

ROMANCE IN CHINESE LITERATURE

By J. P. DONOVAN

MOST of the writers on China and Chinese life lay stress on the fact that owing to the rules of propriety and the customs relating to betrothals and marriage, romantic love plays no part in the lives of the youth of that country. It has been stated that while sexual selection has influenced the advancement and development of other races, it has been inoperative in China. And, therefore, as romantic love has had no part in marriage, it may have been one of the causes of China's arrested development. A study of the Chinese classics would tend to confirm such a view, for Confucius is reported to have said that "women are as different from men as earth is from heaven." And there is no doubt that Confucianism has been responsible for the subordination of women in China, as it was in Korea and Japan.

In spite, however, of the rules of propriety and other restrictions imposed on women by Confucianism, in China as in other lands, "love knoweth no lawes." From their earliest days the children are told stories by their nurses of earthly counterparts to the heavenly lovers, the Cowherd and the Spinning Maid who are said to meet every year on the seventh of August over a bridge made of magpies' wings. Many tales are related of young men and maidens in whose lives romantic love has played a prominent part. Some of these stories are to be found in the "Classic of Poetry" which contains poems written, or rather graven, on bamboo tablets as early as 1765 B. C. Not a few of the odes were written by women while others were composed to be sung by them. As in Japan before the introduction of Confucianism, a great deal of the best literature was either produced or inspired by women.

That in the times prior to the advent of Confucius women had more freedom and independence, and the relations between the sexes were much freer than in later times, is evident from the extracts given below from the "Classic of Poetry." It is an interesting fact that Confucius selected out of over three thousand poems which had been written before 551 B. C.—the date of his birth—three hundred and five which treat mostly of love and war. These, it is said, he sang over to his lute in order that they might harmonize with the musical style of his day. According to Sze Ma Chien, the historian (163-85 B. C.) the poems which form the "Classic of Poetry" were selected by Confucius with a view of promoting propriety and righteousness. The Sage was evidently much broader-minded than either many of his commentators or some of his foreign translators who have interpreted innocent flirtations as immoral assignations.

That "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin" will be seen from the description of the ardent and eager lover portrayed in the following stanza:

With axle creaking all on fire I went,
To fetch my young and lovely bride.
No thirst or hunger pangs my bosom rent,—
I only longed to have *her* by my side.

And that they were not ignorant of the pleasures of flirtation, and had found out long ago that "men were deceivers ever," the following will show:

Where is Tzu Chai, that jaunty lad?
With someone else to flirt and play
Amid the hemp the livelong day
Is his delight.—It is too bad.

That young couples must have met in the gloaming without the assistance of a chaperone will be seen from the following:

A pretty girl at time o' gloaming
Hath whispered me to go and meet her
Without the city gate.
I love her, but she tarries coming;
Shall I return, or stay and greet her?
I burn and wait.

It is not only in the "Classic of Poetry" that love making and courting form one of the principal topics; but in Chinese fiction the heroes and heroines are portrayed with human passions and feelings like ourselves. In the course of the adventures of the leading characters in the romantic literature, both young men and maidens are thrown together in a remarkable manner, and the stories generally end by the heroes and heroines marrying and living happy ever after. As has been well said:

"The men and women whom they introduce are naturally within the circle of their passions and motives. Integrity is seen in contrast with intrigue, and honest men involved in the snares of knavery. The characters are persons of the middle classes such as magistrates, judges, councillors of state, and literary graduates. . . . Visits, and the formalities, polished statesmen, assemblies, and, above all, the conversation which render them agreeable, repasts, and the social amusements which prolong them; the walks of the admirers of nature; journeys; and in sequel, marriage—form their most frequent episodes and ordinary conclusions."

Chinese fiction is not so dissimilar to our romances as some writers would have us believe, and the similarity has been noted by such men as Sir John Francis Davis and Goethe. The following conversation is reported to have taken place between Eckermann and Goethe concerning a Chinese novel which the German poet had been reading. Eckermann said:

"It must have appeared very curious and strange."

To which Goethe replied:

"Not so much as one would suppose. The people think, act, and feel almost entirely as we do, and very soon we become familiar with their point of view; although with them everything is clearer, calmer, and more moral. In their arrangements everything is sensible, *bourgeois*, without great passion or poetical inspiration, and so is very

similar to my 'Hermann and Dorothea,' as well as to the English novels of Richardson."

Until comparatively recent years the *beau-ideal* in Chinese novels was the hero who obtained the highest literary degrees, and who was, therefore, able to quote the Chinese classics with fluency, as well as write poetry on any given subject at a moment's notice. He is described as *sans peur et sans reproche*, being able by his physical courage to overcome all opposition when befriending and championing the cause of females in distress. Learning above all other accomplishments was considered the distinguishing characteristic of the Chinese Bayard. Neither the atmosphere of the camp nor military prowess was extolled by Chinese writers of fiction, as soldiers, until the advent of Westerners, occupied a very inferior position in the social scale. Chinese novelists had no praise for those who obtained glory at the cannon's mouth. One of their common sayings is: "Good men do not become soldiers." The dictum of neither Sophocles nor Schiller that war destroys the best was contrary to the Chinese view as to the merits of soldiers. They would not have endorsed the saying that "Napoleon peopled hell with the elite of Europe," owing to his numerous wars. But it must be said with sorrow that the opinions of the Chinese have changed since the advent of the "Mailed Fist" and other representatives of Western civilization. They have learned and experienced something of the "pride of war," and the "pest of glory."

Perhaps one of the works of Chinese fiction best known to foreigners is "Hao Ch'iu Ch'uan" or "The Fortunate Union." This has been translated into English, French, and German, and is probably the one that Goethe had been reading. It has also been used as a text book by students of Chinese owing to the faithful representation it gives of the every day life and character of the Chinese people. The hero of the story is Tieh Chung Yü, which has been rendered into English as the "Iron Duke." He had through "scorning delights and living laborious days" attained the

distinction of being made a member of the Han Lin Yuan, or "The Forest of Pencils"—which, in other words, means he became the Senior Wrangler of his year. His father was a distinguished official and when the story opens he held the rank of being a member of the Court of Censors at Peking. The duty of a Censor was like that of the Tribune of ancient Rome—having to investigate the charges against, and criticize the acts of, officials, and if necessary those of the Emperor himself, without either fear or favor.

Tieh Chung Yü during his wanderings about the country as a traveling student had some remarkable adventures, experiences, and scrapes, always arriving at the psychological moment to rescue some female from the hands of her cruel abductor or betrayer, and by so doing incurring the hate and enmity of many a rich and powerful Don Juan. The marvelous way in which he discovered the whereabouts of beautiful women who were the victims of such men would have done credit to Sherlock Holmes. In all his contempt, daring, and defiance of danger while carrying on the gallant tasks of rescue, he retained his courtesy, respect for elders, and self-control, and observed as well all the proprieties as laid down by Confucius for the "model man."

The heroine is introduced to the readers as the only child of an official who was president of the Board of War, and owing to his position was obliged to reside in the capital, Peking. His wife being dead, his daughter, though only sweet seventeen, was left in charge of the family home, which was situated at Li Ching, in the Tsinan prefecture, Shantung, some twenty-five miles from Peking. She, being the only child, was treated more as a boy than as a girl—which is not uncommon in China, as I have known personally several official families where it was done. She had, therefore, enjoyed the same privilege as a son in receiving an education with tutors at home, which was usual in such families. By this means she had acquired a knowledge of the Chinese classics and literature which made her the equal intellectually of men senior in age to herself.

There is no need to say that language is inadequate to describe her charms. Like many such women delineated in Chinese novels, "her figure was as graceful as bamboo, her cheeks were oval like melon seeds, her lips were like cherries, her teeth like grains of silver rice, her finely penciled eyebrows were like the antennae of a butterfly, her oblique eyes were like olives, and her tiny feet, three inches long, were like golden lilies."

The ideal of beauty and the mark of gentility for a woman used to be small feet, the compression of which was not imposed by law; but was a craze of fashion, as slender waists were at one time in England. Several accounts are given as to the origin of the custom of foot binding; but probably the following is the correct one:

It is said that Yao Niang, the beautiful concubine of the Emperor Li Yü (975 A. D.) was light and graceful in all her movements, being able to dance with ease and elegance. She gave so much pleasure to her lord and master that he caused to be made golden lily flowers with movable petals for Yao Niang to walk on from her apartments to the palace. To gratify the Emperor still further, she compressed her feet in order that they might look like a lily bud unopened, until they were three inches long. From that time, the smaller the feet the greater was the beauty and respectability of the Chinese girl. The Chinese bride used to be welcomed to the bridegroom's home in language like this:

The bride is high browed, fair and sweet;
Like awls her small and sharp-toed feet.

The name of our heroine was Ping-Hsin, which, while in English would be translated "Icy-Hearted," in China would be understood "as chaste as ice."

She was neither cold nor indifferent to love, which embraces the greater part of woman's life. Although she had reached the age when girls in China used to be married, owing to her being the only child she had not even been betrothed. The age when this event took place in the life

of a girl varied; but in many cases it was negotiated when the child was an infant, by go-betweens who were generally women. There have been instances where unborn children were informally betrothed to each other, the parents agreeing that the children when born, if of opposite sexes, should become husband and wife when grown up. Usually girls were betrothed when they were between the ages of ten and fifteen, and a go-between would be commissioned by the parents of the boy, to obtain from the parents of the girl who might be eligible, her name, and the year, month, day, and hour of her birth.

These eight characters, which were sometimes copied on gold-leaf, were taken to the astrologer or fortune-teller with the eight characters of the youth, in order that the horoscope of both might be examined. The sixteen characters giving the necessary particulars respecting both aspirants to the matrimonial state, though neither would know anything about it, were arranged on a table in separate rows with a view of seeing if they harmonized. If, for example, the boy had been born under the sign of the Chinese zodiac of the dragon, and the girl under the sign of the tiger, these two emblems would be antagonistic, and, therefore, unlucky—so that no marriage could be arranged. There are many other ceremonies connected with betrothals which it would take too long to enumerate. Presents are exchanged between the two families; but in the best circles it is not accurate to say that the bride is purchased. Only concubines may be said to have been bought and there are no ceremonies connected with their marriage, if such it may be called.

Ping-Hsin, not having been betrothed, was therefore fancy-free and heart-whole when Fate brought her and Tieh Chung Yü together. For in China it is commonly believed that matches are made in heaven, and marriage is ordained by Fate, so that all who are destined to be united in the bonds of Hymen have their feet tied together by an invisible red cord. While traveling in the province of Shantung our hero was fortunate enough to meet with an

accident near the house where Ping-Hsin lived, and so it came about that he was taken in to be nursed by the servants under the direction of the mistress of the house. During the time that the "Iron Duke" was a guest in the home of Ping-Hsin, they found many opportunities for the discussion of subjects in which they were both interested. Indulging in the feast of reason and flow of soul, as Chinese scholars did whenever they met, and while strictly observing the rules of propriety, they soon found that they were "two souls with but a single thought."

It would require a large volume to relate all the trying and wonderful experiences that this couple passed through, owing to the intrigue and machination of an evil uncle of Ping-Hsin's. His wicked designs and plans for marrying his niece to an undesirable and worthless individual, her father, being absent, were thwarted by the cleverness of Ping-Hsin, who was more than a match for all her enemies whom she had always outwitted by her superior knowledge and skill. Tieh Chung Yü had many hair-breadth escapes while carrying on his mission of opposing cruelty, injustice, and oppression in high places, and in rescuing females who were victims of bad men. The story ends as it should by a complete award of "poetical justice," the virtuous being rewarded and the wrong-doers punished. The final scene takes place in the palace at Peking before the Emperor.

Tieh Chung Yü, his bride (Ping-Hsin) and the assembled Court then bowed and acknowledged the Imperial bounty, and the hum of joy and congratulation resembled the distant roll of thunder. The attendants had received their orders; and they filed off in pairs, the ornamental lanterns in all their radiance, the harmonious band in full sound, and the marshaled banners in their variegated splendor, escorted the renowned and happy couple as they proceeded homeward attended by a vast company.

The choicest bud, unblown, exhales no sweets,
No radiance can the untried gem display;
Misfortune, like the winter cold that binds
The embryo fragrance of the flower, doth lend
A fresher charm to fair prosperity.

The question as to whether Chinese marriages are happy

ones is too large a one to discuss in this article, though there is a consensus of opinion among those who know the Chinese best that on the whole, the system of leaving the choice of either a husband or wife to the parents and go-betweens has been successful. It has been said by a Chinese lady that marriage in the West often means the removal of sentimental masks of mutual consideration, while in the East it is the beginning of love. A good deal of sentimental nonsense has been written about the unhappiness of married life in China. Quarrels and misunderstandings do occur there between husband and wife, which in many cases is on account of the mother-in-law who is not always as considerate as she might be. But those who have made a study of this question are in agreement with me that in the majority of cases the homes in China are on the whole happy, and the wife, as a rule, reigns supreme in the management of the household.

Since the Revolution in 1911 women in China have been emancipated and are taking a prominent part in the discussion of all questions affecting the social and physical welfare of the rising generation. They have their own newspapers and magazines edited by women, as well as all kinds of societies which have as their object the amelioration and removal of evils in the home and state. Politics and public speaking are not above or beyond the comprehension and participation in of Chinese women.

That polygamy, and concubinage are causes of bickerings, envy and jealousies is only what might be expected, human nature in China being the same as elsewhere; but erroneous views on that subject are held in the West. It should be clearly understood that there is no such thing as plurality of wives. Concubinage, which was common among the Jews until the end of the second century, and which was not suppressed by the Christian Church until 1060 A. D., is allowed. The wife, however, when a concubine is brought into the house, continues to be supreme in the home, the concubine being legally and socially infe-

rior to the wife. Before pronouncing an opinion on concubinage it is necessary to understand the Chinese view of marriage. This is given in the Book of Rites which is said to have been written 1200 B. C., and is as follows:

Marriage is to make a union between two persons of different families, the object of which is to serve on one hand, the ancestors in the temple, and to perpetuate, on the other hand, the coming generation.

It will therefore be seen that the system arose from the necessity of having a son to perform the worship of ancestors after the death of the father.

As has been well said: "To get the correct point of view, we must, in fact, assume for the study of China's institutions and history the frame of mind in which we approach the lives of the Hebraic patriarchs and rulers; cheerfully accepting for them customs which we, the heirs of all ages, have decided to modify or reject."

OH, NOT IN HATE

By ROWLAND B. MAHANY

Oh, not in hate the poppies blow
In Flanders fields. The dead now know
How poor is hate to those who tread
The endless pathway of the dead—
The poppied peace of friend and foe.

Whereto shall this war's merits flow?
How shall our bright example show,
Its sacred influence be sped?
Oh, not in hate!—

The asphodels are bending low
To kiss the poppies as they grow—
Red bloom for blood that has been shed,
White for the Benediction said
Where fall the silent tears and slow,
Oh, not in hate.