

YOUNG-MAN-LEADING-A-COW AND WEAVING-GIRL

BY EVELYN HOWARD BROWNE

THERE were brilliant groups of merry little Chinese maidens flocking through the streets of Chinatown that afternoon. Down Sacramento Street they came, down Clay Street, through Dupont—everywhere they beamed and chatted and gave themselves over to a merriment unusual to Chinese girls.

It puzzled me, this unaccustomed gaiety. Then, too, the little Orientals fascinated me with their brilliant costumes and gorgeously-dressed hair.

To my friend Fong Yee I went—Fong Yee, with his never-failing fund of information concerning Chinese legends and customs. "O, this is the girls' feast-day," he answered readily. And this is the story as it came to me from Fong Yee.

In the days of long ago they lived—a

wonderful boy named "Young-man-leading-a-cow," and the beautiful "Weaving-girl." N'gow Long and Yelr N'geu they were called in their own tongue.

There was no boy who could compare with N'gow Long. He was industrious, noble, and brave. None had ever excelled him. The neighbors watched him with wonder as he grew to young manhood. One who possessed so many virtues must some day be a great man—a man greater, probably, than any in the empire.

As the noble N'gow Long grew toward his greatness, talented little Yelr N'geu was living the busy life which was her preparation for the sphere she was to fill. Never a moment was she idle. Did not her name, "Weaving-girl," indicate her thrifty, industrious nature?

And then the fate which had fitted these two young lives the one for the other

brought them together. They met, and—how could it have been otherwise?—they adored each other.

There was joy in the world when N'gow Long took for his wife the fair young Yelr N'geu. Naught but good to the world could result from the union of two such marvels of industry and propriety.

But—alas, that it must be told,—their adoration absorbed their lives. All else was forgotten. No longer were they the industrious "Young-man-leading-a-cow" and "Weaving-girl." Industry was a thing of the past, while they delighted in each other's companionship. From their lofty pinnacle they fell, while the world looked on and wondered and mourned.

Such a fall merited punishment of unusual severity. These two young people, who, as models of virtue and industry, had shone so brilliantly before an admiring world, must be made to serve as terrible examples to that same world.

In the midst of their happiness they were torn apart. To the heaven-world they were both borne. But it was not to be heaven for them. There they were separated by the entire length of the heavenly domain. Between them lay the N'gun Haw (Silver River)—beautiful, impassable.

In her own end of heaven must the little Yelr N'geu remain forever, weaving and working, weaving and working with the little hands, now all a-weary, that once wove so joyously.

And in his far-away end of the same heaven-world must N'gow Long remain, working—forever working.

And the beautiful Silver River must roll unceasingly between them.

But once a year there comes a glad day—a day whereon N'gow Long may leave his lonely end of heaven and journey across the Silver River to his little love.

The kindly, chattering magpies leave the earth on that day—the seventh day of the seventh month of the Chinese year—and fly to the Silver River. There, over the rolling waters, they crowd together, forming a solid magpie bridge. Across this bridge N'gow Long hastens joyfully to the waiting "Weaving-girl."

At close of day he returns, taking his dreary way across the magpie bridge to his own corner and his unceasing labor.

Some there may be who deem the story of the magpie bridge fabulous. But can it be other than true when it is a well-known fact that on the seventh day of the seventh month there is not to be found one magpie throughout the length and breadth of the Chinese Empire? On the eighth day of the seventh month the trees and groves of China are again filled with the merry chatter of N'gow Long's friendly little helpers.

With this terrible example of neglected and forgotten industry ever before them, the little Chinese maidens are fearful lest they too should forget their habits of thrift and industry. Each year, on the seventh day of the seventh month, they assemble in small companies, their brilliant clothes in immaculate order, their hair gorgeously decorated. With their needlework they diligently pass the afternoon hours. And then, as evening approaches, they bow and worship the far-away young couple, and pray that they may never suffer the sad fate of "Weaving-girl."

