

CHINESE "BOY" SERVANTS

An Institution Only Seen in Its Perfection in the Orient.

The "Boy" Saves His Employer a Great Amount of Trouble, but He Has His Limitations.

Foreign Correspondence New York Times.
SHANGHAI, Dec. 28.—When a man comes East he hires a "boy." No matter how humbly he may have got on before, he is a master with a valet as soon as possible after arrival, and he proceeds to grow in importance and to feel as helpless as he thinks befits his aristocratic station. The reason he is so quick in supplying himself is that the necessity of doing so is the first advice tendered to him; and as his mind is open to suggestion, and he thinks that those who have lived here ought to know better how to get on than he can know, the assurance on every hand that a boy is indispensable strikes him as conclusive. In assenting, he asks a friend to help him; the friend speaks to the compradore, who opens some telepathic bung, and out flows a boy.

The boys always look well washed and ironed, and if the stranger takes to the candidate who presents himself and engages him, the new master hands over his keys. When he reaches his room that night he finds his effects distributed and as well arranged as if he were an old settler, and the boy in attendance to dress him for dinner or ready for any other service. The arrival is at once quite sure that not only is a boy indispensable, but he wonders how he ever managed to live without one. Thereafter the boy is his alter ego, preparing his bath for him in the morning, keeping his room in order, and looking after the numberless wants that occur to a man when he does not need to spend his own time over them.

The "boy" never rises to titular manhood, although he grows gray in service, and he rarely acquires any other name than "boy." One may easily learn something of the boy's family and discover what his intimates call him. But the average foreigner's curiosity does not run in that direction, and the boy rarely volunteers information about himself; so that the foreigner and his boy may always remain strangers, although in close relation as master and servant for years. A man alone with a boy can usually get from him a great variety of work, but if there are other servants about the division of labor is clearly marked, and there is no use in trying to bring about a deviation from it. When a master asks a boy to do something that a coolie should do, and the boy says "No belong my pidgin," that settles it. All the King's horses cannot make the boy do it, and his guild, which includes every boy in the place, will prevent any other boy from doing it.

THE "MESS" SYSTEM.

If three or four men decide to live in mess, each takes his own boy along, a cook is hired, who agrees to pay himself and furnish the table for a fixed monthly sum—from \$100 to \$150 for four—and one of the boys is designated as No. 1, who engages coolies, orders in drinks, tobacco, or other things not provided by the cook, keeps the accounts of the house, and acts as disbursing agent for the mess and paymaster for the staff. Since the help provides its own food and wages are low, the members of a mess may not bother themselves to know how many attendants an establishment supports, but the record was probably approached recently here, when, accounts running higher than the members of one mess liked, the No. 1 boy, called upon to explain, showed that he carried on his roll the names of twenty-eight servants for the four men. The cook had an apprentice, each boy had a boy, and even Scullion No. 4 had a coolie to assist him in his varied duties. A member of the mess questioned No. 1 about the work of all these attendants, and received long explanations that covered all that could possibly be done in the house.

"That is very good," said the questioner. "Now, you have told us of every bit of work that there is to do, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Then, what do you do, may I ask?"

No. 1's gibbness was not equal to that question. He looked blankly ahead of him for a moment, and then walked from the room, a picture of offended dignity.

It is a common saying that every servant squeezes his master, from which it might be supposed that foreigners were subjected to a system of organized small robberies, paying more than they should for everything they get. As what everybody says must have some truth in it, there can be no use in denying that servants make more than their wages. But when a foreigner tries to buy on his own account, he wishes that he had let his boy do it for him. Except for articles for which prices are fixed, the native can do better than the foreigner in almost everything, and the master may save patience and money by letting the boy earn commissions if he can, and thinking no more of it. One excellent trait in boys is that while ready to squeeze from their masters for their own benefit, they will not let any one else do it. Those who trust their boys to be their cashiers save themselves no end of small vexation and perhaps a little money as well.

The value of a boy shines conspicuously in travel. Steamship lines recognize a boy as part of a passenger's normal effects, and he is taken along for nothing or at a charge barely covering his food, and so small as to be not worth counting. With this companion posted as to the place to go, the traveler need not bother himself at all about the details of the trip. His luggage is packed for him, put aboard ship, transferred as often as need be by coolies, and when he reaches his hotel, if he is not in haste to go to his room, he finds on arrival there his effects laid out and arranged as if he were at home. When the boy renders his account he finds it about half what it would have cost himself for the same service.

A VERSATILE SERVANT.

Although a boy stands close by his pidgin when he may, he develops a most amazing versatility when he must. An agent at Port Arthur for a commission house hired a native, whom he dubbed "The Pirate," to do boy pidgin. The service went on without special incident for some time, when the cook fell ill, and as no other could be had readily, "The Pirate" offered to attend to that work as well as his own, saying that he had been cook at a French consulate in Japan for five years, and knew how to prepare dishes in European style. He turned out so much superior to the regular cook as to excite some curiosity about his experiences, when it appeared that he was not only an expert cook, but that, while in Japan, he had learned to speak French and Japanese, that at Vladivostok and Port Arthur he had learned Russian, and that he had picked up sufficient knowledge of medicine to treat ordinary ills.

Having in his employ a cook, physician, and linguist, the agent could not resist the temptation to put "The Pirate's" ingenuity to an occasional hard test. There were two persons in the mess, and the kitchen and table outfits provided for no more. He had half a dozen of his friends drop in one evening at about 7 o'clock, and summoning "The Pirate," he said:

"Pirate, have got six piece new men come to dinner; must have number one layout, chop chop, right away."

"The Pirate" returned to the kitchen with a little show of concern as though dinner for six new men were an every-day occurrence in that house. Eight o'clock was the dinner hour. Promptly at that time the company was summoned to the dining room, where they found a large table, shining with white linen, silver, and glassware. They had an eight-course dinner, with the usual varieties of wines, topping off with champagne, cordials, and cigars, and all agreed that they had never tasted food more daintily or more skillfully prepared.

"The Pirate" had sent around the neighborhood to his cook friends, gathered in everything that could be spared from their larders, sideboards, and wares chests, and had set out a feast that could hardly have been better had he had a week in which to make it ready.

THE GENIUS OF COOKING.

When the troops marched to Peking the agent went along as a correspondent, and took "The Pirate" with him. He entered a newspaper mess, and said to "The Pirate" that he must cook for the mess and get up as fine meals as he had at home. Peking had been stripped of food. The natives in the country surrounding did not dare at first to bring in supplies from the gardens and poultry yards, and the army commissaries were scant and not very palatable. There were five men in the mess, who wanted at least three good meals a day. The house in which the mess quartered contained one pot fit for cooking and a stove so poor that another had to be built outdoors of stone, to hold the pot.

From the day that "The Pirate" took

charge the mess had meals that betrayed no evidence of scarcity of supplies of any character. While the troops and the thousands of natives and other civilians there were worrying along on ordinary rations, none too plentifully given out, "The Pirate's" single pot and outdoor fire provided his household with meals as varied and as well cooked as they would expect to get in Peking in times of peace. He got hold of coolies, made it worth their while to go out into the country and bring supplies to him past the guards, and used commissary rations, which the British permitted the correspondents to draw, to piece out the meals. How he managed to serve successive courses with only a cooking pot was a mystery that no one tried to probe.

It is not every boy who has "The Pirate's" resourceful skill or talents, but the personal servants taken along on that Peking march were nearly all of the "boy" class, and besides doing what they call their proper work, they cooked and washed, attended to horses and carts, gathered in provisions, and made themselves generally indispensable.

The policy of treatment adopted by employers has doubtless much to do with the adaptability of the boys. It is a settled practice with experienced masters to order a thing done, and if the boy begins to parley about it to cut him short and act as if the matter were dismissed from the mind of the one ordering it. Feeling that the thing must now certainly be done, the boy finds a way. Most preposterous orders are often given out of a spirit of pure mischief, but the boys take them all seriously, and the ingenious ones will produce some result rather than be thought stupid, while the tax on their ingenuity does them no harm.

Responsibility intrusted to a boy is sometimes a little costly. When "The Pirate" and his master started southward in October the master remained ashore too long at Tong-Ku, and the ship sailed with "The Pirate" and all the luggage on board. Che-Foo was to be the first stopping place, but there were other ships to come, not all stopping there, and "The Pirate" could only guess what his master, who had been left ashore without money, might do to reach Shanghai. He took off the luggage at Che-Foo and engaged for his master the best vacant room at the hotel there. The master got credit across to Port Arthur, supplied himself with funds, and then sailed for Che-Foo, where "The Pirate" greeted him with a smiling "I knew you would come" and escorted him to his room. His boxes had been unpacked and everything was as homelike as possible. He also found a bill waiting for him for \$35 for one week's room rent. "The Pirate" knew when he landed that no ship could arrive for a week, and it was as easy to store the luggage in a warehouse at a few cents daily as to engage a choice hotel room for them. But he meant well, and that was the end of it. He had excelled in too many things to make it worth while to find fault with him.

THINGS BOYS CANNOT DO.

For all a boy's good points, he has distinct limitations. Among them are his inability to carry a verbal message straight or to remember more than one commission at a time. His shortcomings seem to be

constitutional and impossible to overcome. The only recourse is to yield, write out all messages that he is to deliver, and let him finish one task before he is informed of another. All conceivable remedial methods have been tried, but, resulting only in vexation, they were slowly abandoned. So, nearly everybody owns a chit book, in which a note is placed and the name of the receiver written in the book. The receiver signs an acknowledgment on the line that contains his name, and correct delivery, without mistake as to the accuracy of the message, is thus insured.

A boy may live in a settlement for years and talk a fair pidgin with his master, and yet not know how to find an address given in English. One reason for this may be that boys learn the names chosen by natives for foreign firms, with no phonetic relation to the firm title. Names are chosen by the natives with the view of complimenting the employers. Thus, Jardine, Matheson & Co is known as E Wo, which means Princely House. Every boy knows E Wo, but comparatively few recognize the actual name of the firm, although it is probably the best advertised in the East. Hence, boys who have lived in settlements long enough to know every inch of them may be seen any day groping about the streets with chit books, showing their envelopes to foreigners whom they meet, in order to be directed to places that they know by their native names almost as well as they know their own homes.

A COMPRADORE'S REVENGE.

A story is told of a firm at Tien-Tsin, which asked its compradore to select a Chinese name for it. Before he had done so he decided to quit the firm's employ, owing to some disagreement which left him with a poor opinion of the partners' good sense. One day he presented a name which looked attractive enough in Chinese characters, and orders were given to have it painted on the signs and printed on the stationery. A new compradore came before the new title was publicly displayed, and he saved the firm the annoyance of becoming popularly known by the native equivalent for "Two Damned Fools."

Those who have lived in India say that boys there are better than here, being neater, more honest, and cheaper. One may commonly hear talk of slack service, as though servants in other parts of the world needed no oversight. Neatness is no more difficult to get in China than in America, as much depending on master or mistress, in one country as in the other, as on the servants. Chinese boys certainly always look well, keeping their frocks without dust or creases, their footgear tidy, their queues carefully braided, and their heads and faces scrupulously barbered.

In the matter of attentiveness, the Chinaman does not invent wants for his master as the Indian is said to do, but he tries to obey, and he puts up with harsh treatment without modifying that intention appreciably. An Indian will work for about half the wages that a treaty port Chinaman expects; but when a new-comer can save his shoe leather and his nerves for the American equivalent of about \$6 a month, he does not feel at first like registering a very strong protest against high wages to his boy.

"Boys" in this section and northward are strictly a native institution. They are not the kind that emigrate. China is good enough for them, and when a master goes they seldom accompany him. It is probably as well that this should be so, for a boy away from his environment would be quite useless, while here he can do almost everything except the thinking for his master. Chinamen who go to other countries are from the South, where the spirit of adventure is sometimes closely allied to moral and personal traits quite distinct from those that prevail in parts of China where there is real winter. So to learn what boy service means as the majority of foreign residents know it, one must live a while where the "boys" are rooted.

FREDERICK W. EDDY.

CAR WOULDN'T STOP FOR HER.

Driver Resented Spinster's Criticism of Out-of-Date Street Cars.

Drivers and conductors of the antiquated One Hundred and Tenth Street Cross-Town horse car line have another burden added to their weary lives in the person of an elderly woman who recently took up her abode in a fashionable boarding house near that road. She uses the cars daily, and she never takes a trip without finding something to sharply criticize. She has lived there now for several weeks, and she says that she has ammunition enough to last her as long again.

The employes, however, have come to know her, and dread her tongue, and the other day when she stood at her corner and signaled, the driver leaned far out beyond the side of his car as it passed her at the top speed of the ancient team and called back: "Excuse me, lady; not this car. There's no weather strips on this wagon."

"They must learn that my bark is worse than my bite," said the old maid, as she laughingly told the story on herself. "I wouldn't get one of those boys in trouble for the world."

J. H. Bauland Co. Employees' Reception.

The Richard Archer Association, composed mainly of the employes of the Joseph H. Bauland Company of Brooklyn, and named in honor of the head of one of the departments of the store, will hold its annual reception at Sangerbund Hall, corner of Smith and Schermerhorn Streets, Brooklyn, on Thursday night, when the store will close early. A check for a substantial amount has been donated by the firm toward the expenses of the reception.

College Woman's Club Meeting.

The regular monthly meeting of the College Woman's Club will be held at the Waldorf-Astoria to-morrow evening. There will be an address by F. Hopkinson Smith upon "Impressions in Art and Literature." The musical programme has been arranged by Mrs. Theodore Sutro. Miss Lucy Madison-Lehmann of Kentucky will sing and the blind pianist, Miss Katherine Schlosser, will play. Dancing will follow the entertainment.