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Courtship and Marriage in China.

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I am quite sure that all the young men and not a few of the young women in Christian lands would most seriously object to their present custom of courtship and marriage being substituted for that of the Chinese. The fact is that here, generally, the persons most interested have nothing whatever to say in the matter. They are usually betrothed at a very early age, sometimes when mere babes. Frequently a gentleman



THE CHINESE BRIDEGROOM.

having a friend in a similar position in life will propose, when the years of childhood are passed, to give his daughter in marriage to his friend's son. A 'match-maker' or 'go-between' will be employed; the children's horoscopes cast, and for several days the matter is under consideration by both families. If during this time of waiting any accident happens in either family, such as a breakage among the chinaware, or the loss of some trifling article, it is looked upon as an omen of evil and the match is not concluded. But if all goes on quietly, the parents decide that the betrothal is a suitable one. A number of presents are then exchanged, the parents of the girl generally receiving by far the greater share. Among the gifts are two cards, one ornamented with a gilt dragon, which has written upon it a number of the particulars relating to the boy, another decorated with the picture

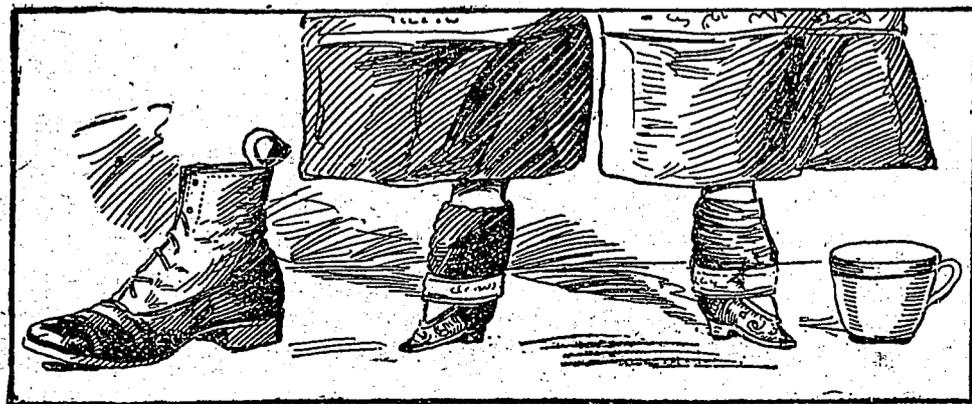
of a phoenix, which gives similar information about the little girl. A thread of red silk, with needles at either end is passed through each of these cards, which, being exchanged, are preserved with the betrothal papers in the families of the children. The red silk indicates that the feet of people destined to be married are tied together with invisible cords. These engagements are as binding as the marriage, although the principal parties may know nothing of the arrangement. Very sad surprises constantly occur at Chinese weddings, for frequently no communication takes place between the two families from the time of betrothal. Sometimes one of the families has become very poor, sometimes one of the parties has become a helpless cripple or afflicted with the terrible disease of leprosy or some incurable malady. I know of one instance where the bridegroom was a perfect idiot, but nothing could prevent the marriage. Sometimes the betrothed girl is taken at once to the boy's parents and there made to serve as waiter for the family until the marriage ceremony is performed. More frequently, however, the parties who are to walk through life together never see each other's face until after the nuptial rites and ceremonies have been consummated. In such a case, on the wedding day the bride is brought to her new home in the hired, grand, bridal chair of brilliant scarlet, elaborately decorated, and carried by four coolies, preceded by a band of music. Two near relatives accompany her until they meet two of the bridegroom's relatives, when they hand her over to the tender mercies of her new protectors. All of her other relatives are supposed to remain at home and bewail their loss. None of her friends or relatives ever attend the wedding. Upon arriving at the bridegroom's house two women attendants take the bride in charge and serve her during the days of ceremony and festivity. As they open the chair, a child, and an old lady who has many sons and grandsons, come forward and invite the bride to accompany them to the bridegroom's chamber, where he is sitting on the bed, attired in official cap, gown and boots. The bride is attired in garments of various colors, with a large robe of scarlet thrown over all the rest. Her head is covered with a veil of scarlet silk or cloth which quite conceals her features and crown. Assisted by the attendants she walks upon the carpet, which is put down for the occasion, as her little feet must touch nothing else, and takes her seat at the right of the bridegroom. He now removes her veil and crown,

the curtain is drawn and the happy couple are supposed to sit and think, not even speak or exchange glances, until preparations for the service are completed. Everything being ready, the groom re-crowns the bride and they walk to the reception room. The whole end of a Chinese reception room is open. In this room, facing the open end, looking into the open court, the couple worship heaven and earth by bowing their faces to the ground four times. They then face in the opposite direction and worship the groom's ancestors in like manner. They next worship each other, and then retire again to the chamber, where the bride's



CHINESE BRIDE IN WEDDING DRESS.

crown and veil are removed for the last time her hair dressed, and the groom beholds his bride in her beauty for the first time. The wedding breakfast is now served, of which the bride and groom alone partake, or rather the groom partakes while the bride sits motionless, eating nothing. During the meal the mistress of ceremonies chants a song supposed to be composed for the occasion in which she predicts that every nuptial blessing shall be the portion of the young pair. They now return to the reception room and worship, in the same manner as before, all of the groom's senior relations, and are worshipped by all of his junior relatives. A grand marriage feast is the climax of the day's festivities, after which the guests, both men and women, are permitted to inspect the bride and make all kinds of personal remarks concerning her dress and appearance. This is an ordeal through which every Chinese bride passes, and the old-time serenade is nothing in comparison to what is sometimes visited upon the newly-married couple. Throughout this trying experience the bride is supposed to appear alike unconscious of blame or praise, of rude criticism or friendly words of sympathy. The following day, if possible, the wedded couple pay a visit to the bride's parents, and if she chance to have a number of 'big brothers,' the groom is liable to have something of a serenade, unless he hands over the cash quite plentifully. After one month of married life the bride is at liberty to visit her parents and relatives. This visit is a very sad one, if the young wife has to tell of some cruel and heartless husband or



CHILD'S SHOE.

BRIDE'S FEET.

TEACUP.