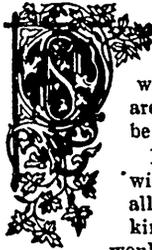


FUNNY CUSTOMS IN CHINA.

BY DR. MALCOLM, ONE OF OUR MISSIONARIES.



EAR boys and girls.

Would you like to know what some of the Chinese children are called, and how they happen to be called by such funny names?

In our town of Hsin Chen, and within a few miles around, almost all the children are called some kind of "Cow," e.g., "Ling Niu" would mean The Leader Cow, "Kon Niu," Follow Cow, and so on.

Parents are always more anxious to have boys than girls. We know of one family of five girls, and when the first girl was born, they said:—We would rather have a son, so we'll call this one "Hwan Niu" (Change Cow.)

When the second girl was born, however, she was so pretty that they could not refrain from calling her "Kwei Niu" (Pearl Cow;) but when the third girl was added to the family, they said "Girls galore," and called her "Yu Niu" (Many Cows.)

Still another, a fourth daughter came, and they said:—The house is filled up with girls, so they called her "Chu Niu" (Full Cow.)

When, however, the fifth and last daughter arrived, they were angry, and said:—We have had enough, and so they named her "Kou Niu" (Enough Cows.)

One day a missionary asked a little boy here, what his name was. He answered: I am Fat Cow, what cow are you?

A general belief is, that when a child dies, it is because an evil spirit, or devil, takes a fancy to it and carries it off. At home even, there is a belief that the good die young. There is a similar erroneous belief here, that these spirits prefer good children, and do not care so much for dirty or ugly children, or any that have lost a limb. They are fondest of a pretty boy, and especially one that his parents love very much. From these strange beliefs, have arisen stranger customs.

For example:—There is a young man that often comes into our compound, who has no little toe on one foot, and he is called "Yao Niu" (Bite Cow,) for a reason that I know you will think very strange. He is the fourth son, but as all his elder brothers died before he was born, his

mother, as soon as he came into the world, bit off his little toe, and threw it away, believing that by so doing she would avert an early death, and that he would grow up to be a man, and although he is now twenty years old, he is still called "Bite Cow."

This is not the only case of this kind, for it is quite common here, and when we see a man in the hospital without his little toe, we may be pretty sure that his mother bit it off when he was a baby so that the evil spirits would not take him.

The sad reason why the little girls are spared this mutilation is because it is a matter of little moment whether they grow up or not.

The evil spirits are also supposed to know that little girls are not of much account. Sometimes a pet son is given a girl's name, and made to wear one ear-ring, to make the devils think he is only a little girl.

In the winter time, some children are clad in tiger skin from head to foot. Many others wear caps made to represent tigers' heads, while almost all wear cloth shoes with fierce tiger faces worked on them. All this to deceive the evil spirits into thinking that they are ferocious tigers.

Parents may love their children very much, and yet for that very reason give them horrid names, to make the evil spirits believe they do not care for them: e.g. A handsome lad may be called "Jeng Niu" (Rejoiced Cow), or "Nao Niu" (Bad Cow), Ch'ou Niu (meaning a very dirty cow), or even "Fen Niu," meaning (Dung Cow.) The strange part is however, that although a boy may be called "Dirty Cow" it might not be good for your health to tell him he is a dirty boy, unless you happen to be bigger than he is.

But the funniest plan that I have yet heard of to deceive the spirits, is to have a boy's trowsers made of different colors, one leg red and the other leg blue. They reason somewhat after this fashion:—The evil spirit fitting quickly by on one side, says to himself: There is a boy with blue trowsers that I must have some day, but when he comes back he does not recognize him, as this time he sees him from the other side, which is red.

As to names, however, children may be called after any circumstance, or thing. For instance, if a child were born during a snow storm, or during a fair, it might be called "Snow Cow," or "Fair Cow." Or again, if the river overflows its banks, and floods the country, a child born at that time is liable to be called "Water Cow."