

Women at Home

A Piece of Old Cathay set Down in a New Land

THERE is a home in Brougham Avenue, Wellington, which has Chinese writing on the gatepost, twisted evergreen trees on the sloping lawns, and masses of geraniums, beds of marigolds, gladioli and roses bordering the paths. On the pedestals of the front steps are bowls of Chinese water lilies, which are lovingly tended by a fascinating little lady from Lotus Land. This charming person, who worships flowers, is Madame Pao, wife of Mr. Chunhow H. Pao, who is Chinese Consul for New Zealand.

Madame Pao is one of Wellington's most popular and delightful hostesses, and is a much sought after figure in social life. Madame and her husband have not been in New Zealand very long. Previous to coming to this country they lived in Canada, New York, San Francisco and Melbourne. Both were born in Shanghai, and they have one son, Johnson Pao, who is at Wellington College.

Mr. Chunhow H. Pao and Madame Pao are still trying to adapt themselves to the New Zealand climate. "Oh, these Wellington winds!" said Mr. Pao smiling. "But we like Wellington," broke in Madame Pao, "It is so very compact—just like the rest of New Zealand—there is a great variety in a small space. We find the people very hospitable and we are looking forward to visiting Christchurch very soon." Both Madame and her husband asked for details of the layout of Christchurch, and about the arrival by train through the Lyttelton tunnel in the early morning after the steamer journey.

Madame received her interviewer wearing an Eastern gown of black satin with a high-braided neck, and she graciously lifted back an edge of the material and showed the back, which was a model of neatness in silver, blue and pink, the threads which came through on to the face of the satin forming a bouquet design. Some of Madame's most attractive cushions are worked in silver and blue, with patterns of the Summer Palace at Peiping, and all the vases in her sitting-room are Chinese. "This one is three hundred years old," said Madame, lifting a tall blue and white patterned vase in which arum lilies were poised. Standing in the dim room on the soft carpet, holding this vase and the lilies against a background of Chinese drawings, including an old portrait of Confucius, Madame cast a truly beautiful Eastern picture. It was not at all surprising to learn from the lips of this fascinating little lady that she used to rear birds, mostly canaries. "No, no—not now," said Madame, lifting her soft white hands. "I have so little time for hobbies now."

"Reading? I do not have much time for that either, but I like poetry. Some poetry is very beautiful. I once knew a German who wrote down the poetry that came to her in dreams. English? Oh, I learned to speak that in Shanghai. English is taught in nearly all the Chinese schools these days. Mandarin is now the official language. There are 56 letters in the Chinese alphabet, and so naturally the Chinese typewriters have a much bigger keyboard than those used in the Western world, where there are only 26 letters in the alphabet."

When asked to give her viewpoint on the present conditions of the new women of China, Madame said that no foreigner could remain long in China and doubt the potentialities of the Chinese woman. Her energy, practical qualities and courage have become self-evident during the past few years, and possibilities have become realities. Independence is the new cry. Just as it is the cry of woman-kind elsewhere in the world; it has been echoed and amplified in China to-day.



A Spencer Digby study of Madame Chunhow Pao, the wife of the Chinese Consul at Wellington. Madame Pao is one of the most charming hostesses in the capital, bringing all the grace of an age-old culture to a country that is still little more than an infant.

"In China women are beginning to believe in their independence," said Madame. "In the past a woman's place was the home, and the Chinese woman from time immemorial has been pictured as the radiance therein. Now, women are beginning to ask about life in general. Don't we have a place in all this; and if we took our place could we not, perhaps, improve things? they cry."

"The traditional woman of China did not look directly at male strangers. I will tell you an ancient story. I told it during an after-luncheon address which I gave recently. A young Chinese woman, when rolling up her sleeve to rescue her fan which had fallen into a well, was horrified to find that a young man, a fugitive from justice, who was hiding behind some shrubs, had seen her. She was so upset at the indiscreet exposure of her arm that she believed the young man must need marry her! Contrast this with the present modern woman, who would rightly regard the feelings of her past sister as ridiculous. Formerly, it was not conventional for a Chinese woman to appear too often in the streets or to talk to men too freely: now she elbows her way through busy thoroughfares, rides on tram-cars, entertains male friends, and insists upon going to all kinds of public places, and takes a lively interest in politics. As far back as the Boxer rebellion, there was talk of Chinese amazons, who were measured for men's uniforms with the intention of joining in the fight for Nationalism. A 'Dare to Die' corps has been in existence since those days, and during the recent Japanese invasion of China, the Chinese women have organised themselves into a 'Women's League for National Salvation.'

"But here is afternoon tea," said Madame Pao, and her visitor had the unusual experience of sampling Lichee nuts after the delicious little cakes, which Madame had made herself.

Hearing Mr. Pao and Madame Pao speaking together in Chinese was like listening to the whispering of winds in far-off trees, and the sighing of waters; high and low their voices went in rippling cadence, strangely reminiscent of the music of Chinese wind-bells, the echoes of which lingered in the ears of the delighted interviewer long after she had left that lovely home.