

**The following is an excerpt from *The British Medical Journal*, dated October 4, 1879:**

### **The Fate of Yakoob Beg's Descendants**

The letters from the Shanghai correspondent of the *Times*, drawing attention to the fate reserved for the surviving male descendants of Yakoob Beg, the famous Central Asian chief and Chinese rebel, will doubtless excite much indignation in England, and may be the subject of remonstrance by our diplomatic authorities. It appears that when, in the winter of 1877, Turkestan [i.e., Xinjiang] passed once more into Chinese hands, there were taken prisoners a number of Yakoob Beg's family, some of whom were executed, and others have died. At the present time, there remain in prison four boys, three of them sons and one a grandson of the rebel leader. These wretched little boys have been treated like State criminals, and have now been sentenced for the awful crime of being sons of their father. This sentence is to the effect that they are to be delivered into the hands of the Imperial household to be made eunuchs of, and to be afterwards forwarded to Turkestan and given over as slaves to the soldiery.

This sentence, ghastly as it is, is the penalty awarded by the Chinese laws in all cases of sedition in which the children or grandchildren of rebels are not themselves privy to the treasonable designs of their parents. If beneath the age of ten, they are confined in prison until they have reached the age of eleven, whereupon the sentence is carried into effect. So late as the end of 1877, it was inflicted upon a son of a rebel named Li Liu, who was only six years old when his father was apprehended in 1872; and in 1856, a number of boys who were with some rebels when captured, were subjected to it, their elders being beheaded. The operation of castration is mentioned in native histories as early as 1100 B.C., when it was by edict constituted one of the recognised modes of punishment for certain grave offences. In China, as elsewhere, eunuchs are in general made in order to qualify themselves to act as palace-servants. They may be kept only by certain members of the Imperial family and in the palaces of the eight hereditary princes whose ancestors assisted in establishing the present dynasty. The Emperor has three thousand in his service; each prince of the blood and imperial princess is obliged to maintain thirty, and so on throughout the different grades. The operation is performed at an establishment maintained for the purpose immediately outside one of the palace-gates. For each castration and subsequent care of the case the operators receive the equivalent of £1 16s. sterling.

The operation has been thus described by Mr. Stent of the Chinese Customs Service. "The patient is placed in a semi-supine position on a broad bench. One man squatting behind him grasps his waist, and one man is told off to each of his legs. Bandages are fastened tightly round the hypogastric and inguinal regions, the penis and scrotum are three times bathed in a hot decoction of pepper-pods, and the patient (if an adult) is solemnly asked whether he repents, or will ever repent, his decision. If he appear doubtful, he is unbound and dismissed; but if his courage have held out, as it usually does, all the parts are swiftly swept away by one stroke of a sickle-shaped knife. A pewter plug is inserted into the urethra, and the wound is covered with paper soaked in cold water, and is firmly bandaged. The patient, supported by two men, is then walked about the room for two or three hours, after which he is permitted to lie down. For three

days he gets nothing to drink, nor is the plug removed from the urethra. At the end of this period the dressings are changed, and the accumulated urine is allowed to escape. The parts generally heal in about one hundred days, when the patient is inspected by an old experienced eunuch, in order to make sure that the mutilation is complete.”

For a long time after the operation there is incontinence of urine. About two percent of all cases prove fatal—some by haemorrhage, some by extravasation, and some doubtless by irritative fever. Mr. Stent says nothing about obliteration or contraction of the canal of the urethra, although one would expect that the process of cicatrisation would frequently produce this accident. The organs removed are embalmed and sealed up in a vessel, which must be produced for inspection by the proper authority whenever an eunuch is nominated for appointment to any post. When he dies, his organs are buried with him.