

Korea's New Women; How They Are Advancing From Slavery to Freedom; The Empress Appears in Public Unveiled



A KOREAN GENTLEMAN AND HIS WIFE.



WOMAN'S CLOTHES.



WOMAN WITH CLOAK ON HER HEAD. THE CLOAKS ARE USED ONLY AS VEILS.

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER. SEUL, 1909. The Empress of Korea rode yesterday in an open carriage through the streets of Seoul. She was on her way from one of her palaces to another. She sat beside the Emperor on the back seat. The sun shone bright, her face was unveiled and all the world could see. There were thousands of men upon the streets at the time. They formed long lines of white against the black nuts. With their big hats and long gowns, their yellow faces were turned straight toward her, and their almond eyes almost popped out in surprise.

Such an event would mean little in any European country. It marks one of the most striking changes that are going on in Korea. It indicates that the new woman is on the ground with both feet, and that from now on the sex will gradually make its way upward out of its present state of degradation. Until now, no man outside the Emperor and the eunuchs of the palace has ever seen the features of Korean female royalty. When I was here twenty years ago a young American girl had just come out to act as physician to the Queen. She was the first woman doctor ever known in Korea, and her majesty awaited her coming rather than have the foreign medical missionaries, who were at that time all men, examine her. When the latter were called in consultation they were not allowed to see the Queen, and when they felt her pulse her hand was thrust out through a screen and nothing else was shown.

Where the Women Stay at Home. The Korean women are not glib-tongued. Until now all those of the high and middle classes have been secluded from the females of the Mohammedan harem. They have quarters of their own, which are in the backs of the houses or in special establishments, far off from those of the men. Some of the noblest have never outside their own compounds, and of the middle classes very few go out to-day except in closed chairs. In the past it has been a crime for a man to lay his hand on a woman outside his own family, and any man who looked over the wall of a garden to see the women within was sure to be punished. The husband has had absolute power over his wife and concubines. They have been bound to him by fetters of iron, and to-day have practically no rights which he has to respect. Indeed, the 10,000,000 women who inhabit this country are still, as far as the laws and the customs which now prevail go, practically slaves. I am told that many of them have such strength of character that they rule their homes. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the men can beat and mutilate them with little fear of the law.

The New Woman Appears. All this has been so for ages, and the arrival of the new woman is therefore the more striking. One sees indications of changes everywhere, both in city and country. When I first came here the common women and slave girls working in the fields carried cloaks with them to shield their faces from the men. Some of them turned their backs and ran away as I approached. On the streets of Seoul those who came out wore green cloaks over their heads, which they held close together in front of their faces, leaving only a crack for one eye. These cloaks had flat, well ironed sleeves which were bordered with white. The sleeves were merely pasted into the garments, and were not intended for the arms to go through. The cloaks themselves were so thin as to be of no value of warmth, and they were used only as veils. Today the common women use the same sort of cloak, but they are not held tightly, and one can see a score of female faces on any of the main streets during any working hour of the day. These street women belong to the laboring classes. Many of them are black as a rule, and are dirty, filthy, and frowsy. So far, the new woman belongs to the nobility of the upper classes. She is usually the daughter of some yangban who is pro-Japanese or is anxious to ape foreign ways. Many of these gentlemen now dress in European clothes, and not a few are anxious to have their wives do likewise. They see the Japanese and European ladies going about unveiled and observe how they are treated by their husbands as



WOMAN AND HER CHAIR.

to result and they allow their wives to copy these foreign examples. I attended a court garden party the other day at which many of the royal family were present. There were several princes, relatives of the Emperor, all of his imperial majesty's cabinet ministers, the high Japanese officials and others. The foreigners brought their wives, and they wore, of course, European costumes. The Japanese ladies were dressed in beautiful kimonos. There were in addition about a half dozen Korean ladies, some of whom wore European dress and the others Korean gowns. Such women belong to the advance guard of the new movement. They go out on the streets with their husbands, and even ride in carriages or jinrikishas, always creating a sensation among the natives when they do so. The older men cannot realize that a good woman who has been raised a Korean would do such a thing, and many of them consider the morality of the new woman questionable, to say the least. Girls With Diaphanous Skirts. As to the clothes the new woman wear, these at the present time are strange to an extreme. The Koreans have no idea of what the proper foreign dress is, and they appear in the most outrageous costumes, thinking them correct. For instance, the wife of a high Korean official came to an afternoon tea at an American house this week dressed in a trailing gown of gauze tissue, the material of which was of about the consistency of mosquito netting. The dress was properly made, but under it there was almost nothing. The woman had petticoats which reached only to her knees, so that her pine-stem legs, clad in

black stockings, could be plainly seen. She had on heavy cowhide shoes and a hat of the vintage of a dozen years ago. The latter was of dingy straw, trimmed with mohair-staten roses, which hung down almost to her shoulders. The combination was so strange that the foreign ladies could hardly keep their faces straight as she moved about among them. Nevertheless, she was a woman of wealth, and money had been no object to her in securing the proper dress. I doubt not she considered herself more fashionably attired than any other lady present.

Such things occur from ignorance as to what the foreign costume is, and the shopkeepers here are taking advantage of the fact that the women do not know. They have for sale a miscellaneous outfit of by-gone clothing brought from Shanghai and other parts of the East. The hats are of all shapes and styles and the dress goods are of every outrageous description. These things are bought by Korean parents for their little children who are going to school, and a number of whom are now wearing foreign dress and almost all of whom have foreign hats. I attended an athletic exhibition of the girls of the public school the other day. It was held on the grounds of the Mulberry Palace and about 500 girls with their teachers were present. They were all dressed in school uniforms. Korean in cut, but they wore foreign hats, which looked as though they had been fished out of the ash barrels of the Bowery. They had flat crowns and broad brims and were indescribably ugly.

The Girls' Schools. The schools which have been established for girls are perhaps the most striking evidence of the new woman movement. There are many of these, some run by the missionaries, some by the government under the direction of the Japanese, and in addition many private schools. At this athletic exhibition the girls ranged in age from six to sixteen, and they went through their exercises in sight of an invited crowd of Koreans of both sexes. Many of them came from well-to-do families, and their sisters, cousins and aunts were present to see them.

The most of these had cloaks or veils of some kind or other over their faces, but the girls themselves had no such covering and they exercised without shame.

In the past the women of Korea have been almost entirely uneducated, and to-day those of the higher class are just beginning to send their children to school. The lower and middle-class women have sent their children to the mission schools for a number of years, and for this reason many of the teachers in the girls' schools, which contain the children of the nobility as well as other girls, are of the lower classes. This is not so of the higher school, founded by Lady Om for girls of the upper crust. It is composed of daughters of the yangban or nobles. There is also a school for girls established by this same consort of the retired Emperor, which has only the daughters of the middle class. Both schools are giving a foreign education to their pupils and are doing great good.

About Lady Om. Just here I wish to say a few words about Lady Om. Until the abdication of the Emperor in 1907 she was the leading lady of this land, and as such did much for her sex. While not the Empress by actual marriage, she was practically so to all intents and purposes. She is the old Emperor's favorite concubine, or consort, as she is called by the Japanese. I understand his majesty is true to her, and that she allows no others of the ladies-in-waiting about the court to come near him. She is the mother of the crown prince, who is now being educated in Japan, and as such she will probably maintain her influence even after that of the old Emperor has become less than it is now.

Lady Om came into the palace when she was a girl as one of the court women. One story states that she started in as a hair dresser, but this is denied. She is not pretty, but very clever, and the Queen, who was assassinated by the Japanese, took her up and made much of her. She liked her cleverness and she also liked her homely appearance, as she thought that would be an obstacle to any love for her on the part of the king, who afterward became Emperor.

As the story goes, the King appreciated cleverness as well as beauty. He cast sheep's eyes at Lady Om, notwithstanding the presence of her majesty, and as a result, Lady Om had to flee for her life. She left the palace and remained away until after the Queen was assassinated, and then came back to be a consort of his majesty. I do not know that she herself had anything to do with the selection of the crown prince as the successor of the present Emperor of Korea, but I doubt not she aided in the manipulation. This boy is only eleven or twelve years of age, and he was chosen by Prince Ito over Prince Euiha, who was an older son of the Emperor by another mistress. Prince Euiha is the young fellow who ran away from Korea to the United States and received citizenship there. He first went to school at Delaware, Ohio, and afterward to a little academy at Salem, Va. He fully expected to be his father's successor, but Prince Ito has set him aside, and he is now living quietly here. The little prince, the son of Lady Om, is exceedingly bright, and he will undoubtedly be the next Emperor.

As to Lady Om's schools, she established these some years ago, and has been supporting them out of her private purse. She has spent a good deal of money, and she is getting up to the time the old Emperor retired, but her funds and those of the Emperor were then reduced, and she has now barely enough for her maintenance. Finding that she could not continue to support her school from her own purse, she made up certain rice lands which had been given to her from those belonging to the crown, saying that their revenues were enough to support them. The Japanese, who are in a position to amount to liberal aid, as I understand it, they have cut down the allowance one-half, and are now devoting the remainder to the support of other schools established by the government. On top of all this there was a short rice crop last harvest, and altogether, the schools are in much need of more money.

The Slave Girls of Korea. As I have said, the new woman movement is far from being a new thing. I doubt if its members can be numbered upon a hundred. There are certainly less than a thousand who have yet attempted to throw off the shackles of the old customs, and the remainder, numbering millions, are in the same condition that the sex has held for many generations. The customs vary according to the class to which the girl belongs. Korea has a nobility, a middle class, common people and slaves. All of the families of nobles and gentry, and the daughter of a slave is a slave in turn. In the past such slaves have been given away, and it is not long since they were sold. When the members of a family committed a grave offense and just meeting it is a little better with long sleeves. This is yellow green, blue or white, and it is tied together with ribbons of the same color. The jacket is so short that a strip of bare skin an inch wide shows out under the shoulder blades when the woman bends over, and if she goes in the sun she may have a red stripe there. The drawers narrow as they fall to the feet, and are fast in great stockings of washed white cotton, which make her

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THE DUNLOP MILLS, Richmond, Va. small feet look five times as large as they are. They are more like boots than anything else, and they take the place of shoes and slippers at home. The better class houses are carpeted with matting, and the women go about in stocking feet. Out of doors they wear low shoes with soles of oxide or cloth. In addition to the divided skirt the Korean woman has on a very full pair of white overpants, which reach from the arms to far below the knees, and over the whole a cloaklike gown tied at the front with a ribbon. This garment is often of silk and bright colors. The younger women are fond of red, those of middle age like blue and many wear white. Most of the women have more or less jewelry. They wear hairpins of gold, silver or amber as thick as one's little finger, and many have two gold or silver rings on the third finger of the right hand. They paint their faces with white, covering the face with white except at the lips, which are red. They use India ink to mark out the line of the eyebrows, and arch these in conformity with the Chinese idea of a delicate beauty. This is accomplished by a curve like that of a line of swans flying through the sky, and if the hairs grow otherwise they are pulled out with tweezers until they approach the idea. The winter clothes of the better class Korean women are sometimes of fur and quilted silk. Padded cotton is also used, the gowns being so made that they can be ripped apart for washing. Much paste and glue are employed in dressmaking, and many a woman of these high-class circles would drop to pieces if she were left out all night in the rain. The new Korean Women Live. The new woman movement means that a great change is to come in the daily life of the Koreans. What with study, school going and calling, a new world is just beginning for these benighted mortals. The well-bred woman used to be a creature of the past, at the age of seven, and from then until her death she is practically confined to the house of her husband or parents. She is lucky, indeed, if she has a little garden to walk about in. If she is very high-class she does not go out at all, or only in a closed box about three feet square, and not more than four feet in height. This is slung between poles. In bringing it to her house the chair-bearers take it inside the yard, and then go away while she crawls in. The proper signal is given, they return and carry her to the home of a friend, leaving the box and going around the corner until she crawls out. Such visits are rare. The Korean lady rises with the sun, and after spending perhaps an hour on her toilet, directs her slaves how to attend to the household. She keeps the accounts of the family and acts as mistress of the establishment. She may do a little embroidery or sewing herself, but outside this she has nothing to occupy her all day long. She usually sleeps on a mat on the floor, and when she rises, if it is cold outside, her feet rest on a warm surface, for her bedroom has flues under it and straw fires are started before daybreak. She sits down on the floor before a looking glass in making her toilet and eats from a little table eight or ten inches high. Her table furniture is composed of bowls of brass and a pair of chopsticks, and her food is largely rice, meats, fowl, fish and fruit. After eating she uses her fingers in place of a toothbrush, washing out her mouth with salt, which she also rubs over her teeth. She takes frequent baths in the summer, and on the whole is reasonably clean. The New Marriage Customs. This movement means that there are to come changes in all matters of love and marriage. Already the Christian girls, of whom there are many, are demanding that they be married in the church after our ceremony, or as near that as Korean ideas will permit. Today the million odd marriages which take place yearly are as barbarous as those of darkest Africa. Children are often betrothed at a birth, and a seven-year-old girl may be married to a man of twenty, or a boy of nine to a girl of nineteen. As a rule, the marriages take place before the children have reached the age of pupils of the first class in the high schools, and a girl is an old maid at eighteen or twenty. Among the queer wedding customs is the giuling of the bride's eyes shut, so that she can see nothing, and keeping them so for two or three days. Another is that the bride will not speak to the groom for at least a week after the wedding, and a third that a fight takes place between her friends and his on the way to the ceremony, and the one represented by the party defeated is considered unlucky. Neither bride or groom sees each other until they are married. After that the girl is practically the slave of her husband and his parents, who may treat her as they please. As she grows older, or when her husband is tired of her, he brings her or more secondary wives into the house and she has to submit. Divorces are easy on the part of the husband, and domestic troubles usually result in adding a concubine or so to the establishment rather than shoving the old wife out into the cold. FRANK G. CARPENTER. (Copyright, 1909, by Frank G. Carpenter.) Children Cry FOR FLETCHER'S CASTORIA