The Chinese Maiden at Home.

By W. A. Cornaby.

IF it be asked, "Is there anything really charming to be met with in China?" I think the answer might be, "Yes, among the little maidens and the lotus flowers." Slimy, almost fetid, are the surroundings of both, and at any rate by contrast with such surroundings both may often impress one as deserving the epithet "charming."

Both also are somewhat difficult to study "at home." A photograph of a lotus flower, as it grows, can hardly be obtained in dress pants and patent leather shoes. Some amount of wading may be necessary. And as to a "mere man" of the West attempting the study of the Chinese maiden at home—he might almost as well attempt the task of photographing birds in their nests. A combination of fortuitous circumstances is required in either enterprise, in order to secure any measure of success.

The first impression of maidenhood in China that an up-country traveller is likely to gain consists of the back and heels of a mite of a girl endeavouring to compass the maximum of distance in the minimum of time. Unless, perhaps, his first impressions are those of a cheeky little face in a doorway (with that sanctuary of refuge—mother—conveniently near), gently suggesting the diagnosis "Ocean fiend," or, as the words are commonly rendered, "Foreign devil."

"Chapter 1, Ocean Fiend" has been the virtual heading of the history of one's intercourse with the Chinese small-boy and small-girl. And the appropriate illustrations for that chapter would be groups of boys and girls breaking up their evening games and running away, even if one or two of the bolder spirits did remain to utter the salutation, "Foreign demon, give us a foreign cash." "'Foreign demon' is your name, isn't it?" asked a little girl quite innocently once. And to resent the name, with anything but angelic placidity, was to fix it the more permanently.

We of the West have no more cause to bless a certain Simon Andrada and his successors than had the Chinese in the years 1518 onwards. It was he who seems first to have taught the Chinese that their old term for pirate, "ocean fiend," belonged most appropriately to foreign marauders such as he,

And as generation after generation of pirates drove the coast-term inland, and generation after generation of Chinese mothers tried to quiet fractious juveniles with, "The pirates will have you if you don't stop it," no wonder that the term "pirate," "ocean fiend," or "foreign demon," should have by this time been well ingrained into the imagination of the children of China, and applied by them as an unknown quantity to every foreigner who comes within their ken.

But of course many do unlearn the lesson. And I well remember the day when a raw country lass of tender years discovered something other than "demon" in a foreigner she had presumably never met before.

It was on this wise. I was walking along the plain to the north-west of Hankow, on a twenty miles tramp to the market-town of Tsaitien (Vegetable Garden). That plain is flooded every autumn and most summers, and the soil being of an alluvial nature, the retiring waters leave it "as flat as a pancake," with no hedges, and hardly a tree to break the monotonous straight line of horizon. But before the waters rise, crops of wheat and vegetables have been secured by the end of May.

"YOU'RE A GREAT BIG POTATO!"

On the particular day in question, away in the distance, weeding a vegetable plot, was a girl in her early teens. No other human being was in sight, and not wishing to hear a startled cry, and witness a flight and a tumble, with those hoof-like feet as sole means of escape, I half resolved to take a circuitous route. But the wheat-crops made that difficult. So, as this was the "high-road," albeit low-lying and narrow, I walked on toward where the child was. Our eyes met, and with a smile which was either arch or impudent, she made the suggestion, "Foreign potato!"

This had no reference to the crops around, which happened to be spring cabbages, nor to any rotundity of figure—of which I am entirely innocent. Rather was the observation to be explained in the light of certain philological facts. In England a

duffer is sometimes described as a "stick-in-the-mud," and in China a similar idiom prevails: that is, one supposed to be stuck in the paste or in the mud. Now all the world is aware that potatoes commonly stick in the mud until they are dug out, and even then may be described *à la Française* as "mud-apples." So in China by general consent the ideal stick-in-the-mud is described by the monosyllable "sao" or potato.

From these considerations it will be evident that, instead of being a "demon"—an object of dread to juvenile humanity, I had risen in the scale of being to the rank of "duffer"—of no special harm to anybody in the world. Which was distinctly gratifying to one's humanitarian instincts!

Once on the up-grade, as in the histories of certain nations, and the biographies of certain individuals, progress may follow by leaps and bounds, and thus it was with myself before the end of the day.

One's destination at Tsaitien was a small guest-room behind a converted cracker-shop, with unconverted and truly heathen cracker shops on either hand. The guest-room looked out upon a little yard, or "heaven-well," wherein was a miniature garden, built up of bricks, and decked with the flowers of the season. For my host was a genial bachelor of good repute, who had travelled across the seas once, and had come back very fond of flower-pots and little children. Indeed, he constituted himself a sort of uncle to every neighbour's child within range.

This old Mr. Hung and I were drinking some of his specially flavoured visitors' tea, and discussing Chinese sponge-cakes, when in came a tall spectacle-seller friend, leading by the hand a little girl of seven, who smelt the flowers as she passed, and looked to be on very good terms with her father and with the world in general.

Mr. Liu, the tall visitor, bowed and instructed his little maid to waggle her hands at the side—which is the Chinese "curtsey" for dames small and large. And as our little maid had not met me before, she set herself, after the fashion of children the wide world over, to subject me to a modest but searching ocular examination. The verdict seemed favourable and, emboldened by my recent rise in the scale of being, I offered little Miss Liu one of the sponge cakes. Down went her head, out came her hand, stretched so as to place some distance between us, and she whispered the words, "Elder sister." Which was to be interpreted that, having an elder sister at home, with whom she was in a sort of partnership, she would take it home and eat it with her. It is quite usual for Chinese girls, at any rate, to wish to share what they get with someone at home.

"You have an elder sister, then," I said. "What is her name?"

"Gem," whispered the child.

"And your own name?"

"Pearl."

"Well then, Pearl, you take that home to your elder sister, and don't eat any of it, mind." She looked quite contented at the arrangement. "Not a scrap of it, mind. But come over here and eat every scrap of this other cake, and don't give your elder sister a scrap. Eh?" This seemed such a joke that the child laughed merrily. And that cake was eaten as close to my knee as she had been to her father's when he sat down—which was progress indeed. "Demon" and "duffer" chapters were forgotten; it was paragraph one of chapter three, and the chapter was entitled "Friend."

Some nine or ten years after, my visits to Tsaitien were to the house of the spectacle-seller himself. Old Mr. Hung had died, regretted by all. And for the time Mr. Liu was exercising a lay oversight of the little mission-station, carrying on his business the while.

The sisters Gem and Pearl had been away at a mission boarding-school, and two younger folks had come on the scene, to wit, Harmony, a little maid of seven, and a considerably spoilt younger brother.

Having grown familiar with the sight of a foreigner from her babyhood, little Harmony did not cease to be spontaneous during one's visits, until spoken to directly, when she would be exceedingly silent all at once. There seems to be little medium in the Chinese small-girl's mind between a considerable noise and silence itself. There being no law in China, national or domestic, against vociferation, little girls as well as boys are wont to use their lungs with the greatest freedom. But they are exceedingly difficult to draw out in conversation of any connected sort. Their range of vision, moreover, is anything but wide. There are boys in Hanyang who have never once ascended the Hanyang Hill. And a little girl's outlook is often restricted to "over the way," or the interior of a next-door neighbour's house.

When the neighbours' children came in, as they frequently did, to see any wonderful toys the foreigner had to exhibit, it was quite usual for three or four of them to combine to give short, snatchy clauses in answer to a question asked them. For instance, the children lingered one night till ten o'clock. "Won't your father miss you, and get the crier to go round with the gong (for lost children)?" I asked. "Oh no," said one. "Father knows where we are," said another. "Father knows we are here," said a third. "He knows we are with you," said a fourth. "He came to see you to-day," added the first.

In a word, conversation with small Chinese maidens can hardly be maintained except by cross-examination, and even then the answers are

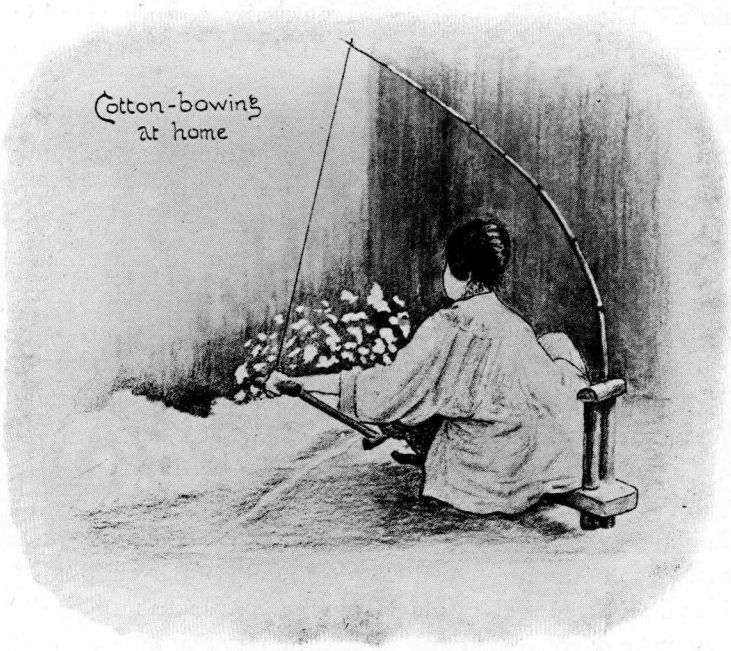
jerky and incomplete. The child's head seems naturally to tnrn round in appeal for a little companion to finish each sentence. This seems largely due to the fact that after the first signs of intelligence as babies—fascinating enough to mothers everywhere—children are not supposed to have anything to say that is worth listening to. No attempt is made, as in the West, to study their little world, and grasp their standpoint. The phrase, "loved as a pearl on the palm of the hand," always, in Chinese literature, belongs to some interesting little daughter, and is not applied to a son. But the intercourse between parent and daughter is more understood than expressed. What words pass the parent's lips are generally mildly or forcibly repressive. And when a visitor is present children are commonly supposed to be a bother to him. Unless they happen to be boys, and spoilt, when they generally succeed in being bothers indeed.

Yet, although Chinese parents are not in the habit of petting their little girls much, they may welcome any interest shown in them by a foreign friend. And in enumerating old Mr. Hung's numerous excellencies, it is quite usual for the townsfolk to end with, "And wasn't he fond of our children!"

Among the little dames themselves much snatchy conversation goes on, often of a kind meant to be witty, abounding in intentional misinterpretations of words, simple puns and the like—similar in kind, if not in degree, to the dialogues which Shakespere puts into the mouths of his rougher characters. And nursery rhymes are in vogue, in which every line starts off at a tangent from a pun. These might be represented in English by such nonsense as, "Mother bought a chicken." "A chick hen, did you say? What hen?" "A pea-hen." "What pea?" "A sweet-pea." "What kind of sweet?" "Toffee." But the ditties themselves are of course untranslatable.

And so, in another sense, is much of the conversation in an ordinary Chinese household, abounding as it does in bad words. The bad words of Western lands have largely to do with suggestions of future retribution—a subject that loomed large on the popular mind a generation or so back. But in China, where a future has not taken much hold of the popular imagination, the bad words are all connected with that prominent subject—ancestry, and are therefore of an exceedingly objectionable nature. And as the common people use these filth-words on all possible occasions, and gentlefolk use them when provoked, the mud out of which the lotus flowers of Chinese maidenhood have to spring is often of a highly malodorous nature.

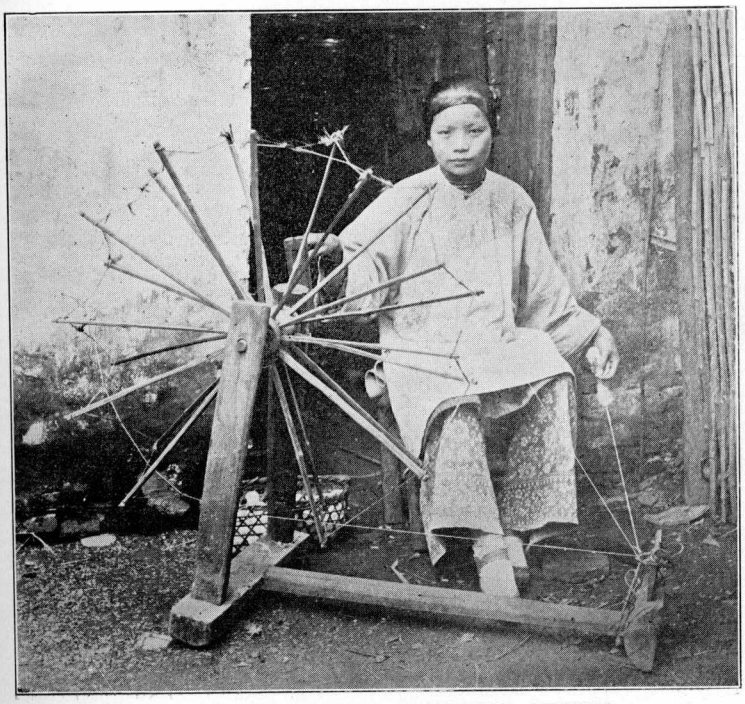
The household whose nearer acquaintance I was enabled to make was, be it said to the credit of all, entirely free from this sort of thing, though the wrangling at a fish market over the way could hardly have been matched in Billingsgate itself.



One disinfectant for Chinese maidens is the exceeding industry which the limited resources of the household render necessary. And when the sisters Gem and Pearl came home, they were kept busy from dawn till dark, washing and mending clothes, making shoes and socks, bowing cotton or spinning it, quietly singing most of the time some helpful ditties they had learnt. Their sole conversation with the foreigner consisted of a smile, or at most a monosyllable now and then. Though they entered quickly into any excitement which was going on among the smaller fry.

One evening a very ugly but smart little maid from next door appeared with an ornate pinafore, the designs of which I suggested might rejoice the heart of my wife. No sign was made that the remark had been heard, but next morning the designs were being transferred to a piece of dark blue cloth, and worked in silk. One of these designs is reproduced in the initial "I" of this paper.

In came the owner of the pinafore later, with her hair done up in a bob at the side. It was a windy day, and I suggested that everybody must look after their hair, as this child's had been blown askew! The whole company laughed prodigiously. Then it was discovered that the foreigner's pigtail (he never wore one) had been blown completely off. The company screamed at this. Then the maiden of the pinafore said, "Give me back my pinafore when you have done with it." And the foreigner, having now discovered that his pigtail must have been loaned, and not blown away, said, "Give me back my pigtail when *you* have done with it." And the company laughed themselves into symp- toms of whooping-cough. Such are the neutral-tinted lives they usually lead.



PEARL AT THE SPINNING WHEEL.

It may be said that this is hardly a specimen of an ordinary Chinese home, being a Christian household. On the other hand, the genial Christianity of the home seemed to bring its inmates into the normal condition of healthy humanity. Of the ordinary life of a girl in many a heathen household the accompanying native illustration is suggestively descriptive. Its subject is not suffered to deteriorate from lack of labour, if she be a "daughter-in-law." She is blowing up the fire for all she is worth, rather from necessity than choice. For much lies in that Chinese word for "daughter-in-law."

Two Chinese dames were overheard one day conversing upon a subject which belies Rudyard Kipling's axiom that "East is East and West is West" —conversing on a subject which links the hemispheres and possibly the ages —the worries from domestic servants.

"What's to be done? I'm that distracted that . . . "

"Same here. You see, if you curse a hired lad and beat him, he runs away. And what with the washing and the cooking and the mending, who is to go on errands, I should like to know? But I'm not going to stand it any longer! That son of mine is seventeen, and I mean to get a daughter-in-law. It is really cheaper, and you can curse and beat her as much as you like, and she *can't* run away, you see!"

"Good idea! So shall I."

A MERE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

Sometimes "daughters-in-law" are procured as little children, adopted into the family, and brought up with their future husbands. And when grown, whether married or not, they are considered as lawful game by the mother-in-law. Their one mission in life is by-and-by to bear a son or two. But meanwhile they may be made to work like slaves, and whatever forcible incentives to diligence may be used, they "can't run away, you see!"

One fact common to maidens of ordinary or Christian households alike is that they may be said to have hardly any girlhood; they are either children or women. From simple childhood they commonly leap into a condition of constrained womanhood. At twelve they may be as natural and artless as could be wished—human flower-buds with a quaint Cathayan perfume; but three or four years later these opening blossoms seem to shut with a snap. They no longer contribute any vivacity to the world at large until the days when little ones cling to the ample folds of their long jackets. It has been observed by ladies with boarding-schools for Chinese girls that at about

A GOSSIP AT THE WELL-SIDE.

sixteen they put off childish things often without putting on anything in their place, so that they become very negative beings until "the great event of life," as the Chinese call a girl's marrige.

Not a few however, as there is no orthodox girlhood for them, manage to make a compromise, and to present a happy combination of child-woman. This has been the case with the two elder maidens of the Liu family, Gem and Pearl, who have since filled the post of nurses in a Women's Hospital, winning the praise and affection of the ladies in charge and of their patients too. They are neither of them in the hospital now, for various reasons.

GEM AT THE COTTON GIN.

Going back a few years, we find Miss Pearl washing clothes and engaged in a gossip at a well-side. Were there no photographer near, the chatting might be about the future husbands of the trio. But in that case the face of Mistress Pearl would hardly be so free from care as the photograph represents her. For both she and her elder sister had been betrothed as infants to other infants (this was in her father's pre-Christian days), and both the male infants had grown up into veritable heathen, and boorish withal.

It is one of the penalties of education among Chinese maidens that with the soul's awakening such a contingency as early betrothal to soulless boors involves a naturally dreaded outlook. And nothing can break off a betrothal. A divorce, from the man's side, would be far easier; from the maiden's side she is tied to someone she has never seen, a man who may be anything from

slave-driver upwards, or even downwards! Nothing on earth can sever that bond. And it is quite possible for death itself to be contemplated with less shrinking than marriage with a boor. One subject among Chinese artists, and supposed to be comical, is a picture known by the title "Mis-matched." It represents a fair young bride riding on an ass looking over her fan at an ugly misshapen old husband who walks by her side. But with a cultured maiden and boorish heathen, the situation is more suggestive of tragedy than comedy.

"The betrothed of the elder sister, Gem," they told me a year or two back, "is the worse of the two country yokels. He is clamouring for her feet to be bound, and swears by all that is unholy that he will have her know her position."

And she has found her position at last! Her father could not get the dreaded marriage-day put off later than "next year." But before the time expired she ended her duties as hospital nurse, and became hospital patient instead. A board hung over her on the wall, marked with words which the non-medical interpret as consumption . . . . And now the grass waves over the body, but not the soul, of Pearl's elder sister. She has found her place at last, and is at peace.

"A Chinese lady to see you, my dear," said my wife the other day. Not being accustomed to receive visits from Chinese ladies, I guessed that the visitor was a juvenile. And so she proved to be, though tall and married.

BUSY AS USUAL.

Outwardly a woman, there was the old child-smile with which a piece of sponge-cake had been received years ago. It was now her turn to offer a similar luxury to my own little maiden, who was quite charmed with our visitor.

Pearl was married, but a compromise had been made. The young man had come into the household instead of her going away into the country. And now the power of homely goodness is brightening him up and, if somewhat rough still, he is neutral rather than objectionable. And his wife is still her parents' child.

And little Harmony, once so rowdy? Her mother gave her to me once, and, when I proceeded to run away with her, said, "I mean it, and only wish she had such good-fortune." And it happens, without having made any very distinct appropriation of the child, that in a boarding school situated next door, one of the primmest and brightest scholars is called "Harmony." She feels, however little she shows it, that there is a sort of uncle and niece relationship between us. And when I wanted one more picture for this paper—well, here she sits.

"HARMONY."