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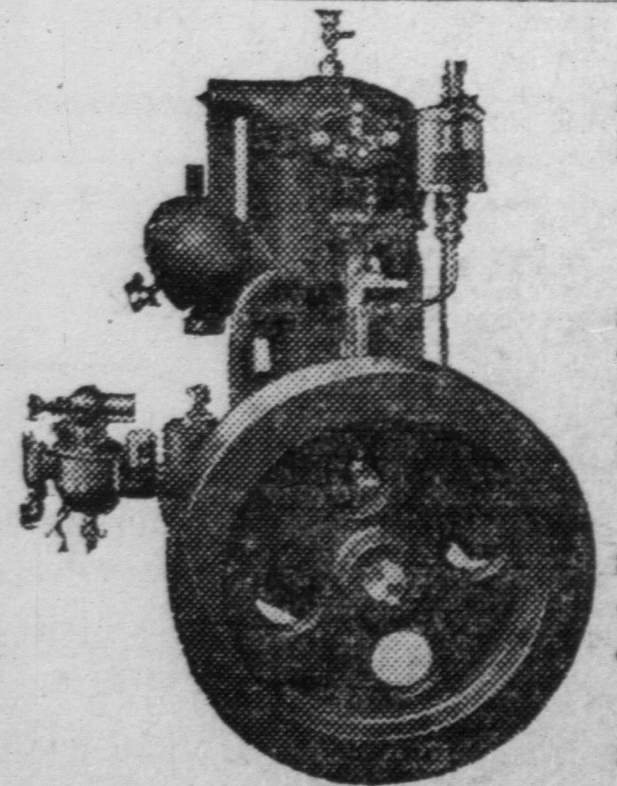
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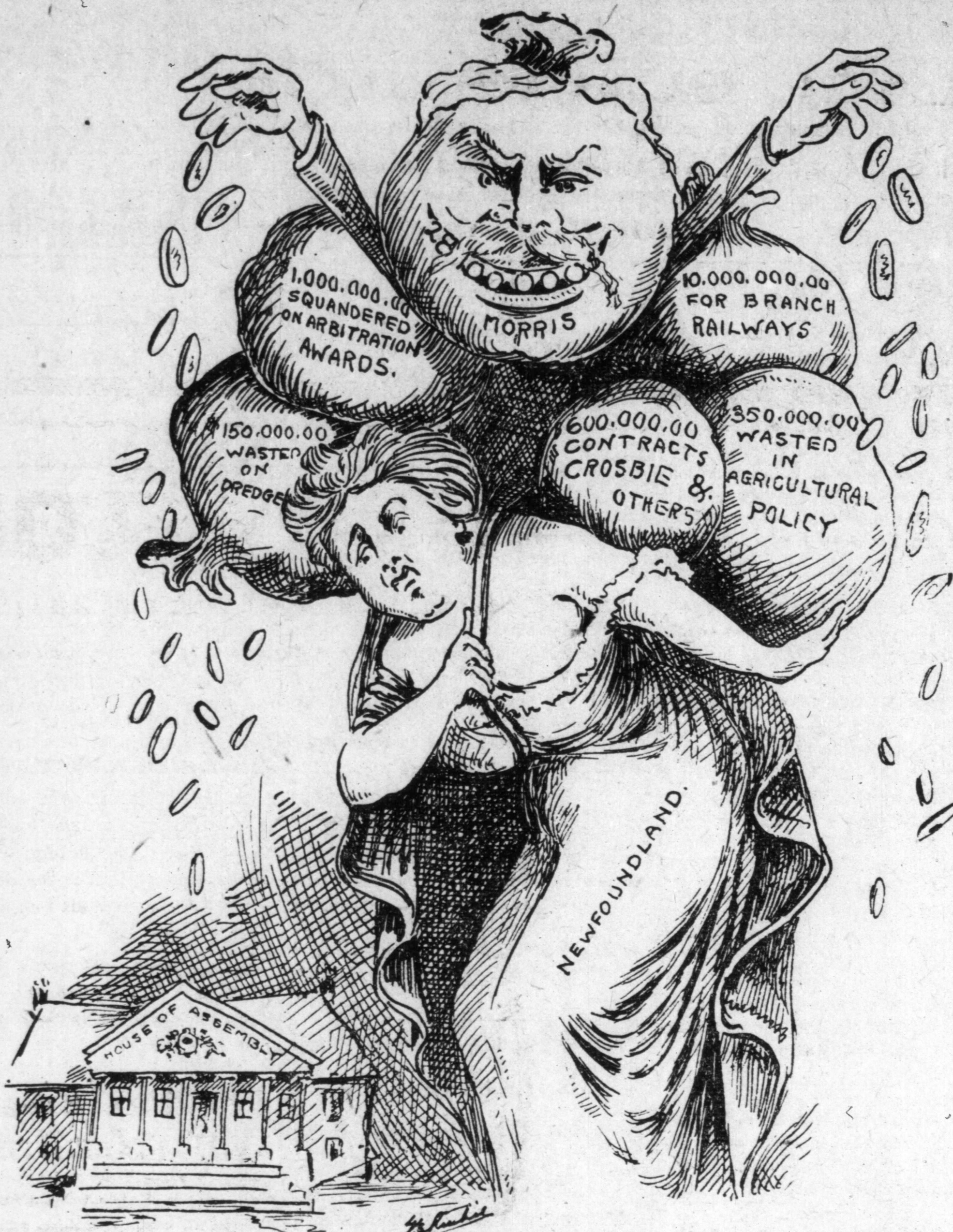
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**Marriage Customs
In The Far Orient.
Peculiar Ceremonies Connected
With the Tying of the Nuptial
Knot in the Celestial
Kingdom.**

In China children are betrothed by their parents at an early age. A child may be betrothed as soon as it is born, but the usual age is about 10 or 12. Several years, therefore, must elapse between the betrothal and the marriage. It sometimes happens that a fourteen-year-old boy is married to a twelve-year-old girl, but this is not the rule. The average age of Chinese brides is 16, and that of the bridegroom 17 years.

When an engaged couple become old enough to be married their parents first decide upon the month in which the marriage ceremony shall be held. This depends upon the celestial animals which governed the respective birthdays of the bride and bridegroom. If the bridegroom was born under the sign of the rooster and the bride under that of the hare their marriage must take place in the seventh moon. If the tiger and the ape, respectively, presided at the births they must be married in the second or eighth moon. People born under the auspices of the ox or the sheep are married in the eleventh moon, while those whose destinies are influenced by the horse must be married in the twelfth moon.

A Chinese wedding takes place in the bridegroom's home. He and no the bride is the principal personage at the wedding, and it is his family that must make the preparations for the happy event. When the wedding day approaches the nuptial chamber is freshly papered and painted. All the doors of the house are decorated with strips of bright red paper on which are written the character "hsi," meaning happiness. Poems are written on scrolls and hung in the guest room, and in the nuptial chamber.

A Bridegroom's Home

On the wedding day a procession is formed at the home of the bridegroom, who must go in person with pomp and ceremony to fetch his bride. First come the standard-bearers, who carry banners, emblems of rank and gaudy lanterns. The standard-bearers are usually beggars, got together by a shopkeeper, who has sedan chairs, banners and other wedding regalia for hire. Then come the

musicians, also hired for the occasion. They have trumpets, oboes, flutes, drums, slymbals, tambourines and gongs. The musicians, as well as the standard-bearers, have red hats and wear coats of many colors over their own tawdry clothes. At the end of the procession are two sedan chairs, each carried by eight bearers. One is covered with blue and the other with red silk hangings, beautifully embroidered.

When the procession is ready to start the bridegroom enters the blue sedan chair. In the red one, which is reserved for the bride, there is balsam. The ballast is a boy who has been selected from among the bridegroom's kin. The attendants of the bridegroom follow in a cart. Then, to the deafening sound of drums and other musical instruments—the procession goes to the bride's house.

When the procession comes to the house of the bride those who have been chosen to receive the bridegroom go out and welcome him. He descends from the sedan chair and mutual bows are salutations are made. When the bridegroom enters the house he is invited to sit in the place of honor. When all are seated the bride's family serves a feast. The bride, being busy with the final arrangements for her departure, is not present at this feast.

At last the bride comes forth from her chamber. But even now the bridegroom cannot see her face, for she wears a heavy red veil. Her attendants carry her to the door and place her in the red sedan chair. The bridegroom re-enters the blue sedan chair. Bunches of fire-crackers are set off to scare away any goblins that may be lurking in the shadows. The lanterns and the torches are lighted and the whole procession moves away to the house of the bridegroom.

The Ceremony

The marriage ceremony usually takes place in the courtyard of the bridegroom's house, which has been enclosed for the occasion by a huge two-storey structure made of hundreds of panes of brightly painted glass fitted into frames and joined to-

gether over a scaffolding. This temporary crystal palace has been hired from the shop which supplied the wedding regalia.

First the bride and bridegroom kneel and touch the ground with their foreheads before two idols called the Gods of Heaven and Earth. Then they perform similar prostrations before the parents of the bridegroom. The bridegroom then removes the veil from the bride and sees her face for the first time.

After the completion of this ceremony the bride retires to the bridal chamber, where the bridesmaids pull out the hairs from her temples and arrange her coiffure in the style of a married woman. Hitherto she has worn her hair in a braid. In China no woman may put up her hair until she is married.

After the bride has had her hair put up she comes out again. She and her husband then greet the guests, after which the wedding feast is served.

The day after the wedding the bridal couple go to the graves of the bridegroom's ancestors to worship. On the third day they go to the bride's home for a visit of nine days. This is done in order that the husband may become acquainted with his wife's family.

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