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The Chinese Moon Festival.

By C. BONE.

HE Chinese Festival of the Moon falls, not unnaturally, on the occasion of the full moon which gives us in the West the "Harvest Moon." Of course the Chinese have noticed that this fine full autumn moon is marked by the characteristic which none other can claim. They have observed that it rises for several evenings in succession at the same time and with little change. They, of course, do not know that this peculiar phenomenon is owing to the fact that at this time the orbit of the moon—as near the autumnal equinox as it can be—makes as little angle as possible with the ecliptic. They, like ourselves, however, have fixed upon the phenomenon, and they, according to their wont, make a good deal more of it than we are accustomed to do. Yet the "Harvest Moon" is not without its poetry even with our own matter-of-fact race. Those who have been privileged to spend some time of the autumn in the country in England, and to mix with the harvesters at this season of the year, will not easily forget their experiences. Perhaps these thoughts belong to those who are to-day middle-aged persons. They, however, will easily remember the beautiful autumn nights, when the heavy waggons, laden with the sheaves of golden grain, the last of the harvest, were drawn slowly home to the farmstead, whilst the men and maidens, weary though they would be with the day's work, would fill the air with songs, and the whole scene was filled with the glorious light of the big soft moon. These scenes once lived through are never forgotten. The simple harvesters think that this glorious moon is a special arrangement for the farmers that they may be able the more easily to gather in the fruits of the earth, which have been brought forth for their use. They do not understand the natural explanation of the beautiful moon, which is so generous to them with its silvery light, any more than the Chinese understand the phenomenon to-day. But they see and enjoy. When we return to the Chinese we see that they have

wrought, out of the occasion, a gossamer of myths and legends, which have been shaped into pretty poetry for the delight of the young people, and perhaps for others who, though older in years, are not older in knowledge and in thought. As with other feasts of the Chinese, there is a fairy story to be learnt from their folklore. During the Tang Dynasty, so runs the legend, one of the Emperors, whose correct style was *Tien Pao* or "Heavenly Treasure," but whose better-known name is *Ming Hwang* or "Brilliant Emperor," was privileged to pay a visit to the moon. He was not, like our "Man in the Moon," snatched thither for the daring sin of picking up a few sticks on the Sabbath, but was permitted, for some reason which does not appear, to pay a visit to the glistening halls of the beautiful land. When he reached his destination he found that the moon was inhabited by a very old man, who was seated at a table engrossed in a very large book. By his side there was a large box, seen to be full of red cord. When the Emperor asked the ancient worthy the nature of the book he was reading, he found that it was called *Yan Yuen*, or the "Book of Predestined Marriages." In other words, in the Moon all successful marriages were arranged. When this ancient seer had decided who was to be married to whom, he tied the two names together with a bit of the scarlet thread, and these marriages when consummated here on earth were always harmonious. No discord would ever mar the lives of these predestined pairs. Unhappy marriages were of those who, in some way, mocked the decisions of the old man. So we see that the Chinese in this matter, as in many others, have discovered that "marriages are made in heaven." But the enchanted Emperor did not at once return to the earth. He had heard beautiful voices and he asked the old man to admit him into the inner halls of the silvery mansion. After repeated requests this was granted. Therein he saw a large number of fairies, who were splendidly clothed, and were employing and amusing themselves as they thought fit. Though the vision was but a brief one he was enabled to notice carefully the fashion of the robes in which they were clad. Presently he bid adieux to the venerable ancient, who had entertained him, and returned to his own earthly palaces, which, after his visit to the moon, appeared by no means splendid. But one permanent result remained. When he returned to his own family, he ordered that all the dresses of the ladies of his harem should be made after the fashion of those which the fairies wore, and as these fashions are in vogue to-day, when parts of an ancient play demand that female actors shall be personated, these are the dresses which are yet worn. These stories, not without a touch of true poetry, are told by each mother to her children, one generation after another, and so they become the property of the entire

Chinese race, just like at home mothers tell fairy tales to their children. But the educated in addition to all this, which is the property of the whole, rich and poor, have their own way of remembering this feast. There are many couplets which have become current coin in the Chinese language, and many of them relate to such myths as that which we have briefly related. The following comes to my memory just as I write. 一輪明月今霄多有酒不飲奈明何. These lines will not appear quite the same in an English dress. The Chinese is very smooth with long use and the rhythm is undoubted. They may be roughly rendered—

“The revolving moon is always clear,
But clearer still this night,
With cups o’erflowing, who won’t drink,
And pledge the gleaming light?”

So the educated, in addition to what the masses have of poetry arising out of the hour, have their own minds full of these verses. They, therefore, gather together, in the open air, and enjoy the scenery and drink and quote and fill the air with their shoutings and merry laughter.

The Moon Festival is famous for its thousands of Chinese and Japanese lanterns with which the people adorn every available place and especially hang out on the roofs of their houses. Made as they are of bamboo and thin paper, tinted of all colours, as they are hung up by tens of thousands on the roofs of a big city, if the evening is fair and there is a slight breeze blowing, they are swayed to and fro and the sight is very pleasing indeed. Few Europeans but what have looked out upon this moving sea of light and have felt the charm of the picturesque scene. There does not appear to be any special reason for the use of these lanterns that I have discovered, and we may assume that this is done simply because of the pleasing effect to the eye. But the enjoyments of the hour have not yet been all enumerated. One of the luxuries of the occasion are the all important mooncakes. Everybody has seen them arranged in the shops, with the accustomed Chinese taste, and with a view to attract customers. These are comprised of two kinds. First there are the dummies. These are imitation cakes and are made not to be eaten, though in form and outward decoration they differ in nothing from the real. They are bought for the children, and are used by them as playthings, with which they form mimic stores in mimic shops. The real cakes are sold by tens of thousands. The Chinese, at this season of the year, as is their wont, are addicted to the giving and the receiving of presents. These mooncakes are the popular presents which are sent from friend to friend. The cakes are very good and are very popular with European children when they have once tasted the forbidden delicacy.

It appears, in the south at any rate, that the mooncake business will be thrown altogether out of its usual ruts. These cakes lately have been made of the best American flour. Owing to the struggle that is now raging in connection with the Boycott, many of the richest of the families of Canton have announced that they will neither give nor receive any of these cakes, but will send fruits and Chinese cakes instead. Hence the general disorder into which things have fallen. We can see, therefore, that the Moon Festival suggests great possibilities for feasting and relaxation, and when this is remembered and in addition we call to mind that the season of the year is, in China, one of the pleasantest, we can see that the festival is very popular, and that the people enjoy it with all abandon.

