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**THE CHINESE
BOY AND GIRL**

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CHILDREN AND CHILD-LIFE



BEFORE going to China, I could not but wonder, when I saw a Chinese or Japanese doll, why it was they made such unnatural looking things for babies to play with. On reaching the Orient the whole matter was explained by my first sight of a baby. The doll looks like the child!

Nothing in China is more common than babies. Nothing more helpless. Nothing more troublesome. Nothing more attractive. Nothing more interesting.

A Chinese baby is a round-faced little helpless human animal, whose eyes look like two black marbles over which the skin had been stretched, and a slit made on the bias. His nose is a little kopje in the centre of his face, above a yawning chasm which requires constant filling to insure the preservation of law and order. On his shaved head are left small tufts of hair in various localities, which give him the appearance of the plain about Peking, on which the traveler sees, here and there, a small clump of

trees around a country village, a home, or a cemetery; the remainder of the country being bare. These tufts are usually on the ``soft spot," in the back of his neck, over his ears, or in a braid or a ring on the side of his head.

The amount of joy brought to a home by the birth of a child depends upon several important considerations, chief among which are its sex, the number and sex of those already in the family, and the financial condition of the home.



In general the Chinese prefer a preponderance of boys, but in case the family are in good circumstances and already have several boys, they are as anxious for a girl as parents in any other country.

The reason for this is deeper than the mere fact of sex. It is imbedded in the social life and customs of the people. A girl remains at home until she is sixteen or seventeen, during which time she is little more than an expense. She is then taken to her husband's home and her own family have no further control over her life or conduct. She loses her identity with her own family, and becomes part of that of her husband. This through many years and centuries has generated in the popular mind a feeling that it is ``bad business raising girls for other people," and there are not a few parents who would prefer to bring up the girl betrothed to their son, rather than bring up their own daughter.

``Selfishness!" some people exclaim when they read such things about the Chinese. Yes, it is selfishness; but life in China is not like ours -- a struggle for luxuries -- but a struggle, not for bread and rice as many suppose, but for cornmeal and cabbage, or something else not more palatable. This is the life to which most Chinese children are born, and parents can scarcely be blamed for preferring boys whose hands may help provide for their mouths, to girls who are only an expense.

The presumption is that a Chinese child is born with the same general disposition as children in other countries. This may perhaps be the case; but either from the treatment it receives from parents or nurses, or because of the disposition it inherits, its nature soon becomes changed, and it develops certain characteristics peculiar to the Chinese child. It becomes *t'ao ch'i*. That almost means mischievous; it almost means troublesome -- a little tartar -- but it means exactly *t'ao ch'i*.

In this respect almost every Chinese child is a little tyrant. Father, mother, uncles, aunts, and grandparents are all made to do his bidding. In case any of them seems to be recalcitrant, the little dear lies down on his baby back on the dusty ground and kicks and screams until the refractory parent or nurse has repented and succumbed, when he gets up and good-naturedly goes on with his play and allows them to go about their business. The child is *t'ao ch'i*.

This disposition is general and not confined to any one rank or grade in society, if we may credit the stories that come from the palace regarding the present young Emperor Kuang Hsü. When a boy he very much preferred foreign to Chinese toys, and so the eunuchs stocked the palace nursery with all the most wonderful toys the ingenuity and mechanical skill of Europe had produced. As he grew older the toys became more complicated, being in the form of gramophones, graphophones, telephones, phonographs, electric lights, electric cars, cuckoo clocks, Swiss watches and indeed all the great inventions of modern times. The boy was *t'ao ch'i*, and the eunuchs say that if he were thwarted in any of his undertakings, or denied anything he very much desired, he would dash a Swiss watch, or anything else he might have in his hand, to the floor, breaking it into atoms; and as there was no chance of using the rod there was no way but to spoil the child.

It is amusing to listen to the women in a Chinese home when a baby comes. If the child is a boy the parents are congratulated on every hand because of the "great happiness" that has come to their home. If it is a girl, and there are more girls than boys in the family, the old nurse goes about as if she had stolen it from somewhere, and when she is congratulated, if congratulated she happens to be, she says with a sigh and a funereal face, "Only a 'small happiness' -- but that isn't bad."



When a child is born it is considered one year old, and its years are reckoned not from its birthdays but from its New Year's days. If it has the good fortune to be born the day before two days old it is reckoned two years old being one year old when born and two years old on its first New Year's day.

The first great event in a child's life occurs when it is one month old. It is then given its first public reception. Its head is shaved amid kicking and screaming, its mother is up and around where she can receive the congratulations of her friends, its grandmother is the honored guest of the occasion, and the baby is named.

All the relatives and friends are invited and every one is expected to take dinner with the child, and, which is more important, to bring presents. If the family is poor, this day puts into the treasury of life a day of happiness and a goodly amount of filthy lucre. If the family is rich the presents are correspondingly rich, for nowhere either in Orient or Occident can there be found a people more lavish and generous in their gifts than the Chinese. All the family can afford is spent upon the dinner given on this occasion, with the assurance that they will receive in presents and money more than double the expense both of the dinner and the birth of the child. If they do not

``come" they are expected to ``send" or they ``lose face." Among the middle class, the presents are of a useful nature, usually in the form of money, clothing or silver ornaments which are always worth their weight in bullion.



The name given the child is called its ``milk" name until the boy enters school. Whether boy or girl it may answer a good part of its life to the place it occupies in the family whether first, second or third.

If a girl she may be compelled to answer to ``Little Slave," and if a boy to ``Baldhead." But the names usually given indicate the place or time of birth, the hope of the parent for the child, or exhibit the parent's love of beauty or euphony.

A friend who was educated in a school situated in Filial Piety Lane and who afterwards lived near Filial Piety Gate called his first son ``Two Filials." Another friend had sons whose names were ``Have a Man," ``Have a Mountain," ``Have a Garden," ``Have a Fish." In conversation with this friend about the son whose ``milk" name was ``Have a Man," I constantly spoke of the boy by his ``school" name, the only name by which I knew him. The old man was perfectly blank -- he knew not of whom I spoke, as he had not seen his son since he got his school name. Finally, as it began to dawn on him that I was talking of his son, he asked:



``Whom are you talking about?"

``Your son."

``Oh, you mean `Have a Man.' "

This same man had a little girl called ``Apple," not an ordinary apple, but the most luscious apple known to North China. I have as I write a list of names commonly applied to girls from which I select the following: Beautiful Autumn, Charming Flower, Jade Pure, Lucky Pearl, Precious Harp, Covet Spring; and the parent's way of speaking of his little girl, when not wishing to be self-depreciative, is to call her his ``Thousand ounces of gold."

The names given to boys are quite as humiliating or as elevating as those given to girls. He may be Number One, Two or Three, Pig, Dog or Flea, or he may be like Wu T'ing Fang a ``Fragrant Palace," or like Li Hung Chang, an ``Illustrious Bird" or ``Learned Treatise."

During the summer-time in North China the child goes almost if not completely

naked. Until it is five years old, its wardrobe consists largely of a chest-protector and a pair of shoes. In the winter-time its trousers are quilted. with feet attached, its coat made in the same way, and it is anything but ``clean and sweet." The odor is not unlike that of an up-stairs back room in a narrow alley at Five Points, in which dwell a whole family of emigrants.

When the Chinese child is ill he does not have the same kind of hospital accommodations, nursing and medical skill at his command as do we in the West. His bed is brick, his pillow stuffed with bran or grass-seed, he has no sheets, his food is coarse and ill-adapted to a sick child's stomach.



While his nurse may be kind, gentle and loving she is not always skillful, and as for the ability of his physician let the following child's song tell us:

My wife's little daughter once fell very ill,
And we called for a doctor to give her a pill.
He wrote a prescription which now we will give her,
In which he has ordered a *mosquito's liver*.
And then in addition the *heart of a flea*,
And *half pound of fly-wings* to make her some tea.

When the child begins to walk and talk it begins to be interesting. Its father has a little push cart made by which it learns to walk, and the nurse goes about the court with it repeating *ba ba, ma ma*, (notice that these words for papa and mama are practically the same in Chinese as in English, the *b* being substituted for *p*), and all the various words which mean elder brother, younger brother, elder and younger sisters, uncles, aunts, grandfathers, grandmothers, and cousins and all the various relatives which may be found in its family, village or home.

It is not an easy matter to learn the names of one's relatives in China, as there is a separate name for each showing whether the person whom we call uncle is father or mother's elder or younger brother or the husband of their elder or younger sister. When it comes to learning the names of all one's cousins it is quite a difficult affair. Suppose, for instance, you were to introduce me to your cousin, and I wanted to know which one, you might explain that he is the son of your mother's elder brother. In China the word you used for cousin would express the exact idea. The child begins his study of language by learning all these relationships.

These are for the most part taught them by the nurse, who is an important element in the Chinese home and a useful adjunct to the child. Each little girl in the homes of the better classes has her own particular nurse, who teaches her nursery songs in her childhood, is her companion during her youth, goes with her to her husband's home, when she marries presumably to prevent her becoming lonesome, and remains with her through life. In conversation with the granddaughters of a duke and their old nurse, I discovered that the same games the little children play upon the street, they play in the seclusion of their green-tiled palace, and the same nursery songs that entice Morpheus to share the mat shed of the beggar's boy, entice him also to share the silken couch of the emperor in the palace.



When a boy is old enough, he grows a queue, which takes the place in the life of the Chinese boy which his first pair of trousers does in that of the American or

English boy. It is one of the first things he lives for; and he should not be despised for wearing his hair in this fashion, especially when we remember that George Washington and Lafayette and their contemporaries wore their hair in a braid down their backs.

Besides the queue has a great variety of uses. It serves him in some of the games he plays. When I saw the boys in geometry use their queues to strike an arc or draw a circle, it reminded me of my college days when I had forgotten to take a string to class. The laborer spreads a handkerchief or towel over his head, wraps his queue around it and makes for himself a hat. The cart driver whips his mule with it; the beggar uses it to scare away the dogs; the father takes hold of his little boy's queue instead of his hand when walking with him on the street, or the child follows holding to his father's queue, and the boys use it as reins when they play horse. I saw this amusingly illustrated on the streets of Peking. Two boys were playing horse. Now I have always noticed that when a boy plays horse, it is not because he has any desire to be the horse, but the driver. He is willing to be horse for a time, in order that he may be allowed to be driver for a still longer time. A large boy was playing horse with a smaller one, the latter acting as the beast of burden. This continued for some time, when the smaller, either discovering that a horse is larger than a man, or that it is more noble to be a man than a horse, balked, and said:

``Now you be horse."`

The older was not yet inclined to be horse, and tried in vain, by coaxing, scolding and whipping, to induce him to move, but the horse was firm. The driver was also firm, and not until the horse in a very unhorselike manner, gave away to tears, could the man be induced to let himself down to the level of a horse. From all of which it will be seen that the disposition of Chinese children is no exception to that longing for superiority which prevails in every human heart.



All kinds of trades, professions, and employments have as great attraction for Chinese as for American children. A country boy looks forward to the time when he can stand up in the cart and drive the team. Children seeing a battalion of soldiers at once ``organize a company." This was amusingly illustrated by a group of children in Peking during the Chinese-Japanese war. Each had a stick or a weed for a gun, except the drummer-boy, who was provided with an empty fruit-can. They went through various manoeuvres, for practice, no doubt, and all seemed to be going on beautifully until one of those in front shouted, in a voice filled with fear:

``The Japanese are coming, the Japanese are coming."

This was the signal for a general retreat, and the children, in imitation of the army then in the field, retreated in disorder and dismay in every direction.

The Chinese boys and girls are little men and women. At an early age they are familiar with all the rules of behaviour which characterize their after life and conduct. Their clothes are cut on the same pattern, out of cloth as those of their parents and grandparents. There are no kilts and knee-breeches, pinafores and short skirts, to make them feel that they are little people.



But they are little people as really and truly as are the children of other countries. A gentleman in reviewing my "Chinese Mother Goose Rhymes" speaks of some of the illustrations which "present the Chinese children playing their sober little games." Why we should call such a game as "blind man's buff," "e-ni-me-ni-mi-ni-mo," "this little pig went to market" or "pat-a-cake" "sober little games," unless it is because of preconceived notions of the Chinese people I do

not understand. The children are dignified little people, but they enjoy all the attractions of child-life as much as other children do.

It is a mistake to suppose that the life of Chinese children is a doleful one. It is understood, of course, that their life is not the same, nor to be compared with that of children in Europe or America: and it should be remembered further that the pleasures of child-life are not measured by the gratification of every childish whim. Many of the little street children who spend a large part of their time in efforts to support the family, when allowed to go to a fair or have a public holiday enjoy themselves more in a single day than the child of wealth, in a whole month of idleness.



In addition to his games and rhymes, the fairs which are held regularly in the great Buddhist temples in different parts of the cities, are to the Chinese boy what a country fair, a circus or Fourth of July is to an American farmer's boy or girl. He has his cash for candy or fruit, his crackers which he fires off at New Year's time, making day a time

of unrest, and night hideous. Kite-flying is a pleasure which no American boy appreciates as does the Chinese, a pleasure which clings to him till he is three-score years and ten, for it is not uncommon to find a child and his grandfather in the balmy days of spring flying their kites together. He has his pet birds which he carries around in cages or on a perch unlike any other child we have ever seen. He has his crickets with which he amuses himself -- not "gambles" -- and his gold fish which bring him days and years of delight. Indeed the Chinese child, though in the vast majority of cases very poor, has ample provision for a very good time, and if he does not have it, it must be his own fault.

Statements about the life of the children, however, may be nothing more than personal impressions, and are usually colored as largely by the writer's prejudices as by the conditions of the children. Some of us are so constituted as to see the dark side of the picture, others the bright. Let us go with the boys and girls to their games. Let us play with their toys and be entertained by the shows that entertain them, and see if they are not of the same flesh and blood, heart and sentiment as we. We shall find that the boys and girls live together, work together, study together, play together, have their heads shaved alike and quarrel with each other until they are seven years old, the period which brings to an end the life of the Chinese child. From this period it is the *boy* or the *girl*.

