

## BETROTHAL AND MARRIAGE IN CHINA.

BY THE EDITOR.

**I**N a girl's life the most thrilling event is her engagement and marriage. The period of courtship is filled with romance and poetry as much or even more than in Western countries. As evidence we quote a love song preserved in the *Shih King*<sup>1</sup> (I, XII, 8) :

"How rises the moon in radiant glory!  
And thou my lady, most charming and sweetest  
Oh, listen kindly to love's story!—  
Ah, poor my heart that vainly beatest!

"How rises the moon in cloudless effulgence!  
And thou my lady, most winsome and purest  
Oh grant thy lover more indulgence!—  
Ah, poor my heart what thou endurest!

"How rises the moon in splendor most brightly!  
And thou my lady, loveliest, fairest  
Wilt never for my love requite me?—  
Ah, poor my heart what pain thou bearest!"

This love ditty has been sung by lovers in Cathay for more than two and a half millenniums, and ever since it was incorporated in the *Shih King* by Confucius, forms part of the canonical books of China. But to prove that literary taste and talent have not died out in the middle country we will quote another poem of a more modern date, which has been translated by Robert K. Douglas, than whom we can scarcely have a better interpreter of Chinese thought and sentiment:\*

### "THE LOVE-SICK MAIDEN.

"Within a silken curtained bed there lay  
A maiden wondrous fair but vaguely ill,  
Who cared for nothing in the outside world,  
Contented only to lie lone and still.

<sup>1</sup> Legge omits this song in his translation published in the *Sacred Books of the East*. We have utilized the versified versions of William Jennings and Victor von Strauss.

\* *Chinese Stories*, pp. 347-8.

"While lying thus her neighbor Mrs. Wang  
 Stepped lightly o'er to ask her how she fared;  
 And drawing back the curtains, stood aghast  
 To see how wan and pale her cheeks appeared.

"Tell me what ails you, dear,' she kindly said.  
 'My mind's diseased,' the maiden soft replied:  
 'I cannot sleep, I loathe the sight of food,  
 And I'm so weary.' Then she turned and sighed.

"Shall I a doctor call to see you, dear?'  
 'A doctor? No; I don't want any such.  
 They countless questions ask to earn their fees,  
 And sometimes end by finding out too much.'

"Shall I call in a priest to pray with you?'  
 'A priest? Oh no, that would be worse again.  
 His snuffling chants and dismal tinkling bells  
 Would rather aggravate than ease my pain.'

"Shall I go seek a nurse to wait on you?'  
 'A nurse? Oh no,' the pretty maiden said;  
 'I could not bear to have her watching me,  
 And purring like a cat about my bed.'

"But what's the cause of this distemper, dear?'  
 The maiden raised herself and blushing said.  
 'Last spring young Le, who to the wars has gone,  
 Was wont to saunter over hill and glade.

"He loved to wander forth amongst the flowers,  
 To revel in the beauties of the spring,  
 To watch the blossoms opening to the sun,  
 And hear the lark and tuneful throstle sing.'

"But what has that to do with you, my child?'  
 'Oh blind, oh blind, and can't you really see?  
 I love him as the wakening dawn loves light;  
 And let me whisper to you, he loves me.'

"Then shall I call this Mr. Le to you?'  
 'What use to call, he's many leagues away.  
 Oh, if I could but see him once again!  
 'You shall, my child, for he comes home to-day.'"

A Chinese lover who woos a young lady of good family visits the house of her parents, where he is expected to show his accomplishments, especially in penmanship. Our illustration shows a young man of the Chinese gentry writing to the daughter of the house a love letter which on the top bears the character "Beauty" in elegant outlines. A little paper-weight in the form of a deer serves to hold the long sheet of paper in place. The young man

of our illustration is apparently busy with the composition of a poem addressed to his "Beauty," consisting of the characters "mountain," "middle," and "high," the sense of which may be, "My beauty!



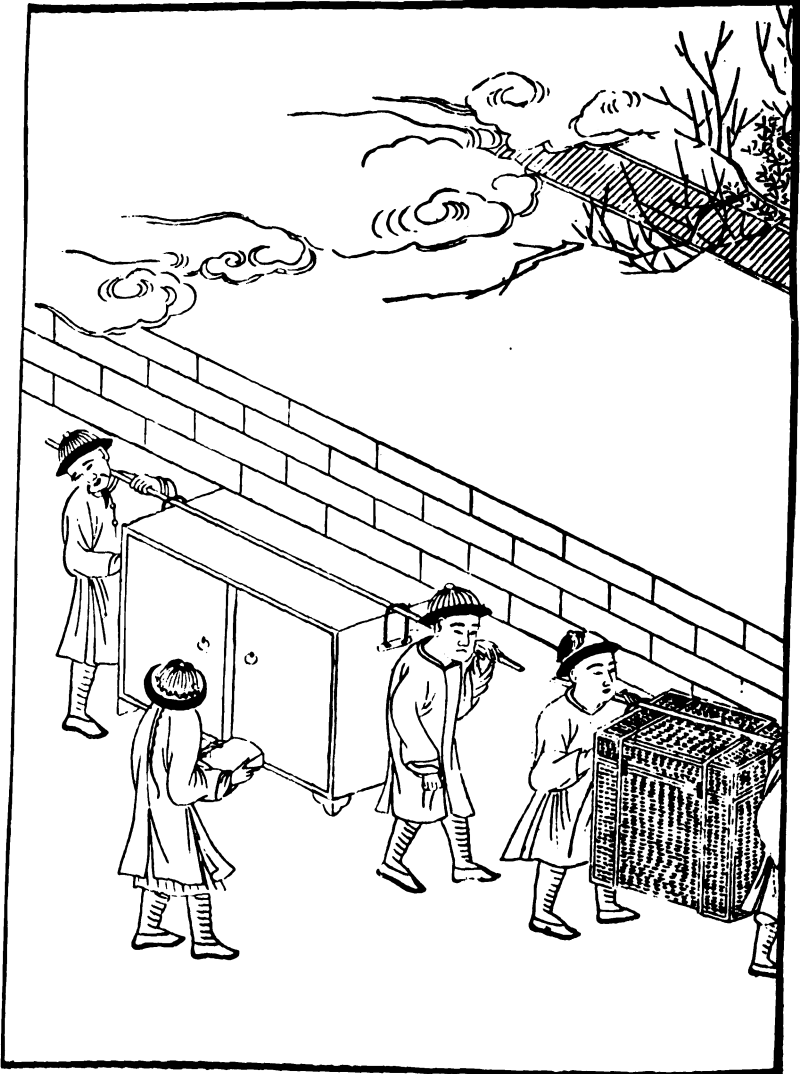
WRITING A LOVE LETTER.

2260

Among mountains, towering high," etc. A male servant of the house of his lady love is serving him with a cup of tea.

According to old custom six rites are needed to render the mar-

riage ceremony complete, but there is no unanimity as to which these six are. They consist, however, under all circumstances in calls of the go-betweens sent by the party of the suitor to the house



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DELIVERING

of the intended bride, partly for exchange of presents, partly to inquire for names, age and circumstances, and to receive the consent of the bride's parents, and finally to fix a marriage day.

We have before us two enumerations, one considered as the original calls the six rites as follows:

1. Na Ts'ai, Sending of presents.



THE TROUSSEAU.

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2. Wèn Míng, Asking of names.
3. Na Chì, Inquiring for the auspiciousness of marriage.
4. Na Chéng, Indication of consent by presents.

5. Ching Chi, Naming the day.
6. Chin Ying, Calling for the bride.



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MARRIAGE

The other enumeration of the six rites is regarded as more modern, and consists of the following acts:

1. Wên Keng, Inquiring for names, which includes age and other conditions.



PROCESSION.

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2. Tung Kêng, Answering of questions, consisting of reply of party of the bride.

3. Wên Ting, Determination through divination.
4. Tai Li, Exchange of tokens (of mutual goodwill). This



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THE YOUNG COUPLE WOR-

is made the opportunity of great display and is deemed an important ceremony.

5. Sung Jih, Naming the day.



## 6. Chin Ying, Calling for the bride.

These six rites are one or another strictly adhered to, but they



SHIPPING HEAVEN AND EARTH.

2319

are not calculated to cut off all intercourse between the lovers or to prevent courtship.

When the marriage contract has been agreed upon by the

parents the trousseau is carried into the future residence of the young couple, and on the day of marriage the groom with his



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OFFERING THE

friends betakes himself to the bride's house, where the wedding is solemnized. In the evening he returns with his bride in solemn procession.

The *Shih King*, a classical collection of Chinese poetry edited by Confucius, which must therefore be older than 500 B. C., con-



LOVE CUP.

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tains a beautiful little "Bridal Song" which is still popular in China, and is frequently used on marriage festivals. We quote it after the versified translation of Mr. William Jennings as follows:

"Ho, graceful little peach-tree,  
 Brightly thy blossoms bloom!  
 The bride goes to her husband;  
 Adorns his hall, his room.



"Ho, graceful little peach-tree,  
 Thy fruit abundant fall!

The bride goes to her husband;  
Adorns his room, his hall.  
"Ho, graceful little peach-tree,  
With foliage far and wide!



BRIDE AT THE MARRIAGE FEAST.

2332

The bride goes to her husband;  
His household well to guide."

Having arrived at their new residence the young couple worship heaven and earth. Then the bride is seated on a divan and drinks some wine with her husband out of a loving cup consisting of two bowls welded into one.

A few days after the wedding, the fathers of the groom and bride meet at the home of the young couple (which commonly is the house of the groom's parents) to enjoy a visit before the family altar, on which we see the stork and pine-tree, perhaps also the tortoise, all emblems of a long and happy life.

We know what an important part in the Chinese world-conception is played by the idea of the Yang, or the positive principle, and Yin, the negative principle. All things have originated by a mixture of these two elements, and in married life the Yang represents the male and the Yin, the female. Ch'iu Chin (*alias* Wen Chuang) the compiler of a manual of quotations, the *Ch'ang Yü Kao*,<sup>2</sup> expresses the typically Chinese view in these words:

"The Yin or female element in nature by itself would not be productive; the Yang or male element in nature alone would not cause growth: therefore through the Yin and Yang, Heaven and Earth are mated together. The man by the help of the woman makes a household, and the woman by the help of the man makes a family; therefore the human race pair off as husband and wife.

"When the Yin and the Yang are in harmony the fertilizing rain descends. When the husband and wife are at one, the ideal of a family is realized."

From the same source we learn that the husband speaks of his own wife as "the stupid thorn" and also as "the one inside," while he refers to the wife of another as "your honorable lady."

<sup>2</sup>Ch'iu Chin lived A. D. 1419-1495. His book has been published in an English translation together with the original Chinese by J. H. Stewart Lockhart, Hongkong, 1893.