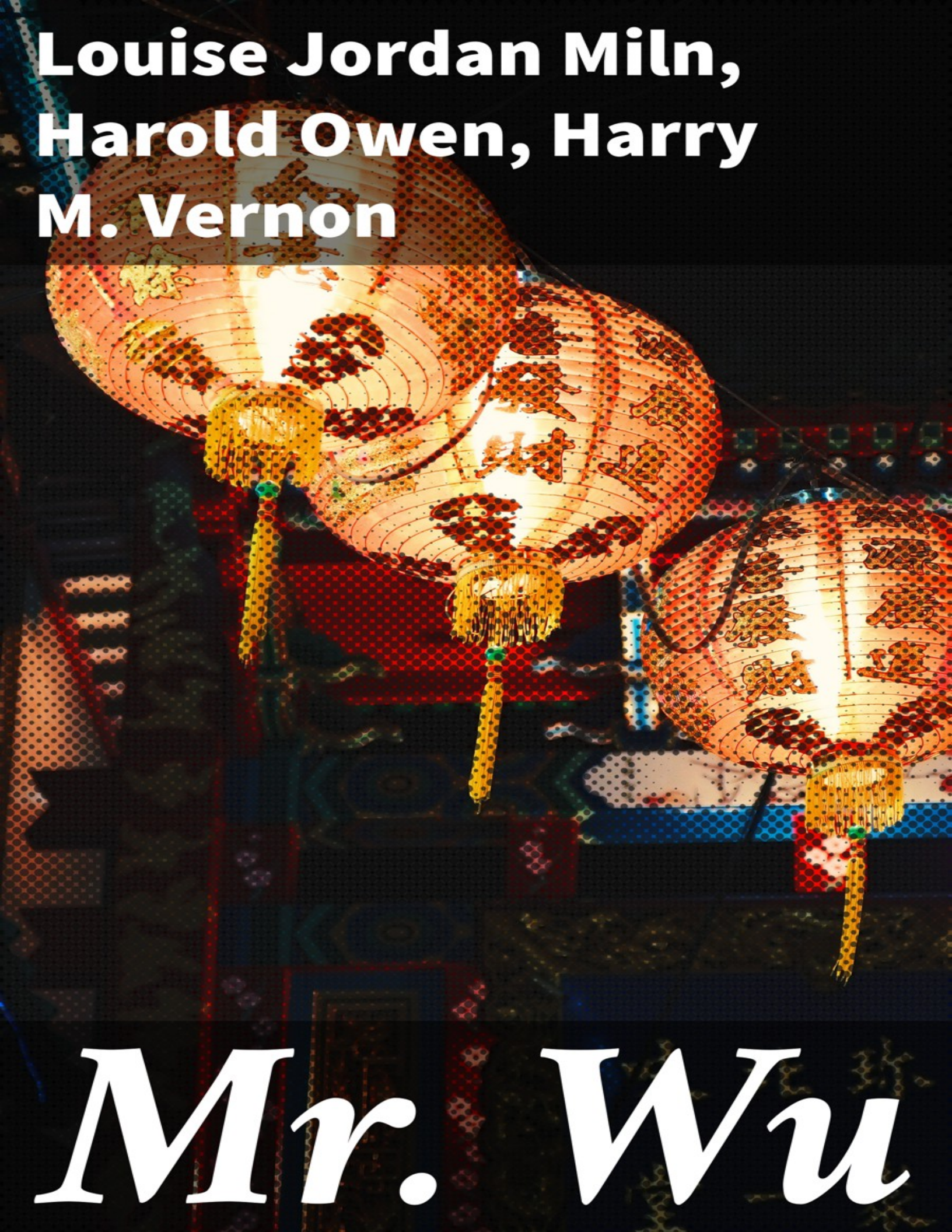


**Louise Jordan Miln,
Harold Owen, Harry
M. Vernon**



Mr. Wu

**Louise Jordan Miln, Harold Owen, Harry M.
Vernon**

Mr. Wu

**Based on the Play "Mr. Wu" by H. M. Vernon and
Harold Owen**



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CHAPTER I

WU CHING YU AND WU LI CHANG

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A LOOK of terror glinted across the eyes slit in the child's moon-shaped yellow face, but he stood stock still and silent—respectful and obedient.

The very old man in the chair of carved and inlaid teak wood saw the glint of fear, and he liked it fiercely, although he came of a clan renowned for fearlessness, even in a race that for personal courage has never been matched—unless by the British, the race which of all others it most resembles. Old Wu adored little Wu, and was proud of him with a jealous pride, but he knew that there was nothing craven in the fear that had looked for one uncontrolled instant from his grandson's narrow eye—nothing craven, but love for himself, love of home, and a reluctance to leave both; a reluctance that he was the last man in China to resent or to misestimate.

Wu the grandfather was eighty. Wu the grandson was ten.

Rich almost beyond the dreams of even Chinese avarice, the mandarin was warmly wrapped in clothes almost coolie-plain; but the youngster, who was but his senior's chattel, would have pawned for a fortune as he stood, a ridiculous, gorgeous figure of warmth and of affluence, almost half as broad as long, by virtue of padding. His stiffly embroidered robe of yellow silk was worn over three quilted coats, silk too, and well wadded with down of the Manchurian eider

duck, and above the yellow silk surcoat he wore a slightly shorter one of rich fur, fur-lined and also wadded. The fur top-coat was buttoned with jewels. The yellow coat was sewn with pearls and with emeralds. Jewels winked on the thick little padded shoes and blazed on his little skull cap.

For himself the mandarin took his ease in unencumbered old clothes, but it pleased his arrogant pride and his love of the gorgeous that his small grandson should be garbed, even in the semi-seclusion of their isolated country estate, as if paying a visit of state to the boy Emperor at Peking. As little Wu was of royal blood himself, he might indeed by some right of caste so have visited in no servile rôle, for on his mother's side the lad was of more than royal blood, descended from the two supreme Chinese, descent from whom confers the only hereditary nobility of China. Perhaps the yellows that he often wore hinted at this discreetly. The sartorial boast (if boast it was) was well controlled, for true yellow was the imperial color, sacred to the Emperor, and young Wu's yellows were always on the amber side, or on the lemon; and even so he might have worn them less in Peking than he did here in the Sze-chuan stronghold of his house.

The room was very warm, and seemed no cooler for the scented prayer-sticks that were burning profusely in the carved recess where the ancestral tablet hung, and as he talked with and studied the boy, whom he had studied for every hour of the young life, the upright old man with the gaunt, withered, pockmarked face fanned himself incessantly. Little Wu had run in from his play in the bitterly cold garden, all fur-clad as he was. The mandarin had sent

for him, and he had not stayed to throw off even one of his thick garments. Old Wu was not accustomed to be kept waiting or the grandchild to delay.

“Well?” the old man demanded, “you have heard. What do you say?”

The quaint little figure kotowed almost to the ground. It was wonderful that a form so swathed and padded could bend so low, wonderful that the jewel-heavy cap kept its place. His little cue swept the polished floor, and his stiff embroideries of gem-sewn kingfisher feathers creaked as he bent. He bent thrice before he answered, his hands meekly crossed, his eyes humbly on the ground: “Most Honorable, thou art a thousand years old, and, O thrice Honorable Sir, ten thousand times wise. Thy despicable worm entreats thy jadelike pardon that he pollutes with his putrid presence thy plum-blossomed eyes. Thou hast spoken. I thank thee for thy gracious words.”

“Art thou glad to go?”

“Thy child is glad, Sir most renowned and venerable, to obey thy wish.”

“Art glad to go?”

The boy swept again to the ground, and, bending up, spread out his pink palms in a gesture of pleased acceptance. “Most glad, O ancient long-beard.”

The grandfather laughed. “Nay, thou liest. Thou art loth to go. And I am loth to have thee go. But it is best, and so I send thee.” He held out his yellow, claw-like hand, and little Wu came and caught it to his forehead, then stood leaning against the other’s knee, and began playing with the long string of scented beads that hung about the man’s neck.

“Well,” the mandarin said again, “say all that is in thy heart. Leave off the words of ceremony. Speak simply. Say what thou wilt.”

“When do I go?” It was characteristically Chinese that such was the question, and not “Must I go?” or even “Why must I go?” The grandfather had said that he was to go: that point was settled. From that will there was no appeal. The boy scarcely knew that there were children who did not obey their parents implicitly and always. That there were countries—in the far off foreign-devils’ land—where filial disobedience was almost the rule, he had never heard and could not have believed. Of course, in the classics, which even now he read easily, there were runaway marriages and undutiful offspring now and then. But the end of all such offenders was beyond horror horrible, and even so little Wu had always regarded them as literary makeweight, artistic shades to throw up the high lights whiter, shadows grotesque and devilish as some of his grandsire’s most precious carvings were, and scarcely as flesh and blood possibilities.

In all their ten years together there had been between these two nothing but love and kindness. No child in China (where children are adored) had ever been more indulged; no child in China (where children are guarded) more strictly disciplined. The older Wu had loved and ruled; the younger Wu had loved and obeyed always. They live life so in China.

“When do I go?” was all the boy said.

“Soon after your marriage moon: the third next moon, as I plan it.”

The child's face glowed and creamed with relief. He was only ten, and—at least in that part of the Empire—older bridegrooms were the rule. If the dreaded exile were not to begin until after his marriage, years hence, all its intricate ceremonial, all its long-drawn-out preliminaries, and happily to be delayed again and again by the astrologers, why, then here was respite indeed.

“Nay,” the mandarin said, shaking his old head a little sadly, “think not so. Thy marriage will be when the cherry trees in Honan next bloom.”

“Oh!” the boy just breathed his surprise.

“I think it best,” the old man added. “Your wife was born last month. The runners reached me yesterday with the letter of her honorable father.”

Little Wu was interested. He had read of such marriages and he knew that they really took place sometimes. He rather liked the scheme—if only he need not go to England for hideous years of wifeless honeymoon! He had heard none of the details of his exile—only the hateful fact. But his Chinese instinct divined that in all probability young Mrs. Wu would not accompany him. Yes, he rather liked the idea of a wife. He was desperately fond of babies, and often had two or three brought from the retainers' quarters that he might play with them and feed them perfumed sugar-flowers. He hoped his grandfather would tell him more of his baby-betrothed.

But the grandfather did not, now at all events, nor did he add anything to the less pleasant piece of news, but rose stiffly from his chair, saying, “Strike the gong.”

The boy went quickly to a great disk of beaten and filigreed gold that hung over a big porcelain tub of glowing azaleas, caught up an ivory snake-entwined rod of tortoise-shell, and beat upon the gong. He struck it but once, but at the sound servants came running—half a dozen or more, clad in blue linen, the “Wu” crest worked between the shoulders.

“Rice,” the master said, and held out his hand to the child.

“Lean on me, lean on me hard,” pleaded the boy; “thy venerable bones are tired.”

“They ache to-day,” the octogenarian admitted grimly. “But untie thyself first, my frogling. Thou canst not eat so—we are going to rice, and not into thy beloved snow and ice.”

The child slipped out of his fur, and cast it from him. His quick fingers made light work of buttons, clasps and cords. Garment followed garment to the floor, and as they fell servants ran and knelt and picked them up almost reverently, until the boy drew a long free breath, clad only in a flowing robe of thin crimson tussore: a little upright figure, graceful, and for a Chinese boy very thin. Then the old man laid his hand, not lightly, on the young shoulder; and so they went together to their rice.

CHAPTER II

AT RICE

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JAMES MUIR was waiting for them in the room where their meal was served. There were but two meals in that household—breakfast and dinner—or rather but two for the mandarin and those who shared his rice; the servants ate three times a day, such few of them as ate in the house at all. But there was a fine mastery of the art of dining, as well as a good deal of clockwork, in the old Chinese's constitution; and Muir, at liberty to command food when and where he would, found it convenient and entertaining to eat with his pupil and his host.

For three years the young Scot had held, and filled admirably, a chair in the University of Peking. The post had been well paid, and he had enjoyed it hugely, and the Peking background of life no less; but old Wu had lured him from it with a salary four times as generous, and with an opportunity to study China and Chinese life from the inside such as probably no Briton had had before, and far more complete and intimate than the no mean opportunity afforded by his professorship in the capital.

Chinese to the core and Chinese to the remotest tip of his longest spiral-twisted and silver-shielded fingernail, Wu Ching Yu, astute and contemplative even beyond his peers, searching the future anxiously saw strange things ahead of this native land of his burning love, and he had boldly mapped out an unique education for his grandson.

Europe was coming into China. It was too late to prevent that now; Wu Ching Yu doubted if it had not always been too late. Well, what would be would be; Confucius had said so. Europe was coming into China, and Wu Li Chang, his grandson, should meet it at an advantage which other Chinese were not wise enough to prepare for themselves. Wu Li Chang should know Europe before Europe came to reap the wealth of Shantung and Peichihli and to fatten on the golden harvest of four thousand years of Chinese thrift, frugality, and sagacity. The boy should have an English education and a facile understanding of English thought and of English ways.

Quietly, remorselessly, the grandfather had studied the individuals of the Aryan races already permeating in official and mercantile trickles into Peking, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Hankow. The Germans commended themselves to him in much. His Chinese thoroughness liked their thoroughness. His concentration liked theirs. But they had other qualities he liked less. The French and the Americans he understood least, and he somewhat under-estimated both. He liked the Russians; but he gauged them to be threatened by the future rather than being themselves seriously threateners of China.

It was the British, he decided deliberately, who most threatened China and promised her most; they, above all others, were to be dreaded as foes, desired as friends. He thought that they had staying powers beyond all other races save his own, honorableness and breeding. He disliked their manners often, but he liked the quality of their given word. He suspected that the English would win in the long run in

any contest of peoples to which they set their shoulders and their will: and it was to England that he determined to send his boy, that there the child might learn to hold his Chinese own in China in the years to come, let come to China from the West what would. Cost them both what it might—and would—of heartache, the boy should go, but he should go with such equipment, such armor of *savoir faire* as was possible or could be made possible. He should learn to speak English, to ride a horse English fashion, and to use a fork before he went. And so James Muir was selected and secured as tutor, mentor and general leader to the little yellow Chinese bear.

Mandarin Wu had met Muir in Peking, had studied and liked him. And Wu's great crony, Li Hung Chang, knew the Scot and respected him. The rest was easy; for Wu was masterful, diplomatic, and the length of his purse was almost endless. Muir had lived with the Wus for three years now, and had known from the first what little Wu had only learned an hour ago: that the boy was going to England and Oxford.

Not for a moment had the mandarin neglected the Chinese furnishing and decorating of the boy's mind. Such a course would have been unthinkable. Already almost the lad might have been presented at the great national examination, and very possibly ennobled as one of the literati, but the mandarin had not thought it necessary. The boy could recite the Li Ki (the old, old Book of Rites that has had more influence than any other secular book ever written, and has done more to make and shape Chinese character and Chinese customs than have all other books

put together) and recite it without mistake or hesitation; he could write decorous verse, paint swiftly and accurately the intricate Chinese characters, and he knew his people's history. He could wrestle and tilt, and once he had beaten his grandfather at chess.

He had worked well with Muir, and Muir with him. They liked each other. And after three years of constant drilling, always followed industriously and often enthusiastically, the young Chinese had a glib smattering of European lore, dates, grammar, facts. Europe itself—real Europe—was a closed book to him, of course. The mandarin understood that. But a few years in the West would mend all that: and then the beloved boy should come home, to serve China and to rule his own destiny.

Between the old Chinese mandarin and the young Scotchman a sincere friendship had grown—and almost inevitably, for they had so much in common, and so much mutual respect. Each was honest, manly, and a gentleman. Each had self-control, generosity, deliberation, taste and a glowing soul. Three years of daily intercourse, and something of intimacy, had destroyed completely such slight remaining prejudice as either had had against the other's race when they met at Peking.

Wu the grandfather was never long or far from the side of Wu the grandson. James Muir had taught one Wu almost as much (though not as systematically) as he had taught the other. And they had taught him more than he had taught them: the child unconsciously, the mandarin with conscious glee. All three had been eager to learn, the men more eager than the boy; and the teacher who is at home always has a

wide and deep advantage over the teacher who is abroad. Background, environment, each smallest detail and petty reiteration of daily life, aid the teacher who instructs in his own country, but impede and thwart the teacher who instructs aliens in theirs.

Chinese families who live in some state usually eat in the great hall—the k'o-tang, or guest-hall—of their house, as far as they have any usual eating place. But more often than not when in residence here the Wus “dined” (of course, they used for it no such term: it was, as were all their meals, just “rice”) in the chamber in which the two men and the child now sat. This house had more than one great hall, and several rooms larger than this, though it was far from small.

It was a passionate room. It throbbed with color, with perfume, with flowers, with quaint picked music and with a dozen glows and warmths of wealth.

High towards the red and sea-green lacquered roof, carved and scrolled with silver and blue, a balcony of pungent sandal-wood jutted from the wall. The floor of the balcony was solid, and from it hung three splendid but delicate lamps, filled with burning attar. The railing of the balcony was carved with dragons, gods, bamboos and lotus flowers, and within the railing sat three sing-song girls. They were silent and motionless until, at a gesture of the master's hand, the eunuch, who was their choirmaster and their guardian, spoke a syllable, and then they began a soft chant to the tinkling accompaniment of their instruments. One played an ivory lute, one a lacquered flute, the third cymbals and bells; and the eunuch drew a deeper, more throbbing note from his chin or student's lute—five feet

long, with seven strings of silk, its office to soothe man's soul and drive all evil from his heart. In the corner farthest from the table squatted, on the mosaic floor, a life-size figure of the belly-god. He wore many very valuable rings, an unctuous smirk, a wreath—about his shoulders—of fresh flowers, and very little else. He was fleshed of priceless majolica, but his figure would have been the despair of the most ingenious corset shop in Paris; his abdomen protruded several feet in front of his knees; his was a masterly embonpoint of glut.

There must have been a hundred big joss-sticks burning in the room—not the poor, slight things sold in Europe, but Chinese incense at its best and most pungent.

The mandarin used chop-sticks. The boy and his tutor ate with silver forks.

The food was delicious, and Muir ate heartily. But the child and the old man ate little. Both were sick at heart. Five of the mandarin's concubines brought in fruit and sweetmeats. The boy took a glacé persimmon, and smiled at the woman. He knew them all by name (there were a score or more in the "fragrant apartments"), and he liked most of them and often played with them. The mandarin paid no heed to them whatever. Such of their names as he had once known he had quite forgotten. The old celibate lived for China and for his grandson. But he kept his Chinese state in China, and always would. And his women were well clad, well fed, well treated and reasonably happy. And if one of them died she was replaced, and so was one that took the smallpox and was disfigured. But one was rarely scolded, and never was one beaten. Wu Ching Yu rarely

remembered their existence. When he did it bored him. But they were part of his retinue, and it no more occurs to an important Chinese to discard his retinue than it does to a portly and decent Scot to discard his kilt in broad daylight on Princes Street. The one discard would be as indecent as the other. Manners make men everywhere, and they have no small share in making manhood, in China as in Edinburgh. They differ in different districts, but, after all, their difference is but of thinskin depth. It is their observance that matters: it is vital.

A great snake waddled in and came across the floor—a fat, over-fed, hideous thing. Muir knew the creature well, and that it was perfectly tame and harmless, but, for all that, he tucked his feet between the rungs of his chair. Little Wu flung sweetmeats and bits of sugared fat pork to the monster, and presently it waddled off again, crawling fatly, and curled up at the feet of the belly-god, and went to sleep with its sleek, slimy, wrinkled head under the lea of the god's wide paunch.

CHAPTER III

THE MARRIAGE JOURNEY

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WU LI CHANG enjoyed his wedding very much. He enjoyed all of it (except the enforced parting with his young wife)—the wonderful journey to Peichihli, brightened by anticipation; the more wonderful return journey, not a little dulled by homesickness for his bride and by the near-drawing of his voyage to England; the six weeks' stay in the palace of the Lis; and most of all—decidedly most of all—his wife.

He would have been ingratitude itself if he had not enjoyed his visit at his father-in-law's. Never went marriage bells more happily. Never was bridegroom more warmly welcomed or more kindly entertained. The wedding ceremonies interested him intensely; they went without a hitch, and never in China was bridal more gorgeous. The honeymoon was best of all—if only it might have been longer!—and had but one jar. (Most honeymoons—at least in Europe—have more.) The one in Wu Li Chang's and Wu Lu's honeymoon was acute and plaintive: it was the day that his wife had the colic and wailed bitterly. Wu Li Chang had colic too—in sympathy, the women said, but James Muir suspected an over-feed of stolen bride-cake, gray and soggy, stuffed with sugared pork fat and roasted almonds. Probably the women were right, for Wu Li Chang was not a gluttonous boy, and he had eaten sugared pork fat with impunity all his life; but, caused no matter by what, the colic

was real enough, and Wu Li Chang could have wailed too, had such relief been permissible to a Chinese gentleman.

The cavalcade started at dawn on an auspicious day in early spring, when the nut trees were just blushing into bloom and the heavy buds of the wistaria forests were showing faint hints of violet on their lips. The return journey was made when the short summer of Northern and North Central China was turning towards autumn, and the great wistarias creaked in the wind and flung their purple splendor across the bamboos and the varnish trees, and the green baubles of the lychees were turning pink and russet.

The marriage ceremonial took quite a month, for the mandarins would skimp it of nothing; and a Chinese wedding of any elegance is never brief. The engagement had been unprecedentedly brief—made so by the exigencies of Wu Ching Yu's plans—and to have laid on the lady the further slight of shabby or hurried nuptials would have been unthinkable, and most possibly would have been punished by three generations of hunchbacked Wus.

Mandarin Wu kept his own soothsayer, of course, and equally of course that psychic had pronounced for the brevity of the engagement, and himself had selected the day of the bridegroom's departure and the marriage days. His commandments had synchronised exactly with his patron's desire. The mandarin's wishes and the necromancer's pronouncements almost invariably dovetailed to a nicety; and when they did not the mandarin took upon himself the rôle of leading seer, and then changed his fortune-teller. It had only happened once, and

was not likely to happen again. Wu Ching Yu was a very fine clairvoyant himself.

The prospective parents-in-law were old and warm friends, Wu Li's senior by thirty years. The older mandarin had dreamed a dream one night, just a year ago, and in the morning had sent a runner to Peking with a letter to his friend:

"Thy honorable wife, who has laid at thy feet so many jeweled sons, will bear to thy matchless house a daughter when next the snow lies thick upon the lower hills of Han-yang. Thy contemptible friend sues to thee for that matchless maiden's incomparable golden hand to be bestowed upon his worm of a grandson and heir"—and several yards more to the same effect, beautifully written on fine red paper.

The offer had been cordially (but with Mongol circumlocution) accepted. The match was desirable in every conceivable way. And when Li Lu was born she was already as good as "wooed and married and a'" to the young Wu, at that moment teaching James Muir a new form of leap-frog.

The cavalcade formed at daybreak, and Wu—both Wus—and the tutor came out of the great house's only door, mounted their horses, and the journey began. It was a musical start, for each saddle horse wore a collar of bells that the pedestrians might be warned to stand aside.

The palanquins of state and their ornate sedan chairs were carried by liveried coolies that the three gentlemen might travel so when they chose; and those provided for Muir were as splendid as those for the mandarin and little

Wu. Teachers are treated so in China always, though not always are they paid as the mandarin paid Muir.

The presents for the bride were packed in bales and baskets—pei tsz—of scented grass, slung by plaited bamboo straps from the shoulders of the carrying coolies. There were three hundred bales in all, their precious contents of silk and crêpe and jade and gems, of spices and porcelains and lacquers, wrapped in invulnerable oiled silk of finest texture and impervious to the sharpest rain. There were silks enough to clothe Li Lu and Li Lu's daughters forever, and the materials for her bridal robes were as fine as the Emperor's bride had worn.

There were five hundred bride's cakes, sodden gray things, quite small in size but heavy with fat pork. There were sixty tiny pipes—all for the bride—of every conceivable pipe material and design. There were a hundred pairs of shoes, to be worn a few years hence when her feet had been bound. There were birds to sing to her—living birds in jeweled cages, and birds made of gold, of coral and of amber. There were ivories and rare pottery and mirrors of burnished steel. There were jades—such as Europe has not yet seen—bronzes beyond price, tea, tortoiseshell and musk, paint for her face, and a bale of hair ornaments. There were a score of slave-girls—ten for her, ten for her mother. In a great bottle-shaped cage of rush a tame tortoise rode at ease. It had been procured from Ceylon at great expense for a maharajah's children in Southern India, and trained to carry them on its back. It were jeweled anklets now, and was for Li Lu when she should be old enough to straddle it. Wu Li Chang had tried it, and he said

that its gait was good. And Muir had named it "Nizam." But it had its own servants; for the tortoise is one of the four sacred animals in China. A hundred and thirty musicians followed the mandarin's cooks and bakers—a musician for each instrument of Chinese melody, and for many two; ten more for the flutes, four for the harps, nine for the bells, and a dozen for trumpets, drums and gongs—the women carried in chairs, the men on foot. There was much, much more, and at long last the mandarin's bannerman brought up the slow rear.

Beside the old noble's palfrey a servant carried his master's favorite linnet in its cage.

There was a long wait at the temple, some yards from the house. Wu and his grandchild went in to make obeisance and to worship before the temple tablets of their dead, while Muir sat outside and smoked an honest meerschaum pipe and drank scalding tea.

The road climbed hillward, and soon after they left the temple they passed a magnificent paifang. The mandarin bowed to it reverently, dismounted, and passed it on foot; and so did the child, knowing that it marked the spot where his grandfather's mother had hanged herself—in her best robes—at her husband's funeral.

On the summit of the first hill they halted again. The old man and the boy took soup and sweetmeats and tea, and Muir munched fishcakes and savory rice; and the child looked long at the house in which he had been born.

The carved screen, standing a few feet before the door to keep the evil spirits out, was dyed deep with sunlight, and its peaked roof's green and blue and yellow tiles were darkly

iridescent, as were the green and yellow and blue tiles of the old dwelling's many tent-shaped roofs.

When they moved on, the boy trotted on foot beside his grandfather and twittered to the linnet, and the linnet twittered back; the mandarin smiled down at them, and Muir lit another pipeful.

All this was most irregular—so irregular that only a Wu could have compassed it. The bride should have been coming to her husband, not the bridegroom going to his wife. But Wu and the necromancer had managed it. Wu was an iconoclast—China is full of iconoclasts. Moreover, it was scarcely feasible to bring so young a bride across China in the early spring—treacherous often and uncertain always. And Mrs. Li, who was not well and who hated travel, had insisted upon conducting the details of the wedding herself. That clinched it. Mrs. Li ruled her husband. It is so in China oftener than it is in Europe.

It would be delightful to chronicle every hour of that marriage journey and of the splendid festivity that closed it. But this is the history of an incident in Wu Li Chang's maturity, and the boyhood that was father to that manhood must be hinted in few, swift syllables.

They traveled as in some highly colored royal progress. Now and again they passed an inn. But they stopped at none. They squatted by the roadside for "rice" whenever they would, and they fared sumptuously every day. There was whisky and mutton for the Scot, and any number of other things that he liked almost as well. When it rained—and in the month it took them to reach Peking it rained in angry torrents four or five times—they stretched out in their

padded palanquins and slept. Each night they rested in comfortable bamboo huts that relays of the mandarin's servants had erected in advance; and when they had eaten and had wearied of chess, the musicians sat outside and tinkled them to sleep, and often the crickets joined in the throbbing music—and sometimes the pet linnet too.

Because they traveled in such state, the peasants, with which many of the districts through which they passed teemed, never pressed near them. But in the wildest parts there were a hundred evidences of human life and industries. Tiny homesteads jutted from the rocks, perched on the crags, hung beside the waterfalls. Wood-cutters, grass-cutters, charcoal-burners passed them hourly and made obeisant way for the shên-shih or sash-wearers, as the Chinese term their gentry. On every sandstone precipice some great god was carved—Buddha usually—or a devout inscription cut in gigantic letters—gilded, as a rule. Each day they passed some old temple, ruined or spruce and splendid; some days they passed a score; and nearing or leaving each temple was its inevitable stream of pilgrims with yellow incense bags slung across their shoulders—for Buddha shares the imperial yellow in Northern China. Each pilgrim cried out “Teh fu”—acquire bliss—or “Teh lieo fuh”—we have acquired bliss—and to them all the mandarin sent cash and rice or doles of cowry shells, and sometimes bowls of liangkao, the delicious rice-flour blancmange, colder than ice and more sustaining than beef-tea, or plates of bean-curd, the staff of Chinese coolie life.

They passed through groves of tallow trees, winged willow, hoangko, walnut, acacia, poplar, camellia and

bamboo; through miles of brilliant fire-weed, arbutus, peanut and golden millet; through jungles of loquat, yellow lily and strawberry.

Everywhere there was running water, jade-green or musk-yellow or frothing white: water clear and unpolluted always, for in Asia it is a crime to befoul or misuse water.

When the short twilight died into the dark, from every temple or hut, by path or on hill, glints of lamp radiance sprang into the night, and lamps glowed along the river banks; from every traveler's hand a jocund silk or paper lantern danced, and everywhere the kwang yin têng—"lamps of mercy" the Chinese name these will-o'-the-wisps—darted and burned.

The days were golden, and the nights smelt sweet.

And from then Muir had but one quarrel with China: it had made Japan seem to him forever commonplace.

James Muir had never enjoyed himself so intensely before: every moment was a picture and a feast. And often now, sitting alone in London, he closes his book-tired eyes and dreams that he is back once more in China, crossing the Sze-chuan hills with a mandarin he admired and a boy he loved, or sipping hot perfumed wine at the indescribable kaleidoscope that was the marriage of Wu Li Chang and Li Lu, and thinking sometimes, not without a sigh, of all he relinquished when the great boat on which Wu Li Chang went to England took him—the tutor—as he well knew, forever from China.

CHAPTER IV

WEE MRS. WU

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It was love at first sight. The bride crowed at the bridegroom, and he forgot his grave new dignity and his ceremonial mandarin robes, and clapped his little yellow hands and danced with delight.

The bride's part might have been performed by proxy, and there had been some talk of this, Mrs. Li volunteering for the vicarious rôle. But Wu Li Chang's lip had quivered mutinously, and so the suggestion had gone no farther.

All was performed punctiliously—or nearly all. One "essential" had been discarded perforce. The baby bride had torn off her red veil and screamed her refusal to wear it. So Wu Li Chang had seen his betrothed's face some hours before he should. It was a brazen bride, but very bonnie. She wore less paint than an older bride would have worn, for Mrs. Li feared for the new, tender skin. Li Lu was a gleeful bride. The feigned reluctance and the daughterly wailing had to be omitted with the veil. She played with the strings of bright beads that hung over her from the bridal crown, and peeped through them giggling at her bridegroom. She laughed when their wrists were tied together with the crimson cord. Wu Li Chang thought the hot marriage wine less nice than that he usually drank at home; but when a few drops from his cup were poured upon her mouth she sucked her lips eagerly and pursed them up for more.

Even Muir, who had small flair for babies, thought this one very pretty. She was as fat as butter, but not nearly as

yellow as Devon butter is when creamed from kine that feed on buttercups and clover there. Her tints were more the color of a pale tea-rose. She had bewitching dimples and the exquisitely lovely eyes which are a Chinese birthright. And her grandfather-in-law thought that she would be surpassingly lovely as a woman; for Mrs. Li, whom he saw now for the first time, was as beautiful as any woman he had ever seen, and his proud old heart was much content, for he knew well how a wife's beauty comforts her husband's years.

She was married on a daïs, of course, but instead of sitting—as she should have done—on a chair of state, she was tied upright in her cradle, the perpendicular bamboo cradle of Chinese babyhood, very much the size and exactly the shape of the huge tins in which farmers send milk to London—to be seen in their hundreds any morning at Victoria or Paddington.

When the last of the hundred rites was over, Li lifted up the mite to carry her to her own room; but she stretched out her arms to little Wu in unmistakable desire, and he sprang to her and gathered her into his arms and carried her himself up to her nursery and her women: the happiest and the proudest bridegroom that ever was—and the mandarins almost chuckled with delight and the Scot felt oddly queer.

After that the boy was free of the women's quarters (the fragrant apartments) in the inner court. He had many a good game of battledore and of kites in the spacious grounds and in the courtyards with his wife's brothers—she had six, and they were all very kind to him; but most of his time he spent squatted on the polished cherry-wood floor of

her room, nursing the babe. He liked that best of all. She was a placid mite, but she seemed to like his arms, that never tired of her, almost as much as they loved nesting her so—and she slept longest or, waking, smiled sunniest when they encradled her. Even the day the foul fiend colic came and cankered them both, she seemed less tortured in his holding, and it was he who soothed her first.

And so they spent their spotless honeymoon. And much of it they spent alone. Her amah watched them from the balcony where she sat sewing, and Li's prettiest concubine tottered in now and then on her tiny feet, sent by Mrs. Li to see that all was well. But amah and concubine counted scarcely as more than useful, necessary yamên furniture to the boy, and were no intrusion.

No man of his rank in all China had more or comelier concubines than Li, and none concubines that were finer dressed. Mrs. Li saw to that. She was a strict and punctilious stickler in such things. Her lord had grumbled sometimes at the expensiveness of "so many dolls"—for he was thrifty—and once he had flatly refused another semi-matrimonial plunge. But Mrs. Li had lost her temper then, called him bad things, and smacked him with her fan, and after that he had let her be, and she had enlarged his string of handmaidens as she chose, and he had paid for them; for he loved his wife, and feared her too, and she had borne him six strong sons. But he saw to it that all the concubines served her well. In English (and in the other tongues of Europe) more exquisitely ignorant nonsense has been written about China than about any other subject, and far the silliest and crassest of it all about the facts of Chinese womanhood.

Mrs. Li did not neglect her baby, and she was too good a mother and too proud not to nurse the little girl herself, and she toddled into the nursery as often as the hour-glass was turned thrice, coming in slowly, leaning on an attendant's arm because her own feet were so very small and useless. As a matter of fact, she could move about quickly enough, and run too (as many of the small-footed women can), so skillfully had her "golden lilies" been bound. But she did it privately only or when she forgot. It was not a fashionable thing to do.

She nursed little Mrs. Wu, but she did not linger in the baby's room overmuch. The mother of six sons was not inordinately proud of a daughter's arrival, although the great marriage had gilded it considerably. And she was greatly occupied in playing hostess to her husband's older guest. It is not etiquette for a Chinese lady to chat with men friends or to flutter about her husband's home beyond the female apartments, but a great many Chinese ladies do—ladies in most things as canonical sticklers as Mrs. Li. Of course she never went beyond her home gates except in the seclusion of her closed chair. The Emperor himself would as soon have thought of showing his face freely on the Peking streets.

So the boy and the baby were practically alone much of the time. He sat and crooned to her and rocked her in his arms, and she crooned to him and grew fast into his warm young heart. And each week passed in added delight.

But they passed! Wu the mandarin had much business in Peking, aside from the paramount marriage business that had brought him so far; he had not been in Peking for years till

now, although his official yamên was still here, and much of his revenue. The yamên was a bleak, empty place that he had never used as "home," and now given up to compradores and other underlings. He visited it daily after the wedding had been completed, and well scrutinized his deputies' accounts and doings. It took time. Nothing is hurried in China except the waterfalls. But Lord Wu's Pekin business was done at last, and he took his elaborate farewells of the Lis, and turned towards home, taking Wu Li Chang reluctant with him.

The boy had asked to take the baby too, even venturing to urge that she belonged to them now. (And to Muir he confided in an unreticent moment that he'd dearly like to include her in the ill-anticipated trip to England.)

The grandfather agreed that she was indeed theirs now. Of course she was. A Chinese wife is the property of her husband's patriarch. That is alphabetic Chinese fact. But they would lend her to the Lis until her husband returned from Europe. The boy grieved secretly and at heart rebelled, but outwardly he was smiling and calm, made the thrice obeisance of respect and fealty, saying, "Thy honorable will is good, and shall by me, thy worthless slave, be gladly done," took a stolid (but inwardly convulsive) leave of Mrs. Wu, fast asleep on her crimson cushion, and turned his slow feet heavily toward his homing palanquin.