prince as the successor of the present emperor of Korea, but I doubt not she aided in the manipulation. This boy is only 11 or 12 years of age, and he was chosen by Prince Yi over Prince Eulwha, who was an older son of the emperor by another mistress. Prince Eulwha is the young fellow who ran away from Korea to the United States and received some education there. He first went to school at Delaware, O., and afterward to a little academy at Salem, Va. He fully expected to be his father's successor, but Prince Ho has set him aside. This was the case with the wife and a daughter of a slave is a slave girl in turn. In the past such slaves have been given away, and it is not long since they were sold. When the member of a family committed a grave offense against the government, the whole family of the guilty one was often reduced to slavery.

This was the case with the wife and a daughter of Kim-Ok-Pun, the rebel who was assassinated by the orders of the king of Shanghai some years ago. Quite a number of the singing girls are slaves, and as such they have been bought and sold. Today almost every Korean lady has her slaves, who wait upon her and do her bidding. I understand that the slaves are usually well treated, and that most of them



WOMAN WITH CLOAK ON HER HEAD.

Slave Girls of Korea.

As I have said, the new woman movement is just at its beginning. I doubt if its members can be numbered by hundreds. There are certainly less than 1,000 who have yet attempted to throw off the shackles of the old customs; and the remainder, numbering millions, are in the same condition that the sex has held for many generations. The customs vary according to the class to which the girl belongs. Korea has a nobility, a middle class, common people and slaves. All of the rich families own hereditary slaves, and a daughter of a slave is a slave girl in turn. In the past such slaves have been given away, and it is not long since they were sold. When the member of a family committed a grave offense against the government, the whole family of the guilty one was often reduced to slavery. This was the case with the wife and a daughter of Kim-Ok-Pun, the rebel who was assassinated by the orders of the king of Shanghai some years ago. Quite a number of the singing girls are slaves, and as such they have been bought and sold. Today almost every Korean lady has her slaves, who wait upon her and do her bidding. I understand that the slaves are usually well treated, and that most of them

would not leave their mistresses if they could.

How the Court Ladies Dress.

Until just now it has been impossible for a foreign man to know anything about the dress of the high Korean lady except from hearsay. I attended a garden party given by the Red Cross society in the grounds of one of the old palaces this afternoon at which several of the high ladies of the emperor's court were present. Among them was a sister of her majesty. They appeared in their court gowns, with great gold pins studded with pearls in their hair and with gold bandages of their rank over their foreheads. Each woman had on a short jacket of white or light blue silk, which reached only half way to her waist, and below this a very full skirt of dark blue silk gauze, which was fastened around the body under the arms and trailed upon the ground. As they raised them I could see their stockings of padded cotton and their low embroidered white or lilac shoes.

They were bareheaded, and their jet black locks were put up in a knot which rested far down on the nape of the neck. They wore no veils nor face covering of any kind, and moved about among the people, interested in all the sights of the occasion. During the celebration the court ladies, who heretofore have been absolutely secluded, sat upon the platform, with the leading Korean and Japanese officials, representing her majesty's government, and one of them even read a message from the empress to the assemblage. No one would have dreamed such a thing possible five years ago.

Korean Girl's Costume.

The dress of the new woman will be far more comfortable and more beautiful than that of the present. A Korean friend of mine has given me some of the details as to the costume of the present. She says: "The first thing a girl puts on is a divided skirt, consisting of a pair of very full drawers which fall in folds to her feet. At the top of these is a band about eight inches wide, which is fastened tightly over the breast by a white ribbon drawing, tied at the front. The drawers are so full that they might be fastened about the neck instead of the waist, if the girl so wished. The waistband is very tight, and it comes high up the back. Above it and just meeting it is a little jacket with long sleeves. This is yellow, green, blue or white, and it is tied together with ribbons of the same color. The jacket is so short that a strip of bare skin an inch wide shows out under the shoulder blades when the woman bends over, and if she goes in the sun she may have a red stripe there. The drawers narrow as they fall to the feet, and are fast in great stockings of wadded white cotton, which make her small feet look five times as large as they are. They are more like boots than anything else, and they take the place of shoes and slippers at home. The better class houses are carpeted with matting, and the women go about in stockings. Out doors they wear low shoes with soles of ox hide or cloth. In addition to the divided skirt the

Korean woman has on a very full pair of white overpants, which reach from the arms to far below the knees, and over the whole a cloaklike gown tied at the front with a ribbon. This garment is often of silk of bright colors. The younger women are fond of red, those of middle age like blue and many wear white. Most of the women have more or less jewelry. They wear hairpins of gold, silver or amber as thick as one's little finger, and many have two gold or silver rings on the third finger of the right hand. They paint and powder, covering the face with white, except at the lips, which are red. They use India ink to mark out the line of the eyebrows, and arch these in conformity with the Chinese ideal of Asiatic beauty. This is supposed to be a curve like that of a line of swans flying through the sky, and if the hairs grow otherwise they are pulled out with tweezers until they approach the ideal.

The winter clothes of the better class Korean women are sometimes of fur and quilted silk. Padded cotton is also used, the gowns being so made that they can be ripped apart for washing. Much paste and glue are employed in dressmaking, and many a woman of these high-class circles would drop to pieces if she were left out all night in the rain.

How Korean Women Live.

The new woman movement means that a great change is to come in the daily life of the Koreans. What with study, school going and calling, a new world is just beginning for these benighted mortals. The well bred woman of today begins her life of seclusion at the age of 7 and from then until her death she is practically confined to the house of her husband or parents. She is lucky, indeed, if she has a little garden to walk about in. If she is very high class, she does not go out at all, or only in a closed box about three feet square, and not more than four feet in height. This is slung between poles. In bringing it to her house the chair bearers take it inside the yard, and then go away while she crawls in. The proper signal is given, they return and carry her to the home of a friend, leaving the box and going around the corner until she crawls out. Such visits are rare.

The Korean woman rises with the sun and after spending perhaps an hour on her toilet directs her slaves how to attend to the household. She keeps the accounts of the family and acts as mistress of the establishment. She may do a little embroidery or sewing herself, but outside this she has nothing to occupy her all day long. She usually sleeps on a mat on the floor and when she rises, if it is cold outside, her feet rest on a warm surface, for her bed room has flues under it and straw fires are started before daylight. She sits down on the floor before a looking glass in making her toilet and eats from a little table eight or ten inches high. Her table furniture is composed of bowls of brass and a pair of chop sticks, and her food is largely rice, meats, fowl, fish and fruit. After eating she uses her fingers in place of a tooth brush, washing out her mouth with salt which she also rubs over her teeth. She takes frequent baths in the summer and on the whole is reasonably clean.

New Marriage Customs.

This movement means that there are to come changes in all matters of love and marriage. Already the Christian girls, of whom there are many, are demanding that they be married in the church after our ceremony, or as near that as Korean ideals will permit. Today the million odd marriages which take place yearly are as barbarous as those of darkest Africa. Children are often betrothed at birth, and a 12-year-old girl may be married to a man of 20, or a boy of 9 to a girl of 12. As a rule the marriages take place before the children have reached the age of pupils of the first class in the high schools, and a girl is an old maid at 18 or 20. Among the queer wedding customs is the giving the bride's eyes shut, so that she can see nothing, and keeping them so for three days. Another is that the bride will not speak to the groom for at least a week after the wedding, and a third that a fight takes place between her friends and his on the way to the ceremony, and the one represented by the party defeated is considered unlucky. Neither bride nor groom see each other until they are married. After that the girl is practically the slave of her husband and his parents, who may treat her as they please. As she grows older or when her husband is tired of her he brings one or more secondary wives into the house and she has to submit. Divorces are easy on the part of the husband, but they are considered disgraceful, and domestic troubles usually result in adding a concubine or so to the establishment rather than shoving the old wife out into the cold. FRANK G. CARPENTER.

Gossip and Stories About Noted People

A Booth Incident Recalled.

PROPOS of his 74th birthday, which he has just celebrated at his home in Baltimore, Mr. J. M. Barron, friend and colleague of Edwin Booth, Joseph Jefferson, Maggie Mitchell and many other stages of their generation sends the New York Telegraph this reminiscence: "Those who were not intimate with Edwin Booth invariably think of him as a man of melancholy, who did nothing but 'ruminate all day his dreadful fate.' Mr. Booth had his moments of jollity and loved to hear the ballads and stories of the time of his youth. At the Russell house, Detroit, one afternoon, Mr. Booth sent for me. I found him alone in his room, smoking a pipe, of course. He said he felt very blue and had sent Mary, his wife, out for a walk with her father, Mr. McKelver. Booth and I being Marylanders and of long, enduring friendship, we had many chats of the old times. He asked me if I remembered any of the old melodies that 'we boys used to sing.' Booth was very fond of the songs of Stephen Collins Foster and especially 'The Old Folks at Home.' I told him I thought I could recite one or two chants that he had not heard for many years. Booth could not sing a note, and people who heard me try said I couldn't, either, but fools glide in where operative anger fear to gurgle, so I sailed in with a tremoloso andante, thusly:

Baltimore girls with pretty faces, Dressed to death and trimmed with laces, Ankles small and waists so slender; Ha! ha! ha! Good-by, John, Baltimore girls, won't you come out tonight? Won't you come out tonight? And dance by the light of the moon? I danced with a gal with a hole in her stocking.

And one heel it kept a-rocking. I danced with a gal with a hole in her stocking. She was de prettiest gal in de room."

Mr. Booth laughed heartily and beat time with his pipe and said: "John, how did you hold on to that? I have not heard it for eons of ages. We had a dinky on our Belair farm who sang something about the River O-see."

"Oh," said I, "you mean 'The Boatman's Dance.' How does this mix with your dinky minstrel?"

The boatman dance, The boatman sing, The boatman's up to everything, And when the boatman gets on shore, He spends his money and works fur more. Hi, ho, the boatman row, Floatin' down de river Ohio, We'll dance all night, till broad daylight, And go home wid de heifers in de mornin'.

We shouted, and Booth slapped the table and declared he had not enjoyed a concert so much for many years.

Wait, Beau; pause and listen. Just as we were enjoying a hearty squeal Mrs. Booth opened the door and in walked Mac with his hat. "What on earth are you two men rehearsing?" Booth pointed to me as the guilty man and Mac said: "Rehearsing! If either of you culprits utter one more false note I'll have you arrested for counterfeiting." This threat broke up the concert.

Many Fortunes in "Ben Bolt."

"Various persons have made an aggregate of more than a million dollars out of the song 'Ben Bolt,' said Arthur Englehart, a lawyer of Charleston, W. Va., quoted by the Washington Post. "but my father, who composed the verses, never realized one penny."

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