

## THE "CELESTIAL'S" BOY

First of all, he is lugged about by his dear little mother, with her goat-shaped feet, until he grows big enough to look half as big as herself, for the baby stage is a long one in China.

Becoming more independent, he amuses himself as best he can with his young companions in tossing bits of earth at a mark, playing shuttlecock with his heels, flying his dragon kite, striking a small stick sharpened at the ends so as to make it jump into a "city," and with a few other games, such as fox and geese, cat's cradle, jackstones, etc., or rather the Chinese substitutes for such.

But Chinese boys come off badly in the way of amusements, and as to climbing, running, jumping, or anything of an athletic nature, that is not in their line at all.

From generation to generation the Chinese crows build their nests safely in the village trees, for a boy never molests them.

"Don't the boys disturb those nests?" asked a traveller, looking up an old poplar in which there were ten or twelve of these huge matted affairs.

"Oh, no," was the reply; "our boys don't climb trees. What if they should fall?"

Chinese school days are dreary. By far the greater number of boys never go to school at all. Of those that do, only a small fraction pursue their studies far enough to make any practical use of them. The object of their education is simply to gain a degree.

Years are spent in learning the very large number of characters in this most difficult language, the first step being to learn to know the characters in the family names.

School begins soon after sunrise, sometimes earlier, and, with a short time for dinner, lasts until dark. The poor Chinese lad, after his midday meal is eaten, "returns to the school-house, not to play in the yard, but to drop into his place and sit like an earthenware image until the rest have arrived also, when the noise and the din of the bellowing, by which the lessons are supposed to pass to the memory of the learner, shows that school is in full blast.

There are in the life of this book-ridden lad no joyous Saturdays, and no regular holidays of any sort, except such as he can beg or steal."

Chinese studies have been compared to "gnawing a wooden pear." Tedious and profitless, the learning gained with vast

amount of labor is of no actual value in after life.

The Chinese youth, however, masters two lessons thoroughly—those of obedience and respect of authority, and also industry.

He it not, indeed, without humility; in fact, he has a great amount of it. He knows that he knows nothing, that he never did, never shall, never can know anything, and also that it makes very little difference what he knows. He has a blind respect for learning, but no idea of gathering any crumbs thereof for himself.

About the age of sixteen, but often earlier, the important ceremony of marriage takes place. The wedding is frequently hastened because an additional servant is needed, and the bride will supply the want. For this reason, many Chinese women are older than their husbands. "When they are betrothed, the bigger they are the better, because they can do all the more work." The elder folk see no unfitness in marrying a slip of a boy to a full grown woman double his size. For himself, poor lad, he has no say in the matter. When the wedding ceremonies are over the lad still remains as before, under the control of his father, while the bride is obliged in all things to submit to her mother-in-law. If at school, the husband will continue his studies as usual.

If he is dull, and cannot make the "seven empty particles"—the terror of the unexpert Chinese essayist—fit into his laborious sentences to the satisfaction of his teacher, he is not unlikely to be beaten over the head for his lack of understanding, and can then go weeping home, to have his wife stick a black gummy, sticky plaster, over the area of his chastisement.

We have known a Chinese boy that had the dropsy very badly, but who could not be persuaded to take a single dose of medicine that was at all bitter. If pressed to do so by his fond mother, he either "rowed" or cried. If not allowed to eat two whole watermelons at a time, his tactics were the same, a scene of violent temper or of dismal, howling grief. He was merely prolonging into youth the plan universally adopted in the childhood of Chinese children.

Yet this sensitive infant of seventeen had been married for several years, and leaves a widow to mourn the fact, that drugs, dropsy and watermelons have blighted her existence.—Regions Beyond.