

## LI CHING'S BABY.

BY ONOTO WATANNA.

**M**R. and Mrs. Li Ching were married by proxy.

Li Ching was the richest Chinaman in America, and he was feared and respected by all his imported brethren. It was not only his wealth that made him an object of awe to them, but the fact that besides being the richest Chinaman, he was the most Americanized and wickedest Celestial in this country. In fact, Li Ching was "up to snuff."

For six years he had been quietly hoodwinking the United States government. His pockets had grown fat with the amount of money that had slipped into them as he smuggled Chinamen from Canada into the United States, until the latter government, which had for a long time been sleepily suspicious, woke up with a growl, and nabbed—not Li Ching—but Ching's agents and accomplices. As I said before, Li Ching was "up to snuff." After the noise that the capture and imprisonment of several of the smugglers occasioned Li Ching dropped operations, moved to a bustling Canadian city, and opened a large hotel, where Celestials from all parts of the country flocked in large numbers.

The hotel was a crude affair. It consisted of three stories, dark and unclean looking. The halls (and indeed the entire place seemed made up of long, dark halls), were always pervaded with a dim sort of smoke or vapor, and the smell of incense was strong enough to be abominable. For this place Li Ching paid an enormous rental, thus gaining the goodwill of the Canadian syndicate who owned

the building, and as his wealth was said to be past telling, he was courted alike by oriental and occidental.

He became naturalized. He assumed the garb of civilization, and with that a swagger. He cut his queue in half and hid what was left of it under his hat. He trained a few bristly hairs into a mustache; joined a church, where he gave largely of his wealth to charities and missions; became christened, then looked about him and got himself a "Mellican" girl.

Like most Chinamen who come to America, Li Ching's tastes were not of a high order, in fact the girl with whom he kept "company" had been for some time a cast-off from society, and of somewhat doubtful character. Nevertheless Li Ching covered her with presents galore of the most costly kind, until the girl began to think of her marriage to a Chinaman as a matter of course. Li Ching watched her out of his narrow eyes, and grinned.

The girl, who was half French and half Irish, was named Marie Grenier. She was a bitter, careless sort of creature of about twenty-two years. She had lived a reckless life for some years, and perhaps the thought of a little rest, even if bought by her marriage to a Chinaman whom she secretly despised and detested, was welcome to her. It was about this time, after Li Ching had been going about with her for several months, that he began to make preparations for his marriage.

He had the top flat of his hotel thoroughly cleaned and papered. He laid costly carpets, and had a parlor and



bedroom set of the heaviest kind moved into the rooms. He introduced a deal of Chinese goods, lighted the incense sticks, laid a great and sumptuous banquet on the table, and invited all the Chinamen he knew. Then he formally announced his intention of taking unto himself a wife. There was loud rejoicing, and greeting and congratulation among the Chinese when Ching informed them that his bride was to be a Chinese woman, but as it was well known that all the Chinese women in British Columbia, where Ching had settled, were married, there was a ripple of wonderment among them as to who the bride would be, and where she was to come from.

At a second still more magnificent banquet Li Ching proudly informed them that already was he married, and, moreover, his wife was even then on her way from China. He had long been negotiating with the girl's parents, and now he had paid the required sum; he had hired one in China to act in his stead, and the marriage had taken place.

A large deputation of Chinamen and a few reporters and hangers on awaited the little bride as she stepped out of the train. There was no denying her caste, for her feet were encased in shoes as small as the average American maid's heel; moreover, she had with her two little slave maids. All the buttons on her little blue coat were of solid gold; there were immense opals, diamonds, emeralds and pearls gleaming on her head, in her little ears, and literally covering her fingers. Her lips were highly rouged, so were her cheeks. A black line was drawn on her forehead, where the hair was brushed slickly back; altogether she looked so wonderful a piece of "make-up" that Ching was fairly dazzled. Before he had come to America Li Ching had been a poor laboring coolie,

and everyone knows of the almost idolatrous awe the lower class Chinese have for their superiors. Li Ching had paid an enormous price for his little bride, but he would have doubled, trebled it, had it been necessary, in order to secure her.

Thenceforward Li Ching turned his back on civilization, resumed the dress of his forefathers, lengthened his queue with long silk threads, and began to worship at the shrine of his new deity, or rather his old one, for in his inmost soul Li Ching had always had a hankering after the "way of the gods," which was the reason why after he had returned from Sunday school and from "lubbing Jesus" he would invariably betake him to a little shrine in the corner of his room and bow himself double before the "tiger."

When Marie Grenier heard of Li Ching's marriage, she felt none of the rage of the "woman scorned." In fact she laughed till the tears ran down her face at the description of the bride, and as Li Ching had thought fit to give her a large parting present, she betook herself to a saloon, got gloriously drunk, and disappeared for the time being.

One year of wedded bliss. Then the Chinese hotel was thrilled with another huge excitement. Mrs. Li Ching had presented her husband with a son! That night Li Ching prostrated himself in absolute worship by the side of his wife. She, poor soul, who had grown wonderfully thin from her enforced confinement indoors, and her lack of companionship and occupation, motioned him to raise the baby in his arms. There was no light in the room, save what the moon reflected in a pale glare across the bed. Li Ching lifted the wee bit of humanity in his arms, turned its face to the light, and then with a muffled cry of horror put it back on the bed and dropped on his knees. Mrs. Li Ching was too weary



and tired to notice either the motion or the cry of her husband, or if she heard the cry she took it to be one of ecstasy. A soft, faint smile of contentment lingered about her face, then she closed her eyes, turned on her side and fell asleep.

The Chinaman remained kneeling, and the stupefied terror on his face became intensified. The little still form looked ghastly white in the semi-darkness, and to assure himself that he was not mistaken Li Ching once more turned it over. Its cold little body made answer, and Li Ching cursed himself for his folly in refusing to call in a "foreign" doctor. He picked the dead baby up in his arms, rolled it in a heavy shawl, looked at the sleeping woman with agonized eyes, and crept stealthily from the room.

That night as Marie Grenier munched her last crust Li Ching burst into her room. He had known of her abject poverty for many days, but he had not stirred a finger to help her.

Without a word to her he laid a pile of glittering coins on the table beside her, and then set his bundle on the floor. He faced the woman with unreadable, expressionless face.

"Me gib you money; you stealee babee; you bring to me; me gib you money, one, two, ten hundled dollars."

The woman's eyes glistened.

"What do you mean, Chinee?" she said.

The Chinaman began to unwrap the bundle, and then she saw the little dead baby, and a horror stole over her face.

"What do you want, Chinee?" she said hoarsely.

The Chinaman repeated glibly: "You bring me babee; you takee this one; you go some house where you workee; you stealee babee, I gib you this," and he pointed at the gold with a long, cold finger.

The woman wavered. She was hungry and cold, and the money lay temptingly before her. Outside the wind was blowing a heavy blizzard, and the snow clouds whizzed drearily past her window. There was nothing in the cupboard for her breakfast—there would be nothing. She wrapped herself in a rough shawl, lifted the Chinaman's bundle, and stepped out into the street.

The Chinaman waited by his gold. One, two, three, four hours slipped by. He showed no sign of impatience, but neither did he sleep. When the woman finally returned she still held the bundle, but as she set it on the floor and unfastened the coverings a faint, piteous cry was heard in the cold, empty room.

The Chinaman took the child, and the woman sprang to the gold. As he reached the door he hesitated for the first time. A wistful longing trembled over his yellow face as he looked at her.

"Where put luder babee?" he said.

"He's all right," said the woman indifferently, "and you had better get a hustle on you before they miss this one."

The Chinaman turned and went out into the night. Covering his precious bundle under his loose jacket, he sped through the deserted streets, reached his own home, mounted the dingy stairs, and cautiously entered the room.

The woman was still sleeping, and Ching took the dainty white underwear from the child, and dressed it in the gaudy wrappings of his own child. Then he laid it with a smile calm as a benediction, beside the wife.

Next day a Chinese barber shaved Li Ching's baby's head, save in the middle, in the presence of a dozen select Chinamen, and pronounced it as large and stout and wonderful a man-child as a two-months-old.