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"SPEAK UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, THAT THEY GO FORWARD."—Exodus xiv., 15.

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Religious Intelligence.

CHINA—POLYGAMY AMONG THE CHINESE.

BY REV. A. P. HARTER.

I write to tell you something about the domestic life of the Chinese. You have probably heard that polygamy prevails in this country, but you cannot readily conceive of all the effects that it has upon their domestic state. How strange it would sound to you to hear persons speaking about several mothers; and how absurd and wrong it would appear to you to have to honour and obey any one more than your own mother! But here every day we hear persons speaking of their mothers, and the children in many families must obey the principal mother more than their own. How wicked you think it for parents to make any distinction between the children; but here, in many families, some of the children are considered and treated by all as more honourable than their brothers and sisters. I write to explain these things to you.

Nearly every gentleman that can afford the expense, marries more than one wife, and the rich marry a great many; and some marry twenty, and some even thirty wives. The principal wife, and the one who is properly called wife, is married for her rank and connections. The husband and wife never see each other till they are being married. The matter is all arranged by a match-maker, and the betrothing is often made when the parties are very young. The engagement is ratified and the marriage is completed with a mutual exchange of presents between the two families who thus become allied to each other. The value of the presents varies with the rank and wealth of the families. This wife is counted the lady of the house and the head of the family.

The other wives (or more properly the concubines, are all bought, and they are brought home without any ceremony. They are all seen before-hand, and they are selected for their beauty and accomplishments. The price for which they are bought varies from \$200 to \$2000, according to the wealth of the purchasers and the estimate they may place upon them.

These wives may all live in the same establishment, or, as is more common, the husband may have several establishments, or one for each wife. Still, all the children are subject to the wife, and obey her first mother, and those of the secondary wives must honour and obey her more than their own. The children of the wife are more honoured than the children of the others. Yet, on the decease of the father, the property is equally divided among all the children, unless the father specially directs otherwise. You can very readily conceive of the jealousies, heart-burnings and contentions this state of things gives rise to. The history of Sarah and her Egyptian maid-servant, whom she gave to Abimelech for a concubine, will occur to your memories, and the more distressing incident of Ishmael cast off because he would not render the required homage to his younger brother Isaac. So, also, the jealousies of Jacob's wives, and the contentions of Jacob's sons, and the evils and afflictions that happened to the good old patriarch, in consequence of them, will all recur to your minds.

When the principal wife dies, the husband may either advance one of the secondary wives, (which is often done) to the place of the deceased, or he may marry another (which is more commonly the case), with the same ceremonies as he married the first. Sometimes they have two wives of equal rank, and they are called 'even wives.' But this is very

unusual, and can only happen under peculiar circumstances, as, for example, a gentleman is travelling from home, and makes a marriage engagement for his son; if, before the marriage is celebrated, the mother should have likewise made an engagement, both these engagements must stand, and the two are called 'even wives.' The question of precedence between them is settled by the priority of the engagement, or, if there is much difference in their ages, the elder takes precedence.

But a more fatal destruction of all domestic peace more frequently arises in the following way.—The husband, from some feeling of caprice, or from dislike of his wife, contrary to custom, places in his own house, hold one of his secondary wives, on an equality with the principal wife, and requires all the domestics to pay the same respect to her as they do to the principal lady. Some of these intrigues in their domestic life were so strikingly observed in the family of a Chinese lady whom Mrs. Happer visited a few days ago, that it may be interesting to state them in detail. The lady is, by the way, a very remarkable and interesting woman. She visits Mrs. Happer and other missionary ladies very often. She has a great respect for foreigners, and is exceedingly anxious to learn all she can about their customs and manners. She goes much beyond what any other lady will do here to gratify her curiosity. She went with my wife to call on a merchant's wife, to see the elegant house in which the foreign merchants live, and to see how elegantly they are furnished. She also went with her to Mr. French's wedding, in order to see our marriage customs. She is very anxious to go to Hong Kong, to observe foreign customs there.

Her husband is wealthy, and is the twelfth child in a large family of children. She is the principal wife, and her husband had two secondary wives. The secondary wife lives with the wife, and the second has a house to herself. As the husband loves her best, he spends most of the time with her. The wife has a son and daughter; the first secondary wife has two sons. They have a private tutor to teach these three boys. When Mr. Happer visited them, the schoolroom was shown to her. The first seat and the best chair and table were assigned to the son of the wife. In a conspicuous place, a tablet, on which was inscribed the name of the sage Confucius, was placed. Every day, when the children come into school, they worship Confucius, as the patron of letters. This idolatry is inculcated with the study of their classics, and it is associated with the most interesting scenes of their youth. What a reproach is this to many schools in Christian lands, where there is no devout acknowledgment of the true God, and whence the Bible, the great fountain of knowledge, is excluded.

The daughter is not instructed with her brothers, but is sent out to a school for girls, in their own street. These children have all been supplied with the Christian books in use in our day-schools, and they show much interest, especially the little daughter, an interesting girl of twelve years, in committing them to memory. In another room was a little girl learning to sing. This girl is about nine years of age, and she was purchased for ninety dollars. She is very pretty, and is not put to work like a slave, but has slaves to wait and attend on her. Her feet are bound to make her small-footed, (which is the great evidence of gentility in China), and a blind woman comes every day to teach her to sing. Everything is done to make her beautiful and accomplished, so that she may bring a large price when she arrives at the proper age to sell to be a secondary wife. Many families buy and bring up children in this way for this purpose. They buy others and bring them up to be waiting-maids to their daughters.

The woman who comes daily to teach this girl to sing is, as I stated above, blind. Nearly all the professed singers here, so far as I know, are blind women and girls. Every night that I walk the streets I meet a number of these blind women, who are being led by some one either going to, or returning from the place where they had been sent for to sing. These blind singers play Chinese tunes on the guitar, and accompany them with their voices. Their remuneration for the singing during an evening depends upon the estimate of their skill.

The above is a sketch of the domestic life in one aspect of it, in the best families of this, the most civilized and elevated heathen nation on the globe. What a contrast to the domestic life in our highly favoured land.—Who of you, after reading this, will not with more ardent feelings thank God for giving you your birth and education as a Christian land!—a land where no plurality of wives is allowed to destroy all domestic peace and harmony—where each child loves and obeys its own mother