

BOYS AND GIRLS

In Far Cathay

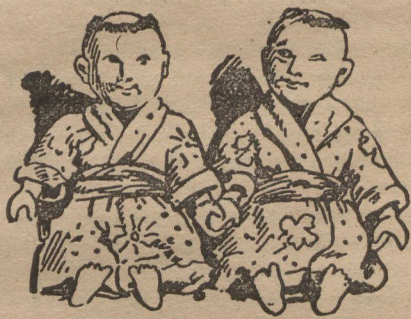
A CHINESE GIRL'S STORY, TELLING OF THE STRANGE CUSTOMS OF A STRANGE PEOPLE.

(“Endeavor Herald.”)

I am going to write a story for some boys and girls away in some other country. How unlucky for them they were not born under heaven as we were! How funny they must all look with pale hair and eyes!

My name is Lindee. Father and mother were disappointed when I was born ten years ago; but Granny said there was no plan—there had to be some girls, and I might as well be one as some one else.

I grew up big and strong on my millet food, and I can cook and sew and mind my baby brother. He makes my arms ache when I have to carry him all day, but I am afraid to leave him alone for fear the evil spirits carry him off. My mother bit



off his toe when he was a tiny baby, as they would not want an injured boy, and the other day she made a hole in one of his ears so they would think he was a girl, and you know they won't take girls. Sometimes Granny looks after him, and then I run into the next courtyard to play with Yawto. Yesterday, while father and mother were out hoeing cotton and I was home with Granny, Swandee came home from school with his eyes all red and swollen. He got up on the kang and cried again till he went to sleep. I knew what was the matter, because he had done that before when he was punished with a flat stick and made to kneel on the hard floor; but it was nearly time to eat, so I hurried to get the things ready and could not talk to him. While I was out getting some grass and roots to burn, the baby broke Granny's bowl that she has eaten out of since she was a little girl. She was feeling pretty sad, because a new bowl would never be like the old one. 'Never mind, Granny,' said I; 'you have some things yet to be proud of—you have a nice coffin and your grave-clothes all ready, anyway.' She was pleased at this, and went off to have a look at them. Father is considered to be a good son to provide her things so soon.

Pretty soon father and mother came in to supper, and I ran to fill the bowls with millet. Swandee woke up and took his bowl and chopsticks and went off to his favorite stone to eat with the neighbors' boys. Father sat on the roadside discussing the affairs, mother and Granny sat in the yard with some others, so I ran into the next yard to eat with Yawto. Poor Yawto! she does not have a very happy time. Her father drives a cart and three donkeys, and they eat so much straw he never has much cash. He came home very cross because his cart had tipped over a big bank. There was no millet cooked for him, so he gave Yawto a push and said she was a lazy good-for-nothing, and that he would sell her the next

chance he got. I was frightened and ran off home thinking he might hit me. I am glad I am not raised on his rice.

When I got home I washed up the bowls and chop-sticks and put them in a nice pile on the floor. Then I spread the straw mats on the kang ready for sleeping. Granny and I have a kang to ourselves. I told her to call me early because Yawto and I were going down to the river to wash the clothes. Granny does not like me to be so much with Yawto. She says you can't get white cloth out of an indigo dye-pot. I suppose she means if Yawto's father is bad she must be bad, too.

It was nearly five o'clock when I awoke. I hurried on my jacket and trousers, slipped my feet into my shoes, and was ready. Swandee was up already, because he has to go to school at six. He was feeling sore after last night, so I gave him a date cake. Yawto called for me, and we set off along the side street. We passed the dye-shop, where the blue cloth was already hanging dripping over the road. A good many people were on the street, and we had to push our way among donkeys and carts, but at last we got to the east gate and were not long in getting to the river. We knew where there were two nice, smooth stones, and we wanted to get them before other girls and women came along. We each got a stone and dipped the clothes in one by one, drew them out on the stone and pounded them with a round stick. It took quite a time, but while one was being washed another dried. Before long there was a row of women and girls all along the bank and the water began to look pretty blue. We played around till all the clothes were dry, and watched the men drawing water from the river to water the fields. Two men held a rope with a bucket in the middle. They let down the bucket, gave a pull and a little twist and the bucket was emptied into a ditch and ran away into smaller ditches all over the fields. One man work-



ed alone, pulling water out of a well with a 'lookoo.' The bucket would go down, down, and then he would wind the rope round and round till up it came again. It is hard work. My mother has to help water our fields. I am glad I am too small.

On our way home we passed the Tudee temple, and there behind it, trying to hide, was Swandee. He had not been to school at all. I'm afraid he will never be a scholar. When Chen Ming, our neighbor's son, brought home his degree and came out 'flower of the list,' the whole city felt honored. Granny says if Swandee would only do as well she would be a happy woman, but I'm afraid he'll have to buy his degree for he'll never earn one. I can count cash and sell eggs as well as he can now. Girls don't go to school. Swandee says they don't need to know anything but how to sew and cook and take care of husbands. He said if we would not tell on him he would buy us some persimmons.

We went into the temple where the gods

were sitting around. They were made of mud and wood, and painted red and blue and green. Yawto is afraid to go near them, but I'm not. One day I stumbled and fell against one and broke his toe. I tell you I was scared. I took up my legs and ran as fast as I could, but I never died or anything. I did not dare to tell Granny. She expects her soul to come here first thing after she dies. I hope they won't be bad to Granny because I broke that toe. A very stylish man came in. He was dressed in a purple coat and bright yellow leggings. We watched to see what he would do. He took some sticks of incense, stuck them in a dish and set fire to them. Then he got down on his knees and 'katowed.' I was afraid he would hurt his head the way he bumped. He left some rice and cash and went away.

We started for home and Swandee said, 'Let us go around by the north gate to see some shaggy old camels.' Yawto's feet hurt so badly we could not go very fast. Her feet have hurt her ever since they were bound—far worse than mine. There are countries where girls' feet are as big as boys'. How unstylish they must be! I should think they would never get husbands. We wished we could ride when we saw some women coming into the city astraddle of their donkeys.

We were so long in reaching home we thought we would get a scolding, but father was in good humor. Granny was dressed up in her best blue trousers and her yellow jacket and had her best earrings in, so I knew something was up. Some men were there, and they stared so at me I asked Granny what they wanted. She told me to run off to the barber's and get my hair fixed, and put on my good clothes and she would tell me. I was not gone long. The old barber man was not busy at that time of the day. He shaved the front of my hair and tied up the back braid with a new red cord. I ran home and soon had on my purple trousers and red jacket and my new green shoes with tigers' heads worked on the front. I wished I had some long earrings, those threads looked so unstylish. My fan was a nice new one, so I took it and ran to hear what was the matter.

'How would you like to have a mother-in-law?' said Granny.

'I don't want one, Granny! I don't want to go away from home.'

'Oh, it doesn't make much difference what you want. We have got a husband for you. Your father made a better bargain than he expected, for you are not much to look at, child. But you won't have to go away yet awhile—maybe not till you are married. Your mother-in-law has daughters of her own and will not need you. Run off now and look at the fine new box of jewellery you've got. You ought to be happy. Everyone thinks it a fine bargain.'

I ran off to look at the presents, feeling proud to think I had a mother-in-law before most of the girls around. But I don't want to go away for a long while yet.

I had no time to see Yawto that night, but I ran over early next morning. Yawto was looking so sad I asked her what was the matter, and she said her father had agreed to sell her mother, as times were so hard and cash scarce. He said Yawto was old enough to do the work now.

Pretty soon in came the father and the middleman with another man. The middleman wrote on a paper, and Yawto's father dipped his hand in ink and made a print on one side; then he dipped in his bare foot