

THE WOMEN'S PAGE

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH MOTHER-IN-LAW?



Atypical Indian Mother-in-law, Such as for Centuries Has Been Held in Disrepute

Maybe She's All Right and We're All Wrong, Because We're the Only Nation That Looks Upon Her as an Indian Squaw

BEFORE the redskins were tamed to eat out of the government's hand many of them had some exquisitely simple ways of dealing with problems that puzzle a complex civilization.

The mother-in-law, for instance, when she was old and worn out, they disposed of quite easily and effectually by abandoning her to the scant mercies of winter. It was hard on the mother-in-law, but it saved the Indians bother.

At best a squaw's life was none too beautiful. Up to the time when she was annexed by some brute she had rather lively times with her lovers, and was seldom limited as to their number. But youth was more fleeting than than now, because of the hardships of life in the open, and her cooing days were soon over. Then she became a hard-featured, weather-beaten slattern, who tilted the soil and was little better than a beast of burden.

The rigors of such a life did not sweeten her temper. She was a vixen, a virago, as vitriolic and as keen for torture as any red fanatic that ever scalped a Pennsylvania Dutchman or burned a Puritan at the stake.

And that, says the French Academy, is the type we Americans associate with our mothers-in-law today. Joking aside, Is our mother-in-law really a squaw?

FOR his mother-in-law the redskin reserved a special hatred. It was more bitter, more deadly, more lasting than his aversion for any other living thing. All the venom of his nature, concentrated and distilled into an extract of pure hatred, represented his feeling for the mother of his wife.

If the feeling had been confined to individuals, instead of being common to the race, it might be explained. A man who drew worse than a blank couldn't have been expected to think any too highly of the real author of his misfortunes. But with the Indians it was the universal thing, this detestation that was deeper and deadlier than his detestation of a poisonous snake or a white man.

The question that comes home to us all is—Are we savages to our mothers-in-law? Or, Are our mothers-in-law savages?

To answer a question like this we might play both ends against the middle and then copper the bet. Really, it's a question that every man and every mother-in-law must settle for himself or herself, as the case may be.

LOST IN THE DIM PAST

The French Academy has been trying to settle it, with the usual result that it has gone so far back that it has lost itself. Until the investigators were quite swallowed up by antiquity, they thought that the mother-in-law aversion was the natural result of the ancient and honorable practice of bride-stealing. The despoiler of a home was supposed to be looked upon as a robber and an enemy, and to return the feeling with interest.

At any rate, the academicians concluded that the mother-in-law hatred was imported into Europe by the Spaniards who returned from the conquest of the new world. Before that time it was not a general practice, or custom, if it may so be termed. The bucolic Europeans were in the habit of revering the origin of their life's happiness. They looked upon her not as an intruder, but as a guest.

In fact, it would seem as if the conquerors caught the mother-in-law aversion just as some of them caught the smallpox-by contact. They began to look on dearest's mamma as a fifth wheel, to wish her out of the house and to take all means short of murder to get rid of her.



Chinese Ruler of a Family, Held in High Repute

There was this in favor of the Indian system that doesn't apply to the white: the red mother-in-law kept out of hubby's way. She didn't bother him, pester him or nag him. She realized that his neighborhood was not healthy for her. She ran from him, and if she happened to run along the seashore he wouldn't follow her until the waves had washed out her tracks for fear some dire misfortune would come upon him if he even walked on the ground she had polluted.

It's this sort of past that the American mother-in-law has to live down. What the comic weeklies have done to her is much less than she got a few centuries ago. She was no joke then. The only airy periffage she ever knew was a club. After that, not exactly the deluge, but turned adrift in a blizzard to perish miserably as she lived.

It really does seem as if the French Academy had "put one over" on us, for most of the world reveres the mother-in-law. In China, for instance, she is very often the ruler of the household. By all that the classics say, the Chinese man is the only real Mongolian that counts much with the yellow gods or his honored ancestors. But that doesn't help him a lot in the bosom of his family. Many a proud Manchu "gets his" when he goes home, even as it happens to you and I. An one writer puts it, "Perhaps the ordinary Chinese married woman does not in practice obey her husband much more than does the British; but she must obey her husband's father and mother."

Why Alter the Marriage Service?



SOME ten years ago a budding suffragette insisted that the word "obey" be left out of her marriage service. She made a hit with the press and got her name in print from one end of the country to the other. Thereafter, for a period of some months, any bride who wanted notoriety could get it by shoving "obey" overboard and sailing into matrimony without a reef in her free will.

Now, if a bride doesn't like to think of pledging obedience, the nasty little word is omitted without a ripple, and she's lucky to get three lines in her home paper. A reporter who omitted to mention the fact would hardly get a call down unless he was due for one anyhow, on the general principles that a reporter ought to be called down once every so often to keep him contented with life.

Other changes have been made from time to time to please capacious brides; but, as a whole, the service has remained pretty much the same for the last three centuries. It remained recently for the lower house of convocation of the established English church to make the most sweeping of all changes in the ritual, in order that no sensitive persons should be embarrassed by the plain speaking of the time-honored exhortation that precedes the actual "I wills."

There's where the mother-in-law scores. In most of those oriental nations, where reverence for ancestors is taught as a religion, and where a newly married couple are but members of a large family, the parents-in-law are the ruling powers. For a bride to disobey her mother-in-law would be a disgrace. Neglect of her husband's parents is actually a cause for divorce in China.

There's no limit, however, to the honors that come to the mother by marriage among the peoples who hold to ancestor worship. There's one tribe of the Rajputs, of India, the Surajbans or Solar race, that pay special honors to their ancestors with offerings of milk, flowers and rice. The women present cakes and oil to the spirits, not only of their mothers-in-law, but clear back to their great-grandmothers-in-law.

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Among the Armenians, who are supposed to be of true oriental descent through the Iranians, and further back through these latter to the Hittites of the Euphrates, the mother-in-law is held in the highest estimation. The women of that race, indeed, are universally held in high esteem, perhaps to some extent for their virtues and not a little for their personal appearance. They are a set of Junos, though they hide their figures with hideous swaddlings of clothes; and their magnificent dark eyes, with strong lashes, effectively set off their olive complexions. They carry the idea of equality so far that the high wooden head-dress, long characteristic of their people, is supposed to have been invented for the purpose of making the women seem as tall as the men and obviating even the slightest semblance of superiority on the part of the male.

When a woman becomes a widow, she is the head of a clan which includes the husbands and wives of all her children, and also her grandchildren. On her death the clan dissolves, but is united again under the leadership of one of her daughters. In case there should be a widow among them. Here the mother-in-law, to be brought up in the nurture of the Lord and to the praise of his holy name.

"Secondly, it was ordained for a remedy against sin and to avoid fecundation; that such persons as save the gift of continence might marry and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body."

"Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual society, help and comfort that one might have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity."

Now for the changes. The first paragraph is to be dropped. The second paragraph is to read, "First, it was ordained for the increase of mankind."

That paragraph beginning "Secondly" is to be omitted altogether.

As a matter of course, the controversy that raged up has been little less than tremendous. Those in favor of the old order of things declare that the ultra-refinement to be observed is regarded as a sign of weakness, and the same spirit that makes for rigors.

WHAT IS CHANGED

Since the Protestants broke away from the parent church, however, the established church ritual has served in England, and to a great extent in this country. A great many of our ancestors managed to stand the exhortation without flinching. But people were more plainspoken in those days.

The old ritual certainly has the merit of plain speaking. It calls a spade a spade, and it tells in an uncertain manner how and why people should enter the marital state.

For those who have never been through the ordeal, the exhortation as used for the aforesaid three centuries is, in part, as follows: "And therefore (marriage) is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly or wantonly, to satisfy man's carnal lusts and appetites like brute beasts that have no understanding, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly and in the fear of God; duly considering the causes for which matrimony was ordained: "First, it was ordained for the procreation of chil-



A Group of Indian Mothers-in-law, Ready for a Scalp Dance



Mrs. Harriet Stanton Blatch, Whom the Inventor De Forrest Classes among the Undesirable Mothers-in-law.

he may murder her, and his action will be considered entirely praiseworthy.

To such an extent is this veneration for parents carried that a widow who remains true to the memory of her husband and does not marry again is likely to have triple arches of fine carved stone, called Pallades, erected in her honor.

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A HUSBAND WON BY PLUCK

Among the Santals, a very low tribe of India, a mother occasionally tries her best to avoid becoming a mother-in-law. Among those blissful people a girl may decide to become a bride by going to the house of the man of her choice and making him keep her. In that case the mother may attempt to smoke her out by throwing red pepper on the fire. If the girl can stand it, she stays in the house and forthwith gains a mother-in-law. In that case she is held to have fairly won her husband, and the gentleman must forthwith make it a marriage.

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One writer in a weekly circulated in the middle classes voices this view, and says, "It has been decided in the royal commission."

when a royal commission is appointed to consider the ways and means of making matrimony a more pleasant and agreeable thing, when questionable dances are all the rage, and when conversation between the sexes is so much freer than in the rude, old-fashioned days of our forefathers that those forefathers are almost as much shocked as we are by the thought of their own want of decency if they were to appear near us; when marriage itself has ceased to be a solemn thing to smart society (and to many people who are neither smart nor in society) save a temporary sort of licensed debauchery in these decadent days of the twentieth century, I say, the exhortation with which the marriage service begins is actually condemned as obscene."

Considering that some things spread very quickly from England to America, we may before very long be having the very same discussions in this country, and probably the points presented will not differ so very much from those of the anonymous writer just quoted.

It really does seem, too, that a good many people have stood the old service without being radically injured by it.

law is the person held in the highest honor; nothing is too good for her, and loyalty and obedience from the children are matters of course. No man would dare dream of being discourteous to his mother-in-law in Armenia.

Such a retort discourteous would be impossible there as Dr. Lee De Forrest made regarding his mother-in-law when he and his wife brought counter suits for separation. He had married the daughter of Mrs. Harriet Stanton Blatch, the noted Brooklyn suffragette and president of the League of Self-Supporting Women. He averred that Mrs. Blatch came to his house and, with her daughter, occupied a whole day trying to force the duty to "Vote for women." It made him so angry that he quarreled over it with his wife. Now, if Mrs. Blatch had only had an Armenian son-in-law, life might have been different all around.

Directly opposite was the case with many savage tribes such as have for centuries inhabited the Fiji, Tonga and Famine Islands. As with many African and Indian peoples, it was until recently the custom to cut off mothers-in-law by sacrificing them when the husband died. In Samoa they were strangled, though the custom was somewhat mercifully confined to the wives of chiefs. The Fijians merely buried the women alive. This was not considered such a terrible thing among those people, as it was nothing rare for a man to have himself buried alive because he wanted to join departed friends. When a chief's house was built, a slave was buried alive at the base of each of the corner posts. Neither wives nor mothers-in-law were held in much esteem, and it was common for them to be slaughtered like cows.

WHERE SHE GETS POETIC JUSTICE

There's more poetic justice, perhaps, in the Shan tribes of the Indo-Chinese group than in any other people on earth, at least as regards the mother-in-law problem. These near neighbors of the Burmans partake of many of their characteristics. They hold their women in great respect, and their courtship, except as to details, is not unlike our own. The girls have complete liberty of choice, and though their rules of courtship require much more of the element of publicity than ours, the difference is rather one of degree than of kind.

After marriage the young couple go to the home of the bride. There they remain two years, and the bridegroom must make his peace with mother-in-law as best he can. That period of probation over, another begins, because the couple go immediately to the home of the young man. Another two years there includes a switch of mothers-in-law, and this time the bride is the one who has to make her peace.

In Japan, where until recently there was nothing but the most terrible tradition to guide young married couples, the bride had all the worst of it with regard to the mother-in-law. She became the slave not only of her husband, but of the old woman. She had to worship new household gods, and every minute part of her daily life came under the scrutiny of the old woman.

Refined cruelty of the first water was the result. Japan, as every one knows, is in a state of transformation. The old is making a losing fight with the new. The result is that half the people pride themselves on being virtually Europeans, and the other half on following in the footsteps of their forefathers. Imagine the plight of a tiny, delicate bride, reared in the old school, who had to remodel her whole life according to the ideas of an advanced mother-in-law! Or, on the contrary, think of a well educated young bride, with modern ideas, confronting herself according to the narrow views of a woman reared under the shogunate. When one considers that the birth of children is conducted under radically different conditions, depending on whether the family is of old or new blood, one can imagine what malign beings some mothers-in-law must have seemed to some brides.

In Persia the mother-in-law occupies a position of honor and trust. When a young man marries, he welcomes the bride's mother to his home as a counselor and guide for the young woman. Considering the polygamy and concubinage, the presence of her mother must be a comfort. Everything is in the bride's favor. But if she transgresses, the opposite is the case. The husband's relatives take the faithless woman in charge, and lucky she is if they offer her a poisoned cup. More often she is suspended on an awl, facing his, tall, and led to a precipice or a well, followed by jeering crowds. The executioner does the rest, with a parting malediction as he pushes her over the brink.

All and of the foregoing goes to show that everywhere much may depend on the individual mother-in-law, and whether she is happy or not, largely on herself. One she is a show in many other countries.

In the world, when they replied, "I will obey my husband," they were laughing at. On the other hand, when they replied, "I will obey my mother-in-law," they were laughing at.

A new league of mothers-in-law has been formed in Liverpool. The police force attached to the district have the assistance of a dog, which belongs to a local police station. The dog is introduced into the police station just as the officers are going on duty and takes up the patrol of the uniformed constables. It will have to do with an officer in plain clothes. On occasions the dog has proved exceedingly useful and useful.

Beautiful artificial flowers were made of wax by the Romans, and the Egyptians used horn and metal for a similar purpose.

No fewer than 1,460,387 accounts in the British Post-office Savings Bank have been forgotten by depositors. Not one, however, exceeds a sovereign.

The Union of South Africa, which includes the Transvaal, Cape Colony, Natal and Orange Free State has a population of 6,000,000.

Insurance, in its commercial aspect, was first introduced into England by the Lombards early in the sixteenth century.

Electric railways were first used in the United Kingdom in 1825, when one was opened at Leytonstone, in Essex.

Eschelle as gas mantles has been founded in France, entitled "The League Against the Lending of Books." The will of Edward Hunt, of Manor Farm, Lower Clatford, Hants, England, dated of £25,000, was written on a page in a ledger, from which it had to be torn by order of the registrar.

Eschelle as gas mantles is an idea from the contents are drawn or blown out, the ends are cut off, and the body of the shell is fixed in place by the regular article. The light thus obtained is while the new form of mantle is much more