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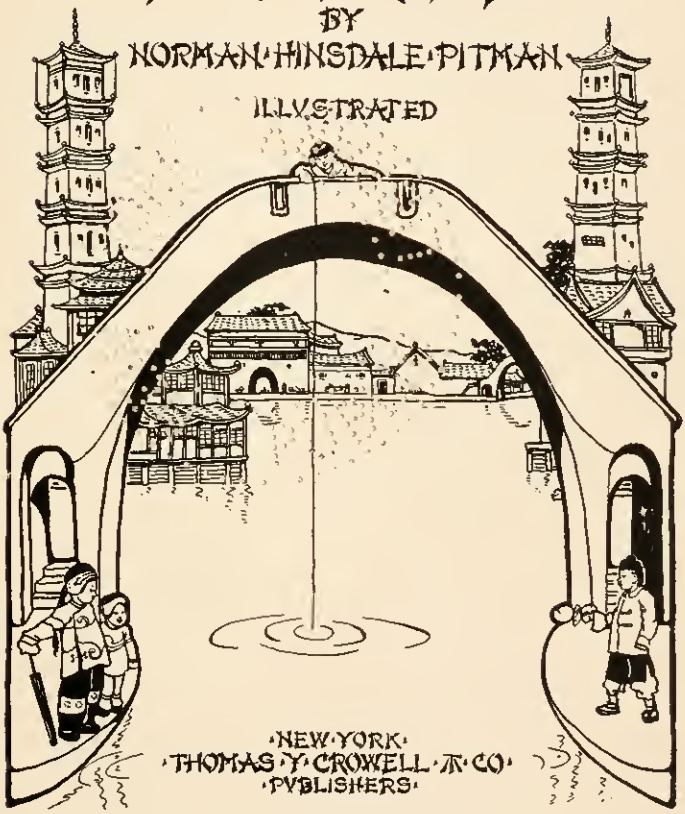
THEIR STEEDS CHANGED INTO WINGED DRAGONS.

CHINESE FAIRY STORIES

BY

NORMAN HINSDALE PITMAN

ILLUSTRATED



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YOW-TO'S FIRST LESSON

YOW-TO'S FIRST LESSON

LONG, long ago, not far from the Yellow River, lived a little boy whose name was Yow-to. His father owned a fine pear orchard, famous for its fruit, which for several years brought to the family a comfortable living.

Up to the time of Yow-to's birth it had been a great sorrow in the hearts of his parents that the gods had denied them a son. Again and again they had bewailed their grievous lot, and burned incense in the village temple, offering up prayers to their idols to be spared the curse that would befall them if no son were born into their family. One would think they might have been satisfied with the five rosy-cheeked little daughters who filled their home with sunshine. But no indeed, as each successive girl child came to their home their sadness had grown deeper and deeper, until at last they were in despair. Like all their neighbors they felt that one boy was worth a dozen girls; for was not each girl almost a useless burden upon the

family? As soon as they were grown, would they not be married and go into another household to work for other people? On the contrary, a son would continue to live at home and work for his parents as long as they lived, and he would be useful in many other ways.

So great became the desire of this unlucky couple to be blessed with a little boy, that one day in the temple the mother offered publicly to repair at her own expense one of the dingy old dust-covered idols, if the gods would grant her what she asked. Whether the grimy god understood Mrs. Wang's promise we shall not say, but certain it is that a few months later little Yow-to came to gladden the hearts of his parents. It was not until a year after his coming, however, that they gave him the name by which we shall call him in this story.

On his first birthday, according to Chinese custom, just before the feast was given in honor of the glad occasion, the baby was dressed in the new clothes presented by his grandmother. Then he was seated upon a bamboo sieve which had been placed in readiness on a table. Many objects were put within his reach, among them a book, a brass mirror, a set of money scales, a

money counter, a pen, an ink slab, a knife, gold ornaments and fruits.

Near the table stood the proud mother and father watching eagerly for the infant's first desires. The five sisters, the grandparents, and the other relatives also waited near by. All were anxious to see which one of the many new playthings about him the child would seize on for his first toy. By this means, according to their belief, they could foretell his future. If he grasped the book or the pencil, doubtless he would become a famous scholar; if the counting frame, the scales, or the gold ornaments, a man of wealth ; if the knife, a warrior; if the fruit, a farmer.

For a moment the little fellow looked up from his toys into the eager faces of those about him. He seemed to know that they were awaiting the result of his actions. Then without further delay, stooping over, he stretched out his chubby arms and swept all of the objects into a pile before him, as if by this movement claiming everything in sight.

The guests laughed heartily at this unlooked-for happening.

"T'a yow to!" exclaimed the father. "He

wishes all. Yow-to, or Wish-all, then, shall be his name."

It was thus the little Wang was christened, and from that day all through his childhood his parents saw the wisdom of their choice. There was no object, within his reach or out of it, that Yow-to did not claim. His sisters had nothing they could call their own, for if they had the boldness to deny the slightest desire of their brother, the youngster set up such a howl of rage that they were only too glad to give way to his appeal.

In the orchard the fattest, juiciest, sweetest pears were always his without the asking, and many a time when pears were out of season did the toddler stretch his little arms out toward the naked branches and howl because his sisters were not kind enough to gather him some fruit.

It is not strange that Yow-to grew from a greedy infant into a very selfish boy. His parents humored him on all occasions, as thoughtless parents often do, not seeing that they were encouraging a wrong spirit. Sometimes when the meals were poor and scant, his sisters suffered from hunger while Yow-to's

bowl was so full that he threw away the morsels right and left. If the other children dared to ask for what was left over, he answered, "No, you are only girls."

In the village school, however, Yow-to did not fare so well. His playmates would not yield first place to him, which made him very unhappy. His selfish heart coveted the bright-colored kites sent aloft by his schoolmates at playtime, and many a time he cried himself into a rage because they would not let him hold the string. At home his father would try to comfort him by promising to buy bird-kites larger and finer than the others, but this did not satisfy him. He wanted all the things his comrades were enjoying.

"Yow-to won't let us keep anything," complained the eldest sister once in the presence of her mother. "No matter how much he has already, he's bound to lay his hands on whatever we are touching."

"There, there, don't find fault," replied Mrs. Wang soothingly. "Don't you know, he is a boy, and you must always humor boys and give way to them?"

"All right," said the little girl, "the next

time a dog gets after me, I'll give him to Yow-to."

Through all his boyhood only one person ever took Yow-to to task for his selfishness. This was his grandmother, but she did it so good-naturedly that he did not remember five minutes afterward what she said.

Thus he grew from a boy to a young man, when, feeling very old and wise, he said to his father: "How can you expect me to make any money, if you keep me housed up forever here at home? Just give me a chance, and I'll show you what a fellow of my ability can do."

His father was somewhat amused, but felt pleased to hear that he was willing to do something toward his own support.

"All right, my boy," said he, "I'll give you a start. I'm not sure you are old enough to go to work for yourself, but I can soon find out. To-morrow you may take a wheelbarrow, fill it with the choicest pears you can find in the orchard, and sell them along the river road. Then we shall see."

Yow-to was delighted with his father's plan. Early the next morning he hurried into the orchard to make first choice of the fruit, and by

breakfast time his barrow was laden with the largest and mellowest of Chinese pears.

It was the middle of August, and a sweltering day. The whole world seemed thirsting for the rain that would not fall. As far as the eye could see, the great highway was dotted with blue-clad laborers going to their work, while early-rising hucksters laden with their wares were pushing forward toward the village markets. Other men were walking beside their donkeys in the dusty road, urging on the patient little beasts that stumbled along beneath their loads.

As Yow-to journeyed on, pushing his tempting wares before the eyes of thirsty travelers, he knew well that it would be a good day for selling, and he resolved to charge a higher price for pears than his father had suggested, thinking to please him at nightfall with the news of better profits.

Many a hard bargain did he drive, and many a copper cash jingled merrily in his money-bag. Yet, so large was his one-wheeled cart that, when he sat down at noon by the roadside to rest beneath a shade tree, some pears still remained for the afternoon. Near by were other

toilers also resting, who became his customers and then lolled back in the shade eating contentedly the liquid fruit. A few who had no money eyed the big pears wistfully.

As Yow-to sat munching his wheaten cake he heard some one suddenly approach just behind him, and turning he beheld a bent old man looking longingly in his direction. The stranger's scant beard was white as snow, and his cue had scarcely hair enough to braid.

"What is it, old teacher?" said Yow-to respectfully, as the old man came nearer. "Would you like to buy a pear? They are the best on the market."

"Alas, yes, young man," said the sage, "but I have no money."

"Oh," said Yow-to, a chill coming all at once into his voice, "I see."

"But, my friend, I feel sure you can well afford to give an old man one of your pears. You have so many, and I crave but one."

Yow-to made no answer, but, leaning over, picked out one of the fattest pears. The stranger's face lighted up as he saw it, but Yow-to, instead of offering the fruit to him, began to set his own teeth in it.

"Then you refuse to give me one, you who have so many?" said the old man sadly. "I have traveled many weary miles since daylight. I am past seventy, and have not had this day a morsel of bread or a sip of tea."

"I did not come this far in the broiling sun to give out alms," replied Yow-to shortly. "There are beggars enough passing my father's gate each day to eat up everything that grows inside his orchard. If you have money, I am ready for business; if not, why bother me any longer?"

Several of the stragglers under the tree now came up, ready to have a part in what was going on; but they did not take sides with the young merchant.

"But I am dying of thirst and you can save me," pleaded the man. "Would you see me perish?"

"Give the old fellow a pear, boy, and be done with it," said a bystander. "Judging by the price you charge, you can afford to do a little for charity. If you don't want to give him your largest, pick the smallest in the pile, but, for the sake of pity, don't let the old uncle drop by the roadside."

But Yow-to would not be coaxed into parting with a penny of what might be taken to his father. The pears were his, he told them, and not to be thrown away, not even the smallest, but sold for good copper cash.

"Think how much merit you can win by doing this good deed," suggested one.

"If you wish somebody to win merit," said Yow-to, "buy the pears with your own coin, and give it to the beggar yourself."

At the word "beggar," the aged man's face flushed to a deep red, and he seemed to remain silent only by great effort. The stranger whom Yow-to had challenged, unwilling to lose credit in the eyes of those around him, and at the same time really feeling sorry for the man, quietly counted out the price of a pear.

The graybeard took the gift with a sigh of gratitude, and was soon enjoying it to the full. Each mouthful apparently gave him as much pleasure as the water of life, and not until the last morsel had disappeared did he turn to the group around him. Beckoning them closer, he bade them watch him carefully.

"Look," he said, taking a seed which he had saved from the pear; "behold in this tiny

seed a power which will teach each of us a lesson."

Curious to see what he would do next, the group who had by this time gathered about the speaker fixed their eyes sharply on him. Stepping from under the shade tree, he hollowed out a place in the soil and planted the seed. After covering it gently with the soft earth which, strange to say, seemed to grow darker and richer at his touch, he asked if one of the crowd would kindly fetch a pot of water. Ready to help along in the strange thing which seemed about to take place, a little boy ran to do the wizard's bidding.

The water was brought and poured upon the spot where he had buried the seed.

Five minutes passed by—then, "Look, look!" cried the astonished crowd. "Wonder of wonders! a tree is springing up!"

Sure enough, as Yow-to and the others looked, they saw slender shoots growing before their very gaze. As the planter continued to water his miniature tree, so intense was the excitement round about him, that one and all forgot the burning heat of the August sun. Higher and higher grew the pear tree. Branches

sprang from the parent trunk, leaves began to form upon the graceful twigs, until at last a beautiful full-grown tree stood where before the soil had been desolate and barren.

"He is a fairy!" shouted one man.

"A tree god more likely," said another.

"The holy one," cried a third.

But the old man paid no attention to these comments.

"Hark ye," said he, "my labor is not ended."

They craned their necks again, and saw a thousand tiny buds appearing, which swelled in turn and blossomed until the tree was one mass of fragrant flowers. The petals faded, leaving in their stead a crop of infant pears upon the magic tree. Larger and larger grew the fruit, until at last the strong limbs bowed low beneath the burden.

All those present stood as in a dream, believing that they had been taken suddenly into the heart of fairy-land. Then they heard the old man say: "Pick, eat, and be filled. As you have been merciful unto me, so shall your mercies be returned to you."

Plucking the largest pear within his reach, he handed it to the man who had befriended him.

THE OLD MAN PLANTED THE SEED.

This was the signal for a general stampede, for each one present was wildly anxious to taste of what had been so marvelously produced before his very eyes. So great had the crowd become by this time, that when the last man had taken his share not one pear remained upon the tree.

Then the wizard stepped up to the tree, and rapping upon the bark with his fingers, paused as if awaiting another marvel. At once the tree began to shrivel; the leaves turned brown and withered. Where but an instant before the grateful shade had cooled the passers-by, once more the sun beat down upon their heads.

When there was nothing left but a gnarled piece of wood no larger than a cane, the fairy laid hold of this as one would seize a walking stick, and, saying nothing to the gaping crowd, strode forth along the dusty highway.

The people looked after him until he had disappeared from sight, too amazed to speak.

Yow-to, awaking with a start from his dream of wonder, turned toward his wheelbarrow, thinking it high time to start about his own business. As he looked, another wonder met his gaze—the little cart was entirely empty. A cry of surprise escaped his lips, and in an in-

stant the meaning of the whole thing flashed before him. He had been given, by a miracle, the true reward of the selfish.

Yow-to had learned his first lesson.

THE BOY WHO SLEPT

THE BOY WHO SLEPT

"LO-LI," said a little boy's father one day, "I shall have to go to the other side of the city this morning to see a drover. I want you to watch the gate for me, so that no dogs get in here; for if anything should happen to that old sow, I don't know how we should get through the winter. If I can sell her, the drover will come back with me to take her off."

"All right," answered Lo-li promptly, "I'll take good care of everything."

But no sooner was his father out of sight than the lazy little fellow curled up in his sunshine and went to sleep.

Lo-li and his father lived in a little one-room mud cabin, with thatched roof, in the outskirts of Peking. The bare hut was furnished only with the usual brick bed built in one end of the single room, with a few ragged blankets piled at one side, a small oven made of clay, an iron pot, a few broken dishes, and one or two wooden stools. Needless to say, the Changs were miser-

ably poor. In fact, the only wealth they had besides the squalid hut and the still more wretched yard was the sow which Mr. Chang now wished his son to tend. The court in front of the house was so small that she had scarcely room to wallow, and as a result, more than half the time she lay stretched out on the mud floor of the cabin.

Lo-li did not know how long he slept, but he finally awoke with a start and looked around him sleepily. It was a warm day, and his slumber had been so pleasant that he disliked greatly to have it broken. However, he might expect his father home at any time now, and he must never be caught sleeping when he was supposed to be on duty. As he rubbed his eyes and stretched his limbs, he became suddenly aware that it was absolutely quiet around him. This was very strange. He could not remember any time before, when the good-natured porker had become so silent, for as a usual thing when no grunts or squeals were to be heard she was almost sure to be snoring a steady bass to the sounds that entered from the street.

Lo-li leaped from his bed and looked about him. Not a pig was to be seen. He ran inside

the hut. It was empty. Into the yard he rushed pell-mell to examine the gate. It was still closed tightly just as he had left it before going to sleep. Clearly no one had entered. He looked at the wall,—it too was still intact; at the roof,—no pigs were there. Dashing back into the cottage, once more the frightened boy searched the bed, unfolded the blankets, and shook them,—no pigs. He bent over and examined the inside of the iron pot—still not so much as a grunt.

The boy was beginning to think he must be dreaming, when he heard a squealing which seemed to come from just outside the wall. He ran to the gate and looked out. There was no one to be seen but an old man disappearing in the distance, who was leaning on a staff as he hobbled his way slowly down the street. Without considering the whys or wherefores of his proceeding, and with the music of the pig still sounding loudly in his ears, Lo-li set out in mad pursuit of this stranger. Surely he must know something of the family property which the drowsy boy had failed so utterly to guard.

"Kind sir, kind sir!" screamed Lo-li as he

came near the aged traveler, "if you have seen anything of our pig, I beseech you tell me where to find her."

"What pig, my lad?" asked the other, smiling at the boy's great alarm. "Why, what can you be talking about?"

"Our sow!" wailed Lo-li. "My father left me to watch her, and I went to sleep."

"Went to sleep! An excellent watchman you are, now aren't you? And of course when you woke up, the pig was gone. Served you right, didn't it?"

"Oh, no, kind sir," implored the boy eagerly, "if you know anything about her, in pity, I pray you tell me what to do."

"You're making a great fuss, it seems to me, about your dirty swine."

"But we shall starve if she is taken from us," answered Lo-li, now in tears.

"You ought to have thought of that before you went to sleep."

"The gate was shut, and I didn't think anything could happen. I lay down just for a minute."

"And slept two hours. Yes, I know all about it."

"Have mercy, have mercy, and tell me what to do," begged Lo-li.

"The gods forbid, boy! don't raise such a racket. You'll have the whole neighborhood swarming round us as if we were chicken thieves, if you persist in yelling so. Do try to be more quiet."

"My pig! my pig!" bellowed Lo-li, more and more affrighted, and utterly heedless of the old man's request.

The stranger, weary of his noise, now turned and began to walk away slowly. As he did so, Lo-li distinctly heard the sound of subdued squealing coming from somewhere about the man's long flowing garments.

"You wicked thief!" he cried in a rage; "you have stolen our hog, and are now trying to make way with it!"

So saying, he seized the staff which the old man was carrying, in order to hold him back. As he did so, he felt a strange sensation throughout his whole body. There was a wrenching of bones, a twisting of muscles, and behold, he found himself walking on four feet instead of two.

"Lo-li," said the old man, calling him by

name for the first time, "hitherto you have been lazy and shiftless, a good-for-nothing child. To-day through your carelessness your hog has disappeared. You begin by asking me to help you find it, and end by calling me a thief. Now you must know that I am Iron Staff, the fairy, and do no deeds save those of virtue. To punish you for your naughtiness and to teach you a needed lesson, I have changed you into a hog to take the place of the one your father has lost. He is an honest man, and should not be made to suffer for your evil conduct."

The old man vanished, leaving Lo-li grunting out his anguish in the dirt. What should he do next? Where should he go? Oh, if he had only been a good boy! But now it was too late!

Just then a dog dashed out, barking furiously and snapping his teeth at this animal which all dogs seem to hate from their birth. There was nothing left for poor Lo-li but to turn and flee as fast as his four short legs would carry him. With the dog biting savagely at his heels, he rushed madly up the street until he caught sight of his father's gate, wide open as he had

left it. Through this welcome haven he dashed, well knowing that his pursuer would not dare to enter.

Puffing and blowing, Lo-li lay upon the ground. He was shivering with terror, for it was a narrow escape that he had made from the snapping cur, and his hind legs showed the marks of sharp teeth in more than one place. As he lay there sore spent, he remembered something with a thrill of horror. His father would be home at any minute now, and with him the swineherd if a sale had been agreed upon. Awful thought! Was he, Lo-li, to be driven off to the butcher, and sold upon the market?

Tired as he was, he sprang to his feet with a grunt of alarm, and plunged madly toward the gate. Perhaps there was yet time for escaping such a fate. But at that very moment two men stepped through the opening, and drove him back into the yard.

"Here, you miserable Lo-li, what do you mean by leaving this gate wide open?" cried his father. "Why aren't you tending to your business? What! the boy's not here," he continued looking all around and peering into the

hut. "No, he's left the place; and if we had not come just at the moment we did, the hog would have been gone too. Look you, isn't she a beauty? Plump as an ox, and nearly as heavy. You won't find her equal in this part of town."

The drover examined Lo-li critically, passing his hands along the supposed pig's flanks, looking into his mouth knowingly, and lifting the flaps of his long, overhanging ears.

Lo-li tried to cry out and tell his father who he really was, but could only squeal shrilly like any other pig. Meanwhile the boy's heart was beating at double time as he listened to the men's talk over his merits as a porker. Could it be that his own father would sell him to be killed? He tried again to protest, but the only result was a funny little squeal which set the two men laughing.

"I'm afraid she knows who I am," said the drover. "Wise sow! If she goes with me, I must tell her that I have orders from the army for ten hogs to be served up at a feast to be held on the emperor's birthday to-morrow."

"Served up at a feast!" Lo-li's blood ran cold. Oh, why had he been so lazy and wilful as a

boy? Why had he not heeded his father's command to stay awake?

But the two men haggled over the price very unconcernedly.

"Well, I'll take her," said the drover finally, "though it's a big price you're asking. Still, we're old friends, and I can afford to give you the big end of the bargain, seeing that it's you. Come outside here, and I'll count you out your money."

Whack! The man's heavy stick fell flat upon Lo-li's back, and he leaped toward the gateway with a cry of pain and terror. Plunging madly out, with the forlorn hope of escaping, he found himself hemmed in by two dogs. These animals lined him up with some other swine that were in waiting outside. The drover's assistant arose from the shade where he had been resting while holding guard over a wheelbarrow.

"That's the fattest one yet," he remarked, examining the new purchase with a critical eye. "Um-um, I'd like to set my teeth in some of that meat!"

The drover counted out the sum agreed upon in the copper cash which were strung in sets

of a thousand pieces, and Lo-li's father had a heavy but welcome load when he turned to enter his doorway.

"I don't see where that boy is," were the last words Lo-li heard his father utter. "I had planned to take him out with me to-day and give him a treat, but the little rascal is so lazy, I guess it's a good riddance."

With aching heart Lo-li now found himself driven down the dusty thoroughfare. Great clouds of dirt, for which Peking is notorious, blinded him and filled his nostrils. If he stopped to rest, a blow on the back by the driver, or a nipping at the feet by the dogs, caused him to set his awkward legs in motion and hasten upon the journey which he felt sure would be his last one. To be eaten on the emperor's birthday! What an awful fate for one so young! For the first time he could understand the sad condition of the lower animals that live only to die for their lords and masters.

Arrived at the pen, Lo-li and his hog companions were driven into a dirty pen where several other swine were wallowing in the mire. There he lay down trembling in every joint, for he knew not how soon they would come for

LO-LI PLUNGED MADLY OUT.

him. The smell was frightful. Oh, for the good warm sunshine and free air of his father's yard, and the chunk of corn bread which he always had for supper! Oh, for another chance! Why, oh, why had he been so lazy? Perhaps if he had done what he could to help his father, they would not have been so poor.

Just then he saw two men approaching. One of them carried a cord, the other a knife.

"Let's take this fellow first," said one of them, laughing and pointing to Lo-li; "she looks as if she would like it."

So saying, he seized Lo-li by the leg, and pulled him, squealing at the top of his voice, from the pen. They dragged him to a side room where he was thrown upon the floor, and the man with the knife came forward, at the same time trying the blade and point with his finger, to see if they were sharp.

Lo-li was sure his hour had come. With a wild yell he bounded from the spot where he was lying, at the same time calling out at the top of his voice: "Spare me, spare me! I am not a hog!"

A loud burst of laughter greeted his ears, and he was amazed to hear the familiar voice

of his father: "And so you went to sleep, hey! and dreamed you were a pig? It served you right, you good-for-nothing scamp!"

Lo-li opened his eyes slowly. At first he could see nothing, on account of the blinding sunshine, on the spot where he had first fallen asleep. He was in his father's yard, and Mr. Chang was standing over him, his face wrinkled with laughter.

"Is the hog still here?" said Lo-li, looking around wildly.

"Why, yes," answered his father. "Don't you hear her snoring? But it's no thanks to you."

"I'll never forget again, father," said Lo-li; "honestly I won't!"

And he kept his word.

THE BOY AND THE PORRIDGE

THE BOY AND THE PORRIDGE

MANY hundred years ago, a family by the name of Fan lived in the ancient city of Fungtu. By dint of hard labor and frugal living they had succeeded in adding several acres to their small farm, and fortune began to smile upon them. A servant was hired, and they were just beginning to enjoy the fruits of their labor, when the father was taken sick and died, leaving the mother and their only son.

Overcome with grief, the poor widow lay helpless for many days, tossing upon her sick bed. Her son constantly attended her and anxiously awaited the first signs of returning health. But for a time it seemed to him as if she could not recover, for she refused to eat the food he offered, and her forehead was hot with raging fever.

One day, faint from loss of strength, she sank into a quiet slumber, and on awaking called her son to the bedside. Rejoiced at hearing her speak

once more, and hoping that the worst was over, he hastened to obey. For a few minutes she could say nothing, and as he stroked the tangled hair back from her heated brow, he noticed that her eyes had lost their wild and restless look.

When at last she could speak she told him that she had had a strange dream. A good fairy had assured her that if she would but begin to follow the teachings of the great philosophers and give up the use of all meat, her heart would become less troubled, and her life be made the better, for this act of devotion to a dead husband.

Ready to advise anything which might satisfy her for the time being, her son urged her to obey the wishes of the fairy; she might thus place herself upon the direct road to recovery.

"All right, my son," said the woman; "since this course seems good to you, also, let us call in the neighboring priest, and before him I will take my vow."

The boy called in the holy man, and the woman made a solemn promise that never again would she allow herself to partake of other than purely vegetable food. The fairy must have

been pleased, for a few days later she arose from her bed and resumed her household duties seemingly as well as when she had dropped them. The son was overjoyed and resolved to do a twofold labor to make up if possible for the loss of his father.

Early and late he dug in his garden, trenching the rows in such a manner that water could run from the well to all sides, and breaking up the hard clods with his wooden hoe. First at work in the morning of all the gardeners in the village, he was also last to leave his tasks at night. There seemed to be no time, rain or shine, when he could not find something useful to do. When the winter season came, although his neighbors found excuses for many an idle hour, he laughed and shook his head when they told him he would kill himself by overlabor.

"Do you not know," he would ask them, "that Confucius says, 'The workman who wishes to do his work well must first sharpen his tools'? How do you expect me to do this, if I do not work when the snow is on the ground? Just wait until the New Year season, and then you will see that I shall be ready to play."

Now, though most of his friends laughed at him, they secretly admired his energy, and called him Kung-fu, which is a Chinese word for *work*. All prophesied that at some time he would become wealthy, an honor to the village.

At the New Year season, true to his promise, Kung-fu took part willingly in the feasts and celebrations that were held for fifteen days after the beginning of the First Moon. One day on his way home from a feast, he was suddenly filled with sorrow at the thought that his mother had enjoyed no pleasures during the period of merrymaking, and that she seemed to be growing wan and thin. In fact she had not even been outside the home enclosure, but had remained at her weaving, refusing all offers of extra food and eating barely enough to keep her body from actual sickness. Acting on the impulse of the moment, he bought a chicken and some other eatables, resolving to insist upon his mother's partaking of a treat.

"Mother," said he upon his return, "I have tried to be a dutiful son to you during the past year. Will you not promise to do me one favor in return?"

The good woman seized Kung-fu by the hand.

Her heart smote her as she thought that, perhaps, in her grief she had neglected the only one for whom she cared. "You have indeed been all that I could wish," she answered, "a devoted, faithful son, and willingly I promise to do anything that you desire."

"Very well," said the boy gaily, "then go to your room, for I shall get supper this evening. I am a good cook, as you shall find."

So Kung-fu set about preparing the meal for his mother. The meat of the chicken he chopped up in Chinese fashion, stirred in a savory mess of vegetables seasoned with garlic, and then moulded the mixture into little balls, which he covered with dough ready for steaming. It was very late when with much laughter and joking he called his mother to supper, telling her that all was ready for the feast.

The widow, anxious to please her boy, ate heartily of the food he had cooked, without having the slightest suspicion all the while that she was eating meat. The chopsticks danced merrily from bowl to mouth until every scrap of food had disappeared, and the two sat back contented and happy. The mother smiled and seemed in better spirits than she had been for many moons,

while Kung-fu, delighted at the success of his plan, resolved to try it again soon.

Very late that night, after he had been sleeping soundly for several hours, Kung-fu was awakened from his slumber by the sound of strange voices and laughter in his mother's chamber. He arose hastily, and was on the point of entering her room, when he heard a piercing scream and knew that she was in some terrible danger. Then came the noise of scurrying feet, mingled with moans as of some one dying. Pushing open the door he sprang to his mother's assistance, but imagine his surprise to find the room was entirely empty!

The small grated window was still closed with its covering of paper, and the iron bars across it were in their usual place. Kung-fu stood in an agony of fear. There was no means of leaving the room except by the door, and he was quite certain that no one had passed him in the hallway. Indeed, at the very moment when he had heard the noise he had crossed the threshold, only to find the place unoccupied. With trembling fingers he lighted a tiny lamp and looked carefully about him in the apartment. The blankets on the bed had been

thrown back in confusion, but there was no other sign of disturbance. As he peered anxiously into every cranny, determined, if possible, to find some clue to the dreadful mystery, he noticed on the table a sheet of red paper about the size of a Chinese visiting card. On it were inscribed strange characters and the figure of a terrible monster with a woman in his clutches.

Overcome by the horror of what had taken place, Kung-fu hurried to the near-by temple, where he aroused the friendly priest who once before had been summoned by his mother, and told him the whole dreadful story.

"My son," exclaimed the bonze, when the young man had finished, "you say you prepared the supper last evening. Bethink you carefully. Of what was the meal composed?"

Then Kung-fu made a clean breast of the matter, telling of his pity for his mother who was very feeble, and of his desire to make her eat at least one good meal during the New Year festivities. He told of his purchases at the market, of his return home, and of the pleasure with which she ate the food he had prepared with his own hands, not knowing what was in it.

"And you say that she ate of the croquettes, my son?" asked the priest.

"Yes, and that right heartily. It did me good to see the poor soul enjoy herself after her many days of hardship."

"Then did she not in eating violate the oath made to the gods that she would never again partake of flesh? You say that there was chicken in your food."

"But, venerable priest," protested Kung-fu, "is not this the New Year, and are we not all permitted at this season to do that which at other times would be a sin? Do not the wise men tell us to enjoy ourselves at the New Year, that we may work the better when the year is old?"

"Yes, my son," he answered kindly, for he was a good priest, "all that you say is true, and yet there is no license even at this season for a man to break his vow. There is no period when a sacred oath may be broken and go unpunished. Your mother has been seized by evil spirits, as this paper which you found plainly shows, and carried off into the depths of the earth for punishment. Behold here the seal and symbols of the demons that make their

home down below. Alas, without knowing it, you have brought upon her the most terrible tortures. The greatest of these will be slow starvation, for the demons will consider this the best way to remind her of her sin."

Kung-fu went home bearing a great burden in his heart, the burden of grief at his own terrible blunder. He pictured his mother suffering for what he had brought upon her, and on account of his own thoughtlessness. She had trusted him, and had not even suspected the trick by which he had caused her to break her vow. True, he had really believed that at the New Year season this oath need not be kept, but this did not alter the fact that now she was in the lower regions under torture.

But the boy felt he must not give way to idle grief. He must see if there was a way by which he might aid his mother. If she were starving, why could he not supply her with the means of life? He who had plenty would indeed be a wretched son if he did not share his food with her, he thought to himself.

There was at that time in the city of Fungtu an ancient temple which was connected with the caves of Tartarus—where the evil spirits

dwelt—by a long tunnel. Every one knew of this passageway, but no mortal had ever dared to enter it for fear of the direful fate which would await him at the other end, if he should be captured by the demons.

Kung-fu, however, was buoyed up by the great love he bore his mother and the thought of his own fault. He did not know the name of fear. No spirits could punish him, he reasoned, for trying to help his mother. They might prevent him from reaching her, but they would not harm him. If he failed the first time, he would try again. Thinking thus and planning for his venture, he boiled a quantity of rice; and placing this in an earthen jar, he set out on his grim undertaking.

He had no trouble in finding the temple, but had it not been for a letter his friend the priest had given him, he would not have gained admittance, for the building was not open at all hours. Once inside the walls, he begged the doorkeeper to point out the gates to the well-known tunnel, at the same time giving the old man a coin as the best sign of good will. The attendant, seeing that Kung-fu had an open face and an honest eye, led him down into a

dark cavern and there pointed out the rusty iron gates separating the outer from the inner world.

"Pray, my good sir," begged the young man, giving the keeper another copper, "kindly let me peep inside and see how it looks in this place of torment."

"No, no!" said the other in horror.

But Kung-fu was so insistent that he finally unbarred the gates. Without waiting for further permission, Kung-fu pulled open the creaking gate, leaped through the opening, and started down the paved incline which he knew would lead to his mother's dungeon. The attendant called after him in vain, but dared not follow him.

For an entire day he traveled in terrible darkness, not daring to light his torch on account of the pictures with which the walls were covered. He could not see them, yet he could feel these awful pictures of the punishments and tortures inflicted in the realm toward which he was journeying.

Finally, overcome by weariness, he stretched himself on the ground at the side of the road for a moment's rest. Sleep overtook him, and

for hours he lay there in the darkness. At last he was aroused by the sound of voices and laughter all about him, but he neither saw nor felt anything, and by the time he had struck a light, the cavern was once more as silent as the grave. Believing that he had been awakened from a nightmare, Kung-fu picked up his pot, ready to advance upon his mission, when he found to his dismay that the precious contents of the jar had disappeared. Not even a grain could he discover on the floor to mark the manner in which it had vanished. The voices and laughter had come from evil spirits who had waited for him to sleep in order to rob him of the precious food which he was carrying.

Kung-fu wasted no time in vain regrets. He resolved to try again, and he had no thought of giving up his efforts to reach his mother. At once he set out on the return way, forgetful of his own half-starved condition, in the thought of his mother's extreme peril.

He made his way in safety to the outer world, and a second time prepared the rice. Then he came again to the temple; but this time the keeper would not listen to his entreaties.

"Young man, you fooled me before, and I cannot permit you to enter," he replied.

Only by telling the bonze the entire wretched story could he prevail upon him to change his mind and open the doors to Tartarus again.

"When one loses his mother as you did," said the doorkeeper, relenting, "I cannot deny him anything. Go, and may the gods speed you in your mission."

Once more, then, did Kung-fu make his perilous journey through the cavern; but this time he would not permit himself even a minute's rest, for he feared that sleep might seal his eyelids and make him powerless in the presence of the demons.

Finally, at the very end of the passageway, he found further progress barred by a mighty wall of flames which roared and crackled so furiously that even the bravest of modern fire fighters would have stood aghast. But without a thought of the outcome, Kung-fu wrapped his mantle about his head and plunged head first into the seething billows, and in an instant found himself unhurt on the other side. Fearful lest his rice had been scorched by the excessive heat, he uncovered the dish to take a peep.

Immediately there was a whirr as if of many wings about his head and the same noise of hoarse laughter that he had heard on two previous occasions. Clapping the cover on the pot, he strove to save its contents. But, alas, his action was too late; the greedy spirits had made way with every morsel!

Undaunted by his second failure, Kung-fu stubbornly resolved to try once more. But he now saw that he must attain by strategy what he had been unable hitherto to do by mere pluck. The flames had vanished and he returned in safety. All the way back he stirred his wits to think of some method whereby he might get the better of the evil spirits who seemed determined to rob him. It was not long until a plan popped into his head, and now he felt sure he could outwit his enemies.

This time, instead of preparing the rice as previously, he stirred into the kettle other things such as dried dates, taro-roots, and peanuts, which, though clean and good, gave to the porridge a dirty appearance and made it seem unfit for food. Laughing at his clever ruse, he set out for the third time with a heart even lighter than on either of the other ventures.

KUNG-FU RAN THROUGH THE WALL OF FLAMES.

Now he had no trouble in gaining admittance to the temple. He made his way easily through the cavern, and a second time passed safely through the wall of fire. Again he uncovered his dish to examine its contents, and again he heard the uncanny laughter. But the strange voices seemed to speak in tones of disgust, and Kung-fu felt with thankful heart that they had been deceived by his unsavory looking mixture. Yes, it was all there in the little pot. He shut the lid tightly and sped on.

Soon Kung-fu found that the region was divided into ten sections, wherein all manner of horrors were being visited upon the poor prisoners. The shrieks of the victims almost deafened Kung-fu, and had it not been for his stout heart, he would have abandoned his undertaking even thus near his goal. Passing through three dreadful rooms, he came to the fourth region of Tartarus, and here he saw on the rocks over the entrance the following in letters of fire:

"*Within these walls starvation rules.*"

Here then, he felt certain, was the dungeon of his mother. He crossed the threshold. No one attempted to stay his progress, for the good-

ness and virtue of his action saved him from all danger which otherwise might have been encountered. Hundreds of wretched victims were lying about on every hand, writhing in the torture of starvation. Only enough food had been provided to keep them from dying, and thus escaping the clutches of their persecutors.

In the farthest corner of one of the side rooms Kung-fu at last beheld his mother, although he would not have recognized her, had she not called out to him faintly as he was passing. Bending over her poor emaciated form, he could scarcely believe his eyes as he saw how terribly thin she had become.

Without a word of explanation, he lifted her to a sitting posture and, seizing the spoon which he had brought, gently placed some of the porridge between her lips. And then, as in the twinkling of an eye, a blinding light so dazzled both of them with its brilliancy that for a moment neither could speak. There was a sudden rush of wind, as if they were being borne through space at a tremendous rate, by some superhuman force, and as the power of vision returned once more to their eyes, they

looked in amazement about them, for they were sitting in their own humble cottage!

A paper was lying on the table, on which these words were inscribed, "Inasmuch as you have been faithful, you have won your mother's pardon from the horrid haunts of Tartarus."

Kung-fu and his mother, now restored to health and life, clasped hands and knelt in happy gratitude to give thanks for their escape.

To celebrate the devotion of this son, and to show their children the beautiful results of loyalty to parents, we are told that ever since, throughout the Celestial Empire on the twenty-ninth day of the First Moon, many good Chinese partake of "filial porridge," a dark-looking but pleasant-tasting mess made according to the recipe of Kung-fu.

THE GODS KNOW

THE GODS KNOW

THE sacred horse was foaming at the mouth. "Good-for-nothing vagabond!" he exclaimed; "this is the second time in ten days that fellow has forgotten to give me my bean cake."

"Don't worry, kind sir," said a weazen-faced little girl who was peering through the bars; "you may have my bread, and perhaps that will keep you from being so hungry."

The sacred steed looked curiously at the midget who had addressed him thus boldly. She was holding out in a dirty little hand a very small piece of coarse corn pone. At first he sniffed the food suspiciously, then closed his jaws over the fragment and accepted the childish contribution to his bill of fare.

"Well, who are you?" he said finally, as he became conscious that the girl's dark eyes were still fixed upon him intently.

"Who am I?" she repeated, as if in doubt. "Why, truly I scarcely know. I live in a

near-by village. Some say I am the mason's child, others that I belong to the priest in the hill temple. Sometimes I believe that I am no man's daughter, and that I fell straight from the moon."

The child spoke so gravely that the horse could hardly help laughing in spite of himself. "But who takes care of you?" he continued when he had recovered his gravity.

"Me? Why, they all think I'm big enough to look out for myself; at least they say so. I've had to dig my own greens for two years now, and I am only nine."

"Poor child! then you really have no one to look after you, no place to sleep?"

"No place to sleep? Well, you certainly are funny. I can sleep anywhere night catches me, in the wheat-field, under the trees, in the temple if it rains. That's just the trouble: there are too many places. I get so lonely sometimes, I think I should like to die." Here a tear-drop trickled down the little girl's face.

"There, there, don't cry, my dear. Be a brave girl. Doubtless it has been very hard for you. And yet, do you know, I was just thinking how differently you and I feel about

this very freedom you enjoy. You speak of roaming about from place to place at will. Alas! I know nothing of that pleasure. I have been shut up in this temple court for fifteen years, and for what purpose? That a crowd of staring simpletons may gaze at me, believing I am sacred."

"Well, aren't you sacred?" questioned the child in wonder.

"Sacred! not half so much as you, my little one, who gave to me your crust of bread, nor half so wealthy. You have at your command the countless relishes of nature, a thousand glories that you may enjoy but for the looking, while I"—here he paused as if overcome by the poverty of his own condition—"while I am mured up here within this temple cell like any common prisoner."

"But are you not proud to have the people stare at you, and offer up their incense with your name upon their lips?" she questioned. "I should think you'd like it."

"I will not say that my head was not turned during the first few years of my captivity, for what young colt would not become conceited at the sight of people coming daily to offer him

their prayers, and bowing down before him as if he were a god? My vanity, however, was of short duration. I soon outgrew such silly notions, and began to chafe beneath my bondage. For a time I refused all food and thought of starving myself, but this seemed foolish. Any kind of life, even a donkey's, is better than none. Twice I tried to get away, but my efforts were of no avail; my jailers watched me far too hawkishly and there seemed to be no chance of escaping. Since then I have tried to be content, but with nothing beyond one's daily stipend of food to look for, there is little to make a fellow happy. And now that the attendant is getting careless about feeding me, I don't know what I shall be driven to. Why, do you know, the rascal actually cheats me, the sacred horse. He nibbles at my bean cake every time he cuts my portion, and it was only yesterday I saw him break off a great chunk to take home to his wife and children. Now that he has begun this sort of thing, I really don't see what I am coming to."

"Yes, but even if he does rob you of a trifle, you still have more to eat, far more than we poor people. Why, I should be happy indeed

to get in three days as much as they give you at a single feeding."

The horse pondered this remark for a moment, then looked straight into the eyes of his visitor. "If you really do envy me my lot, how should you like to change places? Oh, no, I don't mean that you must become a horse and I a girl," he added, smiling at her look of wonder. "That would be very sad for you. It is a much simpler matter than that. All you have to do is to come here to-night, unbar my gate, and let me out. Then you walk in, take my place, and fasten the door again. I get away from the neighborhood as fast as my stiff limbs will carry me, strike out into the world in search of the adventures that have been denied me for so long; while you, who thought it would be fine fun to have the people worship and feed you the way they do me, will have the chance to see how it feels."

"But won't they say I turned you loose?" asked the girl, amazed at his plan. "Won't they beat me, even kill me for letting you go, and pretending to be sacred?"

"Oh, no, not at all; you are every bit as sacred as I am, and when they see you instead

of me, they'll just call it another wonder of the gods. No telling what they'll do in honor of you. They'll call you a goddess. You're quite sure there's no one in this place that knows you?"

"Not a soul. I've never been outside of Lan T'an until last night, and that must be twenty *li* away. But do you think the people will really worship me, a little beggar girl?"

"Think it? Why, I know it. You just wait and see. Now what do you say?"

"I agree," she answered breathlessly, as if she feared he would withdraw the offer. "When do you wish me to come? I can be here at any hour you name."

"Then say we make it eleven. That will enable me to get far beyond this valley before daylight into a place where the people won't recognize me as the sacred horse. It would be rather inconvenient if they should all be trying to bring me back again just as I had escaped."

That night soon after the moon had risen, the little girl hurried through the temple enclosure and made her way to the stall of the sacred horse. Without a thought of fear, she

approached the dark corner of the court, caring nothing for the hideous grinning idols that glared out at her from every corner. As she came up, the horse was peering into the darkness, and greeted her with a friendly neigh. "It is you, and in good season. I was afraid you would oversleep, or perhaps that you would back out altogether after it grew dark."

"No, indeed; only there's one thing I must not forget to ask you. What must I say if the priests and people who find me here ask any questions?"

"Simply say, 'The gods know.' Then be silent and look wise. If they repeat the question, repeat the answer. Soon they will acknowledge you as a fairy or a goddess sent from heaven, and provide you with elegant quarters, for they will feel sure that their honorable sacred horse has been transformed into another and a higher form of virtue. The elegant silk cloths and drapery which you will find here in this chest are my vestments provided for state occasions. I shall deed them all to you. Drape them about your body in the best manner possible so as to hide your beggar rags, and they will add much to your appearance."

"Oh, you are so thoughtful!" murmured the little girl gratefully, as she drew back the bars. "There now, you are free to go whithersoever you like. Only wherever you may go, always remember there is one friend who will care for you and think of you often. If ever you grow weary of your wandering, be sure to come back where I may give you comfort."

The girl threw her arms about the horse's neck, and then stroked him gently. This was her farewell to the only being who had ever befriended her. The animal looked at her wistfully for an instant, then giving a good-bye whinny, trotted through the arched gateway of the temple court. The girl closed the opening, then returned to the sacred stall, went inside and let fall the bars. In one corner she found the vestments which had been described to her. There were coverings of the softest silks, and it did not take her long to deck herself in queenly raiment, so that no one would ever have recognized in her the beggar of the day before. Now she lay down in slumber, dreaming sweet dreams of the morrow when men should come to worship at her shrine.

A few hours after midnight two dark forms crept stealthily into the court, and, groping their way in the shadow of the building, approached the very room in which the child was sleeping. With a start she awoke and heard the sound of gruff voices talking in low tones just outside the bars.

"Idiot! what do you care if it is sacred? What's a sacred horse, to make him better than any other animal? The question is, can he travel? That's all we want to know. Men that have broken into the mandarin's house and stolen his costliest treasures mustn't be particular about what kind of beasts they take to get away on. Now this stuff is heavy. You and I can't keep up the pace and pack it between us for many miles. Sling it on this nag, and we'll make double time all the way out of the valley, until we get beyond the reach of danger."

"But, suppose the horse *is* sacred, what'll happen to us? I'm just afraid it may ruin the whole business. I've been against this plan of yours from the start."

"Don't be a coward, Wu. One thing is sure, the horse can't tell on us, even if he is holy; and

if we take him out of here for a little tear through the country, it will be good for his lazy old hide, and who'll know the difference?"

At that moment a tiny form, all clad in the most beautiful of raiment, arose from the dark shadow in which she had been lying, and advanced to the bars not two feet from the spot where the men were talking of their booty.

"Yes, who'll know the difference?" said the first speaker, repeating his question with a stamp of his foot.

"The gods know," came the answer, clear as a voice from heaven itself, and turning, the terror-stricken men saw the fair face of one who seemed to their startled eyes like some divine spirit of goodness looking into their very hearts. With a cry of dismay, and trembling at every joint, the two thieves dropped their plunder and fled in mortal terror from the scene.

The little girl, laughing, in spite of her former tremor, at the stampede she had caused, opened the bars and with much tugging managed to drag in the heavy bag of treasures which the midnight marauders had so hastily deserted. One by one she lifted out the precious objects,—costly censers, golden candlesticks, and

ornaments of choicest ivory. These she ranged before her in the moonlight, gazing in amazement at beauty and splendor such as she had never dreamed of. Was the mandarin a god, she asked herself, that he could have in his house such an array of heavenly possessions?

As the child looked in a daze at the wealth spread out around her, once more her eyelids drooped, and she fell in a little heap upon the floor.

When she next awoke, the sun was shining brightly, and behold, the court was a-swarm with people. In the front of the throng, looking in wonder through the bars, was the mandarin himself, clad in all the splendor of his rank and office. Behind him was a company of soldiers dressed in military uniform. The child, though startled at so unexpected an awakening, remained silent. The great man looked at her and then at the stolen treasure on the ground. At first he was too bewildered for utterance. Then, as he regained his voice, he asked her, "Where did you come from, my child?"

"The gods know," she replied, remembering well the instructions of the horse. All who

heard her marveled at her words and the radiance of her face.

"But where is the sacred horse?" he continued after a slight pause, in which he seemed to be weighing well the words that she had uttered.

"The gods know," and she looked the official full in the eye.

At this repetition of her first mysterious answer, the faces of the soldiers blanched, and many a man in that assembly fell upon his knees in superstitious awe. "She is a goddess," they began to whisper.

"And these treasures," said the mandarin, pointing to the stolen ornaments, "they were taken from my house last night. The thieves were tracked to this temple yard. How did these things come into your possession?"

"The gods know," replied the little girl for the third time, and the other's face fell before her penetrating look.

"Aye, verily," he cried, "the gods indeed know everything, and this thing must be a miracle that they have worked."

Then straightway he and all his followers sank upon their knees and pressed their foreheads

reverently to the soil before the girl within the horse's stall.

When it became noised abroad that the sacred steed, which had so long been worshiped in the temple, had in an instant been transformed into a little goddess before whose presence bad men quailed and gave up their evil, every one was startled. Men came from all quarters to look upon the wonderful creature sent from heaven to bless mankind.

"She is the Goddess of the Bereft," they said in their enthusiasm. "When thieves enter in and steal, the losers have only to make petition to this new immortal, and what they have lost will be returned."

Soon, under the lead of the mandarin, who had been the first to benefit by the little girl's sudden appearance, a great sum of money was collected that they might erect a suitable dwelling for so desirable a goddess. A beautiful plot of ground was selected, and handsome buildings were constructed in a style so lovely that the little girl was overwhelmed with her good fortune and fairly wept for joy.

"Oh, if the good horse were only here now to share with me my splendor!" she said to herself.

Every day great numbers of worshipers came to look upon the child, and when they beheld her, they fell down and kotowed to the ground.

Ten years passed by, ten years of comfort and enjoyment, and yet the little girl, now grown to womanhood, was far from happy; for in spite of the reverence in which she was held by mortals she felt a deep longing for a friendship which was lacking in her present existence. One night as she was walking all alone within her inner garden, she was aroused from her moonlight revery by the sudden approach of a servant.

"Most illustrious lady," began the attendant, "a strange thing is happening at the outer gate, which I thought, perhaps, you might be interested in hearing of."

"Pray tell me all," she answered.

"One hour ago the porter was called forth from supper by a strange rattling at the gate. On opening, he found an old white horse, riderless, and without trappings, apparently trying to enter. He drove the beast away, and was just sitting down to his meal again, when the knocking was repeated. Again he frightened off the intruder. The strange thing is, the

more he beats the horse, the more determined it is to come back."

"Then, let him enter," said the maiden, with an imperative wave of her hand. "Not even an animal shall be denied admittance to my presence."

The servant withdrew, and in a short time reappeared, leading by the mane a white horse that limped his way along, apparently in the last stages of decaying vigor.

The girl dismissed the attendant, and then turned to her old friend, whom she had recognized immediately although he had lost somewhat of that noble bearing for which he had been distinguished during his stay within the temple.

"Dear sacred horse, is it indeed you?" she faltered, "you to whom I owe all my present luxury?"

"Yes, it is I," he answered in a low voice, "and I have come to beg a humble corner in your stables, that I may spend my dying days beside the one mistress whom I adore, and who, I know, will treat me with compassion."

"But did you not enjoy the liberty you craved so much?" she asked him gently.

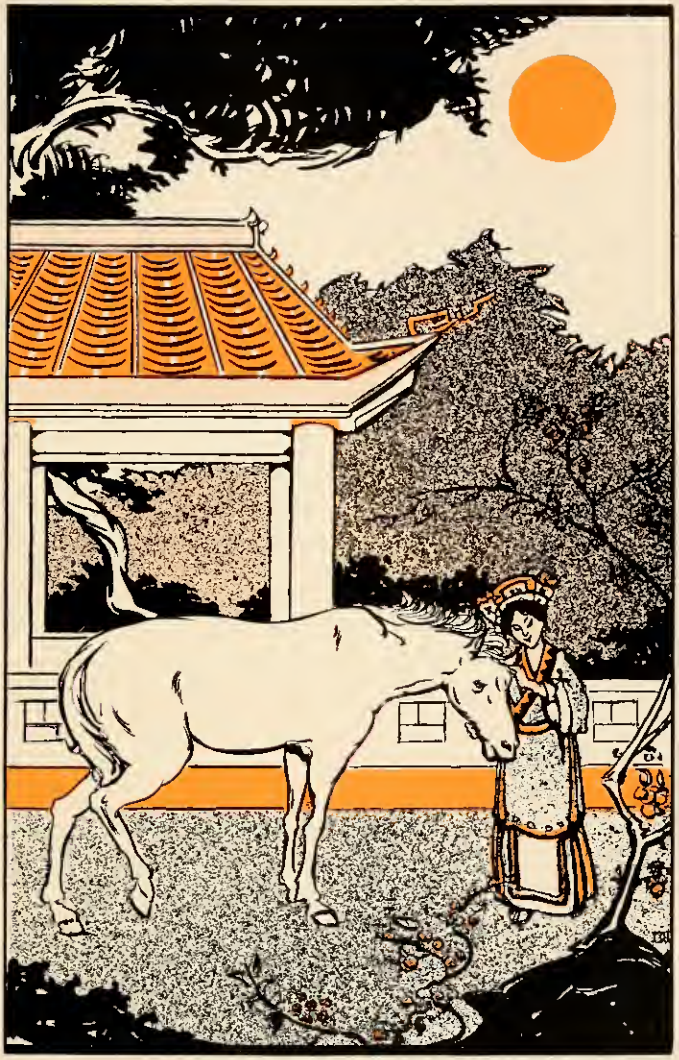
"Nay, for liberty is nothing without friendship, and friendship nothing without love. When I reigned as sacred horse in yonder temple, all men called me master, for they believed me holy; when I was free to leave and travel at my will, I straightway lost this sacred title, and lo, from being master unto every man, instead, each man I saw became my lord. In neither life did I enjoy the charms of friendship. You alone seem willing to give me that which I desire. Thus I have returned to crave your protection and to die."

Once more the girl threw her arms about the neck of the faithful steed. She laid her head against his neck, while tears of sympathy began to trickle down her fair cheeks.

The horse looked at her in silence. "And can it be," he said finally, "that you who live within this palace, surrounded by every luxury, —can it be that you too are unhappy?"

"The gods know," was her answer.

As the maiden spoke these fateful words which brought back memories of the long ago, she closed her eyes and tried to shut out the ugly vision which sprang up before her. Alas! it was too true, she found herself unhappy.



"I HAVE COME TO BEG A CORNER IN YOUR STABLES."

Suddenly a delicious thrill shot through her being. The aching heart within her breast beat faster, and, looking up, she saw that the sacred horse had vanished, while her own fair arms were twined about the neck of a man whose handsome youthful features were worthy of a prince's face. With a cry of joy, she nestled within his arms.

"Ah, my loved one!" he whispered, "did I not say that liberty is nothing without friendship, and friendship nothing without love? Are you not happy now, my darling, happier than you've ever been before?"

"The gods know."

"Yes," he added, his voice made deep with holy passion, "the gods know!"

LO-SUN, THE BLIND BOY

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LO-SUN was a blind boy and, like many others thus afflicted in China, he had no home, for his hard-hearted parents had driven him forth to beg his living. From morning till night he wandered along the city streets and country lanes, always carrying with him a blind man's staff. With the help of this stick he seldom missed his footing, and he learned to go from one part of the city to another, and to find his way around in the near-by villages very well.

Lo-sun had one companion, a faithful dog named Fan, who helped him to many a stray copper. Whenever the little master snapped his fingers three times, the well-trained animal went down at once upon her knees and touched her head to the ground, thus making what is called in China a kotow, or mark of respect. So pleased were many passers-by with this polite trick on the part of a dog, that they often paused to hand the blind lad a bit of money.

After a time he made many friends in the city, and not a few men spoke to him as he tapped his way about the narrow streets.

One evening as Lo-sun and his dog were strolling along a country road they were overtaken by nightfall, and it became necessary for them to sleep out-of-doors. As this was nothing unusual for either, they had no fear, but at once began to search for a good spot in which to make their bed. It did not take Fan long to discover a large, leafy tree under which they might rest in comfort. She barked the good news to her master, who understood several words of the dog language, and led him to the haven of rest. Soon curled up together like two kittens, the tired pair fell fast asleep.

In the night Lo-sun had a strange dream. Some one addressed him softly, saying, "Lo-sun, Lo-sun, do you see me?"

"Alas!" answered the boy sadly, "I am blind."

"My poor little fellow, that is indeed a sore affliction, but perhaps I may be of some service to you."

"Oh," said Lo-sun, his face brightening, "kind sir, can you, will you restore my sight?"

"No, my lad, I will not, but I shall make it possible for you to do it for yourself. Heed well what I say and then become your own healer. Henceforth each time you do a good action, no matter how small it may be, a little light shall enter your poor blind eyes. As the deeds of virtue multiply, greater and greater shall be the change which you will notice, until at last, the scales that have hindered you from seeing shall fall off completely and your sight be entirely restored. But, mark well my words. If, instead of doing deeds of kindness and of love, you should so far forget my promise as to soil your heart by a bad act, then shall your eyes be sealed the tighter and you shall lose twice as much as you are allowed to profit by a deed of virtue."

The strange voice was silent, and Lo-sun, with a start, awoke from his slumber. The sun was shining in his face, and the whole world seemed brighter than it had ever been before. Fan also seemed happy, and licked her little master's hand in silent sympathy.

"Shall we do it, Fan?" asked Lo-sun, speaking as if Fan had heard and understood the dream words as well as he.

The dog barked joyously at hearing her master's voice.

"All right, if you agree, I think I can get back my eyesight. You know I can't do much without your help, old fellow." Lo-sun threw his arms about the great dog's shaggy neck and hugged her in a tight embrace.

The two then set out for the city, and Lo-sun could think of nothing but the words of the good fairy in the dream. Oh, if he might only have back his eyesight, how happy he would be! He would like to show the cruel father who had cast him out of house and home that he would amount to something in the world, that he would rise above the lowly station which his parents occupied. Just outside the city wall, as he was about to enter by the large gate, he came near stumbling over an old beggar who was lying at the side of the road.

"Give a poor blind man a penny," mumbled the pauper; "for the love of mercy, do not pass me by."

"But we are both in the same boat, my friend," laughed Lo-sun, "for I too am blind."

"Alas! kind youth, I am much more unfortunate than you; I am a cripple also."

With a cry of sympathy, and with no thought of the fairy's promise, Lo-sun drew out the only coin he had, a tiny bit of copper and handed it to the lame man, saying, "Take it; this is all I have."

Suddenly there seemed to come a flash of light before his eyes; the blackness that had so long robbed him of sight seemed to grow less dense.

"The dream was really true!" he exclaimed joyfully, and the people who heard him thus talking to himself, thinking the lad crazy, drew their garments aside as he passed by. Never had Lo-sun been so light-hearted as he was that day. The whole world seemed to smile at him and fill his heart with summer.

That night he slept in the Beggars' Temple, an old tumble-down building just outside the North Gate, long since deserted by the priests, and given over by general consent for the use of homeless creatures who had no other place of shelter. In one corner lay an aged hag, weak from starvation. Lo-sun gave her willingly the stale bread which was to have served as his supper, and again to his surprise and delight noticed a faint glow which lightened up

his vision. But as a consequence, he and Fan were compelled to go to bed hungry.

Awakened early in the morning by the cravings of an empty stomach, the blind boy set out along the dusty highway. It was yet too soon for travelers, and he was still puzzling his brains as to how he should satisfy his hunger when Fan solved the question by running down a fat hen which chanced to cross her pathway. Here was luck for a blind boy! No one in the neighborhood, apparently, not even the sound of a distant cart-wheel! Lo-sun took the hen from the dog's mouth, and as the animal barked in noisy joy, praised her for showing such ability as a hunter. In twenty minutes he was at the market place by the river, where he had very little trouble in selling his fowl at a good price.

No sooner, however, had the money been counted into his hands than the lad felt a dark veil descend over his eyes. The reward he had received for his two good deeds was thus in a moment snatched away, and he found his condition the same as when he had left the tree under which the dream had come to him.

Lo-sun was not easily discouraged. Readily

admitting the wrong of which he had been guilty, he resolved to retrace his steps and find the owner of the stolen hen. Throughout that whole day he trudged up and down the highway which passed by the Beggars' Temple, vainly inquiring of every passer-by if he knew of any one who had lost a fowl. By evening his little legs were weary, and his face, usually sunny, was covered with a veil of dust. The pangs of hunger which had annoyed him at daybreak now made him ravenous, yet sturdily he resisted the temptation to spend the ill-gotten gains. The next morning when he awoke he found to his great delight that his eyesight had improved once more as by magic. Evidently his sincere sorrow for wrong-doing had not been without avail.

For a number of weeks by a succession of good deeds Lo-sun advanced so rapidly on his journey toward the goal of restored sight, that at last he could tell when some one was coming toward him in the road, not only by hearing, but by the actual power of vision, and he even fancied he could distinguish the glory of the sunset. When he had reached this stage in his healing he was overjoyed, and at once resolved

to save every cent possible, to supply himself with the glasses which he had been told people with weak eyesight sometimes wore.

But one day he again met the old lame man to whom he had once given his last money.

"Alas! I have nothing," said he to the latter's plea, although he was now quite well supplied with coppers, "nothing that I can give you."

"But I am starving," implored the beggar.

"I too," answered Lo-sun.

A sudden twitch, a darkening shadow, and lo! the glory of the sunlight was denied him. Now Lo-sun was in despair. He had tried, oh, so hard, to lead a sinless life! He had denied himself many things. And for what reward?

"As fast as I gain," he reflected bitterly, "I lose, and thus go backward." He was discouraged. What could a blind boy do in China, a country where there are no schools for the afflicted, where those thus suffering are cast out upon the street?

Angry with the world, his neighbors, the evil fortune that had placed him at so great a disadvantage, he made his way finally to the bank of a roaring river. It was the rainy season,

and a vast torrent of angry waters was rushing down a channel which usually was calm. He sat down on the bank of the noisy stream and pictured himself as a stick swept along by the raging flood, sometimes cast high upon the shore, and then again, as the level of the waters rose, picked up and dashed onward. Was not the only real friend he had in all the world a faithful dog? And do the best she might, what could such an ally do to bring her master back the visual powers denied him by the gods? Without sight, he could not hope to strive among men for money and position.

"Poor Fan!" he cried, "you do all for me that you can, and yet you cannot save me." The grateful animal licked her master's face. "You are all that I have; nothing shall ever separate us, for without you I should die."

Just at this moment a cry was raised along the river, "A man is drowning! See! within the rapids. His boat is capsized; he cannot swim!"

From all directions came the rush of hurrying footsteps. A crowd of excited people gathered in an instant. All were looking curiously at the struggling man, and yet no man dared to lift a hand of rescue.

"See! he is losing strength," they shouted. "His boat is swept away, and with it his last chance of reaching shore. Soon he will go down for the last time!"

The blind boy listened to the uproar with a sense of sadness in his heart. How could this crowd of strong men stand by and make no effort to save another from perishing before their very eyes? If he were only in their position, how quickly would he leap to the rescue, how quickly would he show the others they were cowards!

Suddenly his breast thrilled with emotion. Would it be possible? Yes, he would undertake it,—he the blind boy would try to do what all those heartless people were failing to perform.

"Fan can do it!" he shouted wildly, springing to his feet. "My dog will save him!"

"Stop!" said one of the bystanders who had seen the boy on several occasions, and who out of sympathy for him wished to do him a friendly turn. "Stop! it is too late. You will only lose your dog, and do no good. Let the fellow drown; he is only a worthless beggar."

"That's all I am," was Lo-sun's quick reply, "and like helps like, you know."

Quick as a wink he seized his dog by the neck and dragged her to the brink of the stream. "Fetch, Fan, fetch!" he shouted, as he pushed her into the torrent.

With a bark of intelligence, the animal seemed to take in the situation at a glance, and struck out with powerful strokes toward the struggler. The excitement on the bank grew intense. "It is too late," they said. "The man can't hold out a minute longer, and the dog will never reach him."

Never had Lo-sun felt the need of sight so keenly as at that moment when his one friend was in danger of being swept away from him forever. In his mind's eye he seemed to see the whole picture.

A shout from the idlers at last told him plainly that the swimmer had seen the effort being made in his behalf, and was redoubling his own attempts to hold up until the dog had reached him. Nearer and nearer Fan fought her way through the foaming whitecaps. Her master had commanded; it was hers but to obey. With acute foresight did she make allowance for the distance which the swimmer would be carried down-stream before she could

reach him, and the crowd on shore shouted wildly as they saw the noble animal close her teeth in his ragged garments just as he was sinking. Now came the most heroic struggle of the dog's existence, a fight against the elements for her own life and that of him whom she had seized. Back she struggled, her great eyes fixed upon her master, who all the while running along the river bank with the crowd, was madly cheering her on to victory.

At length a man on shore, who was carrying a boat-hook, was able to fix the barb in the drowning man's clothing. The dog, seeing that her life-saving work was over, released her hold, and the half-drowned beggar was drawn in to a place of safety. But, alas! poor Fan! At that very moment an undercurrent caught her and dragged her down. She was too weak to struggle and sank at once.

The cry of the crowd told the boy of this sad fate, and with a moan of anguish, Lo-sun fell upon the sand and buried his face in the dirt. The curious onlookers eyed the grief-stricken little boy for a few moments, and then as the night began to fall, one by one departed.

When morning dawned and Lo-sun awoke,

there was no devoted friend to lick his hands and bark his joyous welcome back to wakefulness. But to his astonishment, as he raised his head, his eyes were dazzled with a glorious light. He looked around and saw the things about him, was able to distinguish the outlines of the river, the willows fringing the banks, and behind, the walls of the city. True, he could not take in the smaller objects, but oh, how delightful it was to see these marvelous sights that had for so long a time been denied him. As he pondered the wonder of it all, he knew full well that his willing sacrifice of Fan for the drowning beggar had given him this priceless blessing.

As Lo-sun thus sat upon the ground rejoicing in his new strength, he saw a man coming toward him. He could see the figure of the man, but not his features. Closer and closer came the stranger, until at last he was standing directly over the boy.

"My lad, it was you who saved my life yesterday."

Lo-sun looked up eagerly, trying to make out the features of the one for whom he had lost his all.

"What! is it you?" exclaimed the other. "Is it Lo-sun, the boy whom I turned out from house and home?"

With a moan of bitterness, Lo-sun covered his face with his hands. So it was his father, the man whom he had hated for his cruelty—his father for whom he had given up his faithful dog! Angry words welled up within his breast, and in another minute he would have cursed the man who had mistreated him so shamefully. But just then a soft voice warned him and stretching out his hands, he said, "Father, I forgive you."

The man, touched to the quick by what had happened, clasped the little fellow in his arms and held him tightly to his breast. "The gods be merciful!" he cried, "for I have sinned most foully. My son, my son, I cast thee off, and lo! thou hast been the one to save my life."

And as Lo-sun returned his father's embrace, the last scale fell from his eyes, and he looked freely out upon the whole beautiful world.

SING LI'S FORTUNE

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SING LI was a good boy. Ever since his father's death he had served his mother faithfully. Always obedient, always gentle, always diligent, never lacking for a cheery word or smile, he did not fail to win the golden opinion of all who knew him. Throughout the village where he lived parents were continually pointing him out to their sons as a model of all that a boy should strive to be. No wonder his mother was proud of him and never tired of singing his praises.

On the afternoon of his eighteenth birthday, Sing Li's mother called him in from the little garden where he was working, and bade him sit down for a few minutes at her side, in order that they might drink a cup of tea together and talk a while about his future.

"My son," she said, looking at him with a loving smile, "thanks to the manly help which you have given, we no longer fear the pangs of hunger or the cold of winter. Your strong arms

and willing heart have more than made up for all my early trials. To-day is your birthday; you are now eighteen—a man grown—and as a sign of thanksgiving for the filial love that you have shown me, I wish to make you happy."

Sing Li looked with wonder into his mother's face. He could not imagine what she was going to tell him, and his heart beat a trifle faster.

"As a reward for your virtue," she continued, "I have decided to let you choose your own wife. Most Chinese parents, as you know, do not consult their children in such affairs. They are too young to know their own minds, so we choose for them. But you are wise beyond your years. So if you know of some girl you would like to wed, name her, and I shall do all in my power to satisfy you. It is time for a younger woman to enter our household and take some of its cares upon her more sturdy shoulders. On your nineteenth birthday, one year from this very moment, I wish to have your wedding."

Sing Li was indeed rejoiced at his mother's words. For several moons his heart had been attracted to a pretty maiden of a neighboring hamlet. Many times he had seen her drawing

water at a public well, and had noticed her pretty face and graceful actions. But he had refrained from telling his mother, for fear she would think he had done wrong to fall in love with one to whom he had not been married. Strange to say, in China it is not the custom for a man even to see his betrothed until she has come into his house as his wife. After that, if the two happen to fall in love with each other, no one can criticize.

"My dear mother," said Sing Li at last, "your words have caused me greater happiness than the sun can give the harvests; the music of your speech is sweeter than the flowers of spring time. You have guessed the secret of my heart and instead of scolding me you offer to help me."

"What! have you picked your mate already?" laughed the delighted woman. "Well, I am not sorry, for at nineteen you will be far better prepared to take a wife than some men are at ninety. Confide in me, and I shall do my best to carry out your wishes."

Hesitating no longer, Sing Li emptied his heart before his mother. The devoted woman was rejoiced at the description of his sweetheart,

and lost no time in calling in a friend to act as go-between and arrange if possible for the match. All went smoothly, and very soon feasts were held in honor of Sing Li's engagement to the prettiest girl in Mo Li T'an.

Eleven months passed by as in a dream, eleven months of joyful waiting. Sing Li went about his labor happy and contented in the thought of his good fortune. In his odd moments he added a little room to his mother's cottage, and set out climbing plants below the window, in the hope that the flowers would please his bride.

"If you will be as good after you are married, Sing Li, as you have been thus far, your wife will have nothing to fear from her husband," said his mother laughing.

One day Sing Li was in a neighboring city doing some errands. He had nearly finished his business, and was almost ready to start for home, when his attention was attracted to a fortune-teller around whom a crowd had collected near a temple. The old fellow was amusing the throng by the curious things which he was predicting. As Sing Li paused on the outside of the circle of listeners, the seer,

guessing at once that he was a stranger in the city, called out to him and bade him come closer. The crowd made way for him at once, and with a careless laugh he presented himself before the man and paid his trifling fee.

The fortune-teller suddenly grew grave as he looked into the young man's face. He stroked his beard for a moment as if reflecting, and there seemed to come over his features a look of sorrow and compassion.

"What is it?" questioned Sing Li breathlessly, as he noticed the other's hesitation. "Speak out what you have to tell me. I am afraid of nothing."

"Alas!" replied the fortune-teller, "I am exceeding loath to tell you, for I see quite plainly that you are condemned to die."

"Likewise are you and all these others," laughed Sing Li, pointing to those around him, although he could not keep back a shudder at the man's words.

"Young man, this is no jesting matter. On the day when you reach the age you see written here upon this paper, the gods will claim your spirit and you can no longer live on earth." So saying, he drew forth a piece of yellow paper,

and handing it to Sing Li, pointed out some characters inscribed thereon.

Sing Li grasped the bit of writing, his hand trembling in spite of all his efforts to remain calm. He could scarcely believe his eyes. The number written was XIX. It was foretold that he would die on his nineteenth birthday!

"But that is my wedding day, old master!" he cried. "Is there no mistake in what you have prophesied?"

"None whatever," replied the other solemnly. "What is written by the hand of fate, no human will can alter."

"But in that case I have only one week of life remaining!" said the unhappy Sing Li; "but one more week to live!"

"Then you had best go home at once, arrange your last affairs, and tell your friends good-bye."

"My poor, poor mother!" moaned Sing Li, as he elbowed his way through the staring crowd of strangers. "What will become of her?"

When Sing Li returned home that night his mother saw at once that something ill had happened, but for some time she could not prevail upon him to disclose the cause of his suffering.

He refused to eat the evening meal which she had cooked, but sat with bowed head.

When at last his mother persuaded him to tell her the whole pitiful story, she was so crushed by the dreadful news that nothing could soothe her. For two days she would taste no food, and at night she tossed upon her bed and could not sleep.

Soon the news of Sing Li's coming death was spread about the village, and the friends and relatives flocked in at all hours of the day to hear the sad story. They shook their heads when he told them the details of his meeting with the fortune-teller, and of how death was to claim him as a bridegroom on the very day appointed for his wedding.

One wrinkled crone on leaving gave it as her judgment that the coming affliction was a punishment of the gods because Sing Li's mother had allowed him to select his own bride, instead of choosing one for him as was customary.

Although his mother did not by any means believe this, it caused her to cease her idle lamenting and to gather her scattered wits together. If she had been the innocent cause of Sing Li's trouble, she must take steps immedi-

ately to save him. She now urged her boy to return to the city, seek out the prophet, and ply him with questions, thinking that thereby he might find some way to save himself.

Sing Li did so, and after some search again came face to face with the soothsayer. The old man, recognizing him at once, greeted him with a sad smile. He listened attentively to the eager questions asked him, and after a short pause answered, "My lad, there is but one chance left you. Rise early to-morrow morning and set out for the top of yonder peak. Carry with you a dish of venison and a flask of old wine. When you have reached the summit of the mountain, you will find two aged men engaged in playing chess. Place your offering of food beside them, but on no account disturb them at their game. When they have finished, approach and lay before them your petitions. If they will do nothing for you, you are doomed."

After thanking his instructor Sing Li departed, his heart thumping fast at the thought that there was still a hope of deliverance.

Before dawn on the following morning, just one day before the time appointed for his doom,

he started on his journey. For hours he toiled wearily up the steep path. It seemed as if he would never reach the top. At last when he was on the point of falling from exhaustion, he passed round a giant boulder and found himself standing on the brow of the mountain. There, as the fortune-teller had said, he found two very ancient looking men playing chess.

Sing Li stepped up on tiptoe, set down his meat and drink beside them, and then silently observed the players. Both were old and gray, but one was open-faced and joyous, while the other had a dark scowl that made him look as if he cherished nothing but ill-will for all men. They sat silent and absorbed and did not so much as glance in his direction. The game was drawing to a close, and Sing Li's eyes followed the moves of each contestant with a strange fascination. Chess had been the one diversion of his boyhood, and the skill which he had acquired was known to all his friends.

Suddenly with a gruff laugh, the dark looking man advanced his queen, calling out triumphantly, "It's checkmate in three moves!"

The opponent smiled, saying, "Yes, I've been expecting it for some time. The game has

made me nervous." He now started to sweep the remaining men from the board.

Without stopping to think, Sing Li, who had noticed a way by which the kindly old man might avoid defeat, cried out excitedly, "Good sir, pray advance your one remaining pawn, and you may force a draw!"

The players looked, first in astonishment at the bold intruder, and then at the chessboard.

"Quite right, young man, your eyes and wits are keen of vision," said the one, "but I fear you did wrong to tell me."

"Oh, it's all right," snarled his companion. "I'm tired of winning all the time anyhow. Hey! what's this? Food and drink! Come in good time, my lad, come in good time! Now I can forgive you easily for sticking your spoon into another man's broth."

The aged men fell to eating. They quaffed the wine right merrily and made sport over their unexpected feast, now and then talking over the points of the game which they had just been playing. Between mouthfuls the dark-faced patriarch poked fun at his companion for allowing a mere lad to instruct him in the game of games.

SING-LI FOUND TWO ANCIENT-LOOKING MEN PLAYING CHESS.

When they had finished dining, they turned toward Sing Li as if awaiting his story; they seemed to know that he had come to them for guidance.

"Venerable teachers," began the boy, his voice a-tremble with emotion, "I have been directed to your august presence by the finger of destiny. It is not the winning of a game of chess that I am seeking, but the saving of my life from the dread hand of death, for I am doomed to die upon the morrow."

"What is your name?" said one of them, drawing out a huge volume of records.

Sing Li made known his name and village.

"Aye, it is indeed true. Your death is appointed for the morrow," they said in unison, after tracing out the characters upon the page, "for thus you are to celebrate your nineteenth birthday."

Sing Li shuddered: it would be a sorry celebration. Then he told them of his home and his mother, of the prospective wedding, and of his fateful journey to the city. When he informed them of the fortune-teller's prediction, the elder interrupted him saying, "The seer did wrong to tell you. Such things as are ruled

over by the gods are not to be unfolded to the ears of men. Let us see the paper of which you speak."

Sing Li drew forth that which the fortune-teller had given him, and the sages examined it closely.

"Hark you, young man," said the one to whom Sing Li had dared give advice about chess-playing. "I like your fearless manner. You are honest and straightforward. Without knowing it, you have done to-day that which few men would care to try. Know you who we are?"

Sing Li shook his head in dismay, too much embarrassed to speak.

"Then learn that we are none other than South Measure and North Measure, the Gods of Life and Death."

The old god laughed heartily at Sing Li's awestruck expression. "Now as a slight return for the favor you have done me this afternoon, in preventing my friend here from winning his last game, I am willing and ready to save you from an early grave."

"And I," said the other divinity with a heavy burst of laughter, "as a slight return for

the favor you have done me this afternoon in helping to check the clamors of my stomach, even though you did prevent the checkmating of my comrade, am also willing to aid you."

Sing Li, who had sunk on his knees before the rulers of his destiny, was knocking his forehead to the ground in sign of adoration, when his new friends bade him rise and see what they were doing. This he did at once. The aged men had spread out the fatal paper on a flat stone.

"Behold," said the jovial-faced God of Life, "here where you see the number XIX written, signifying that when you arrive at that age you must die, we shall insert another letter, making the number XCIX instead. Live then to a ripe old age, remembering always to advance along the highways of life, honoring your elders and spreading kindnesses wherever you may go."

Sing Li put the precious sheet in his bosom, and, turning to thank his deliverers, found that they had vanished.

With a heart full of thanksgiving, he started down the mountain to find his loving mother and expectant bride.

FAIRY OLD BOY AND THE TIGER

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MANY centuries ago, in the province of Honan, a boy was born who—the old stories say—was different from any other boy that ever lived. When his parents first beheld him, they were amazed to see that he had the features of an old man. His wrinkled skin was yellow as with age, his scanty hair was the color of snow, and his teeth were crooked and ugly.

After the first gasp of astonishment his father ran out and called the neighbors in to see this prodigy. They were no less surprised than he; but their first feeling was as nothing compared with their amazement when the infant, an hour old, opened his lips solemnly and said in the best Chinese:

> "In heaven or earth, where'er you gaze,
> Wisdom alone is worth your praise."

Some of the neighbors cried out that the baby was a god. Others said he was a fairy.

His parents did not know what to make of him, but called him "Old Boy," on account of his odd looks. And Fairy Old Boy he was dubbed by all the countryside, and has been known by all the Chinese ever since.

As he grew up his appearance changed very little, for he was born as old as he could be. But the fame of his wisdom and good deeds spread continually. It is said that he lived for several centuries, and that when he died the secret of long life died with him.

We shall tell you one of the many curious stories told about him in China.

For many days a savage tiger had been laying waste an outlying province. His lair was in a mountain cave, and from there he was wont to descend swiftly and silently at eventide to fall, perhaps, upon a defenseless flock of sheep. He would not content himself with slaying one or two for his meal, but struck wantonly right and left, seeming to delight in the bloodshed.

Swiftly his lithe body moved through the jungle, noiseless as a shadow he sought his nightly lair. His greenish eyes glowed savagely at the memory of his crouching victims.

Full well did he prove his right to the name which the villagers and countrymen for miles about had given him, Shanwang, king of the mountains. Yes, they might well call him the "destroyer," or the "king of blood."

In this manner, Shanwang worked havoc throughout that entire region. There was no household that did not suffer before his swift and cruel power. Goats, cattle, and even human beings fell into his clutches, and so great was the destruction he wrought among the people that they offered incense to the gods and prayed to heaven for protection from his death-dealing visits. The county mandarin publicly announced a rich reward for the man who would make way with the pest of the community. Hunting parties were organized, but not one man in the entire valley owned a weapon fit to cope with the giant tiger, and there was not one who could devise a plan for killing him. Again and again those who had gone forth boastful and full of hope returned to bear the taunts of their fellows on their failure to win the coveted prize. Several times the beast had been trailed to his retreat within the rocks. Skilled archers had lain in wait for

days at the entrance of his cavern, watching for the animal's departure, but all to no avail. It was evident that there was another, an unknown opening, through which he was able to elude his enemies.

At last a traveler in that region suggested that they call upon Fairy Old Boy to aid them in getting rid of their great enemy. He told them of the fairy's marvelous wisdom and good deeds. The suggestion was quickly seized upon, and a messenger from all the villages was sent to Old Boy, telling him of their perils and imploring his aid. He heard the story through, his face more puckered and solemn than ever. Then he said :

> "Return as quickly as you came ;
> Shanwang is not all to blame."

And he would not utter another word. The messenger, like everybody else, was mystified with Old Boy ; but as he returned his heart felt strangely light, and he told the anxious villagers he believed that the fairy would succor them.

But meanwhile the tiger ceased not to slay

and lay waste upon every side, until the herdsmen were in despair.

One day a dark cloud settled over the little valley. All believed it was going to rain. The vapor came nearer and nearer to the earth, until at last the very trees were enveloped in its damp embrace, while the houses were shrouded as with a huge veil. But just as the black shadow touched the ground, there came from its centre a burst of sunshine, and before the startled people who were watching appeared the odd figure of a funny little old man.

"It is the good fairy!" they exclaimed. "He has come to free us of our trouble."

"Yes, my dear people," answered Old Boy, for it was indeed he, "I have come to deliver you from your scourge. Trust me, and all shall go well with you."

The excited men and women crowded around their visitor, each one anxious to have a peep at the man who was known all over the kingdom as the wise fairy who loved to do good deeds.

Soon they had told him of their losses, explaining how they had tried in every way to rid themselves of Shanwang. Old Boy smiled as he heard their story. "You have done

well," said he at last, when they had ended, "but it is not surprising that you have failed. You do not understand Shanwang. This very day I shall go to the mountain and undertake to work in your behalf."

A great cheer arose from the assembly, for, having heard of Old Boy's well-known dislike for shedding blood, even though it was that of a wild beast, they had been fearful lest, perhaps, he might refuse to help them.

"Which of you, my friends," continued the speaker, "is willing to go with me on this dangerous mission? I shall need a guide to lead me to the tiger's lair and aid me in what I shall undertake."

Every man in the crowd eagerly agreed to go with Old Boy, for seeing how calmly the fairy viewed the situation, they were all assured of success. After selecting a stalwart young fellow named Wu, Old Boy asked the villagers to furnish him a newly weaned kid. This they did willingly, feeling sure that it would be used as a decoy in the attack upon the tiger.

A few hours later, when the fairy and Wu set out for the cavern, they were followed for some distance by a great number of people.

But to the astonishment of all, neither of the hunters was armed.

"What can it mean?" they asked. Wu was carrying the kid in his arms, while Old Boy had nothing but a torch. "I fear we shall never see them again. Old Shanwang ought to have an easy time."

"Hush, man! Don't you know that this man is a fairy?" said another.

At last Old Boy and Wu disappeared from sight. They made their way directly toward the tiger's den. In a short while they found themselves in a lofty cavern which was so well lighted by an overhead window in the natural stone that they had no need of their torch. The bones of sheep and cattle scattered over the ground gave the invaders a fair idea of the many feasts that Shanwang had enjoyed. In one corner was a sandy spot which the tiger apparently used as a bed. Here Old Boy directed Wu to place the kid upon the ground. The little animal curled up on the floor and was soon asleep, while Wu and the fairy hid in a dark crevice not far distant.

"The tiger will not smell us," said Old Boy; "the odor of the kid is our protection."

Several hours passed in silence. As Old Boy had told Wu none of his plans, the young man was completely in the dark as to what was happening. So far as he could see, both of them were now at the mercy of the wildest, most dangerous beast that had ever ranged the mountains. But when he noted the expression on his companion's face, he lost his sense of fear and calmly awaited the coming of the jungle king.

At last, feeling a slight pressure on his arm, he looked toward the passageway through which he and the fairy had entered. The huge cat stood before them, holding in his jaws a young deer. All at once, uttering a savage roar, the beast dropped his kill. He had caught the scent of the kid lying there asleep. With a snarl that sent a cold chill shooting down Wu's spinal column, he leaped to the centre of the cavern, and in another instant had discovered the helpless goat.

Bounding to its side, the great tiger seemed on the point of swallowing the timid visitor alive. Then a strange thing happened. The savage beast suddenly grew quiet. He stretched out his tongue and licked the motherless goat caressingly, who—now awake—seemed to feel no fear. Then

FAIRY OLD BOY AND THE TIGER.

with a purr of contentment that made the grotto echo as with the faint rumble of thunder, the savage Shanwang curled up on the floor, and the little kid lay down again beside him. Soon both were soundly sleeping as if nothing strange had come to pass. The astonished Wu looked from this scene to his companion, and saw that the fairy also had lain back on the stony floor and closed his eyes in peaceful slumber. So Wu decided that he, too, could doze in safety.

A few hours later the two men were aroused from their nap by unusual sounds which reached their ears. The tiger and the kid were rolling over in a rough and tumble game. Shanwang, now as gentle as a kitten, would lie on the floor pretending to be asleep. Then the kid would dash at him full tilt and spring upon his prostrate body. The larger beast would roar as if in anger and snap his white teeth in mock rage, but far from showing sign of fear, the kid would only redouble his efforts to catch the other napping. Finally the contest ended in a free for all race to the low doorway of the cavern, where the combatants darted out pell-mell to outer freedom.

Fairy Old Boy looked at his companion with

a queer expression on his face. "So far, so good," he said, smiling.

"But I don't understand," replied Wu. "This is all very well, but I thought we came here to kill Shanwang."

"Oh, ho!" laughed Old Boy. "Have you never heard that there are more ways than one of catching fish? Who said anything about killing the tiger? Come with me, and I'll show you something."

They made their way to the mouth of the cave. Outside just a few hundred yards away the kid was quietly browsing, while the giant cat was licking his paws in the daintiest fashion possible.

"Where love has entered in," added the sage, pointing, "the wicked passions flee away. Return to the village. Watch and wait. Let not your hand rise up in murder, for straightway you shall see my meaning. In six moons I shall return. Meanwhile heed my words."

So saying, he seated himself in the midst of a cloud which, unobserved by Wu, had descended over the mountain, and with a friendly wave of the hand disappeared in the same manner that he had come to the valley.

Dazed by this sudden turn of affairs, it was some time before Wu started for the village. On his return home he was surrounded by an impatient crowd of citizens, all of whom were anxious to know the result of the tiger hunt.

"Did you get him?" they shouted excitedly, pressing closer in their eagerness.

Then Wu told them in detail of all that had happened, and the others were as much mystified as he had been.

"The old fellow's a fraud," said a village teacher sagely.

"And my goat went for nothing," added the man who had furnished the kid.

"Wait and see," cautioned the priest.

And as they could do nothing else, they did so.

During the next few months strange things happened in the valley. Three days after the adventures of Old Boy, a herd of cattle was attacked by the tiger, but instead of killing by wholesale for the sheer pleasure of spilling blood, as formerly, the animal pulled down only two calves. One of these he ate on the spot, and the other he bore away for future feasting.

The following week, to the joy of the entire neighborhood, he despatched a dog, a worthless cur that had long made himself a public nuisance. A third week passed, and only one sheep fell a prey to Shanwang's appetite.

Soon there was much whispering about the villages. Those who had scoffed at Fairy Old Boy's mission now began to see that a wonderful change had taken place in the tiger. They repeated the words spoken by the elder to Wu upon the mountain, "Where love has entered in, the wicked passions flee away," for they now began to understand their meaning.

One day, three months after his memorable trip with the fairy, Wu decided to go once more to the tiger's retreat and see if he could catch another glimpse of the mysterious animal. Proceeding to the cavern he secreted himself as before in a dark cleft where he might watch in safety. It was not long until he heard the sound of footsteps, and there before his astonished gaze appeared the strangest shape that he had ever seen. The head, neck, and forelegs of the tiger were still visible, but the other portions of his body more nearly resembled those of a man! The savage look on the brute's

face had disappeared, and there seemed to be an expression of sympathy instead. At the side of this strange creature ambled the kid as fearlessly as if it had been in the company of its own mother. The two lay down together in perfect contentment and were soon in deep slumber. The next morning when Wu awoke, Shanwang and the kid had departed.

The young man hastened back to the village, feeling sure that his friends would call him crazy when they heard his story. It is likely this would have been the case, had not a marvelous event taken place on the same morning, opening the eyes of all the community to the tiger's change of body. A babe had strayed some distance from its mother, who was gathering brush at the foot of the mountain. All at once the poor woman heard a scream, and, turning, saw with horror that a huge serpent had wound itself about the child's frail body. In another instant the little one would have been crushed, but at the same moment a roar was heard, and a beast, the like of which she had never seen, leaped from the bushes and seized the snake, just in time to loosen its death grip on the child, which it then restored un-

harmed to its mother. According to the woman's description, the protector of her child was half tiger, half human.

"It was no other than Shanwang, King of the Mountains," exclaimed Wu, who had arrived just in time to hear the strange story. "I too have seen him and can verify the marvel." Then he told of his visit to the cave and of all that he had witnessed.

"He is turning into a fairy," said the priest, "for love is entering in."

Many were the fantastic tales now heard on the lips of shepherds and farmers, for it seemed certain that the once relentless tiger had become changed by magic into the friend of the weak and suffering. Time and again he kept the innocent from disaster, rescued children, saved the flocks and herds. In a short while he had more than made up for the evil of his former life, and seemed intent only on doing deeds of mercy.

The six moons which Old Boy had told Wu must pass before his second coming were soon gone, and in the afternoon of the final day a vast multitude had gathered together in the valley. Every one felt sure that something

wonderful would soon take place before them; nor were they mistaken. As on the preceding occasion, a dark cloud settled over the hilltops enveloping the fields in its shroud of blackness. Then a voice spoke from the midst of the cloud: "Behold, my people, a great marvel has just happened among you. Where hate and savage passion filled your lives with fear, the sweet spirit of love has entered. Shanwang, the tiger, bloodiest of his race, shall henceforth be a fairy in the Western Heaven, spreading deeds of mercy wherever he appears. Know you that there is no night too black to have its daylight, no life too dark to have its love."

When the voice ceased speaking a young man of noble bearing was seen approaching.

"Shanwang!" they whispered.

Looking neither to right nor left, with steady step he advanced toward the cloud. A bright spot now appeared in the centre of the shadow, and soon the form of Fairy Old Boy, seated in a bower of lilies, was visible to all. The handsome stranger approached the fairy, bowed low and took his place with a smile by the elder's side.

Then the two fairies were borne away in their chariot of flowers, and the hearts of all who witnessed were so touched that the spirit of love thenceforth ruled their actions.

YU-KONG AND THE DEMON

YU-KONG AND THE DEMON

THE thirteenth Emperor of China was famous for the size and prowess of his body-guard. These men were the pick of all the empire; and to the end that he might secure the strongest swordsmen, the swiftest runners, the greatest wrestlers, and the best archers, the wise Emperor held yearly athletic contests which were open to all comers.

At one of the largest of these contests the interest had risen to a keen pitch, for the ruler had proclaimed that the best all-round athlete, that year, should be made Captain of the Body-guard, the highest post in the land.

Hundreds of skilled men and thousands of spectators crowded to these games, which lasted during the week of a full moon; and the Emperor himself sat in his box each day and judged the sports. Many and varied were these contests, but to the surprise of all, a mere stripling named Yu-kong won each event in succession. In running, leaping, wrestling, hurling

the spear, and wielding the sword, he seemed alike invincible.

A grand tourney for archers was the final event of the games. When the hour for this sport arrived, excitement was at fever pitch. A full hundred of the cleverest bowmen of the world came forward that day, and in the midst of them stood Yu-kong, slender, straight and confident. The great crowd of spectators applauded wildly as they beheld him in the midst of the competitors, for they admired his skill, and knew that any test in which he had a part would be well worthy of their closest attention. Nor were they doomed to disappointment, for the royal records affirm that no finer display of shooting was ever held in the Middle Flowery Kingdom than on this very field day.

The contest finally narrowed down to three men, two of whom were champions of the Empire, while the third was Yu-kong. Now, although our hero was the youngest of the trio, he did not lack for skill, but, fingering his bowstring with an easy grace, he approached the firing line with a firm tread. His rivals had preceded him, and so true had been their aim that in no case had they failed to strike the

moon, or centre of the target. Yu-kong let fly his shafts in such a swift succession that all who looked were filled with amazement, and some cried out that all four had left his bow ere one had pierced the target. Be this as it may, on examination it was found that the twelve arrows of the three marksmen were all within the circle of the moon, and the contest was declared an even bout.

With this decree, however, the people were not satisfied, for they wished to see an undisputed champion proclaimed. As a consequence, the officials caused a mark to be suspended from the limb of a tall tree, in such a manner that it would sway to and fro in the breeze. One shot each was to be fired, and on these alone would depend the decision of the Emperor.

As the first two archers stepped forward, only a slight breeze was stirring, and thus the heavy target moved very slowly back and forth. One shaft pierced the second circle, while the other won the cheers of the throng by striking just within the borders of the moon. But much to the dismay of his admirers, no sooner had Yu-kong arisen than a brisk wind sprang up, which made the tree sway backward and forward until

the target, whirling and twisting, seemed like a tiny chip tossed and buffeted by giant waves.

"Alas! my friend," said one, "in an instant hath victory been snatched thus ruthlessly from your grasp."

On every hand arose bitter cries of disappointment. "Postpone the shot! Give him another chance!"

One of the two other bowmen offered to let Yu-kong wait till the breeze had lulled, but after thanking him he declared that he would prefer to lose than not to abide by the rules as originally agreed upon.

Carefully did he take aim as he drew back the string, and so nice was his judgment that, in spite of the unlooked-for handicap, his shaft struck the moon in the very centre, and made its owner champion of the Empire.

But before the Emperor could rise and publicly proclaim the young man to this great honor, one of the other archers, E-shen by name, stepped forward and called aloud for justice.

"What would you have?" asked the ruler.

"Your Majesty," said E-shen scowling, "this youth has been favored by fortune all through

the games. Witness his last shot at the target, which he could not possibly have made but for a lucky breeze. Moreover, Your Majesty, he is too young to be made captain over the rest of us, who have seen years of hard service."

The crowd muttered angrily at this, and the Emperor was at a loss for a moment for reply. He himself saw that the victor was not old enough for this high office. But Yu-kong himself met the difficulty.

"Your Majesty," he said modestly, "I am ready to shoot again for this prize. But I feel the need of more years and training under your kindly eye. I pray you give me merely a place in your household."

This speech met with ready favor, and the Emperor crowned him victor, while reserving the office. And thereafter no one was more loved or admired in the Imperial City than the young Yu-kong.

But there was one who hated the athlete and secretly sought to do him ill—and that was E-shen. Now E-shen was not a man at all, but a demon or evil spirit who had chosen this form to carry out his own wicked plans. After his ill luck at shooting, he had vanished from

the city, and when he next appeared it was in the guise of a fortune-teller.

In this form he was not long in making himself a power in the city, for there was no secret too profound for his knowledge, no question too deep for his ready answer. At all hours of the day he was besieged by a throng of anxious questioners, to whom he revealed the means of saving themselves from trouble. The greatest of his gifts was that which made him able to foretell the day on which each man would die. His ability to read the records of North and South Measure, the Gods of Life and Death, gave him an advantage over all other soothsayers, and countless wealth was within his grasp, for none was so bold as to deny his knowledge.

But for this unusual success E-shen cared not the slightest. It was for another purpose that he had clad himself in human garments, that he might trap Yu-kong and bring about his downfall. Patiently he awaited the chance to seize his victim, and full many a time was he disappointed before at last the opportunity for striking came.

The athlete's faithful servant fell sick of a

disease at that time unknown in China, grew rapidly worse, and soon was on the point of death. The best-known doctors in the city seemed unable to analyze the case, and consequently failed to prescribe a remedy.

"Why have you not been to E-shen for advice?" at last questioned Yu-kong's companions.

"Because I have never believed in such powers as he professes to have," replied the young man.

"But do you not know that he healed the mandarin's daughter, and has cured more people than all the physicians in the city put together?"

"In spite of that," persisted Yu-kong, "I do not trust him; he has a bad eye."

Now E-shen knew of Yu-kong's answers, and was hot with rage at the other's open distrust of his ability. Inwardly he resolved to make the athlete's punishment even more severe than he had at first intended.

When the champion, moved by the entreaties of his friends and by the love he bore his dying attendant, as a last resort presented himself in the fortune-teller's quarters, no pen could de-

scribe the overflowing joy of the demon. Already he felt this hated upstart struggling in his clutches, and he gloried in the destruction he would straightway wreak upon him.

"Honored sir," he said, addressing Yu-kong by name as he entered, "so the sickness of a servant has at last driven you to what at first you scorned to do."

"What do you know about me and my sick servant?" questioned Yu-kong, startled in spite of himself at the other's penetration.

"Such things are every-day matters with a man of my calling," replied E-shen. "However, since before the first of next moon you will die also, there is ——"

"Hold! madman, no one is stronger than I, or in fairer health," interrupted the other. "Stick to your business, and tell me what to do for my servant."

"Your servant is doomed, in fact will be dead before you reach your home; and likewise you, as I have specified, unless you are willing to submit yourself to my wishes."

"Cowardly dog!" exclaimed Yu-kong in a burst of anger, "what care I for all your baseless threats! Do what you will, for I defy you,

and may the curses of the gods rest upon your false head."

Rushing from the fortune-teller's presence, he returned to his home, only to find that the servant was really dead. But two days remained until the first of the moon, but two days more of life, if the warning of the seer in his own case were really true. Yu-kong, however, refused to visit the soothsayer and try to make terms with him. Such an action on his part, he told his friends who urged him to go, would be cowardly and utterly unworthy of a man who had won his military degree. No, far rather would he die than bring disgrace upon the name of his father.

On the following day he visited every armorer in the city, and tested the best swords that were to be had for love or money. At night he went home armed with the strongest, sharpest weapon he could buy. Without a thought of worry, he retired early for the rest which would be of so much avail to him upon the morrow, provided the words of the seer were based on fact. He slept until late, arose, and ate heartily. Throughout this day he mingled among his friends, chatting with them as if nothing unusual were

about to happen. At nightfall, having received the good wishes of all with whom he had talked, he withdrew to his own room.

In a short while, he knew not when or how, the evil spirits would begin their attack upon him. Although the odds were not in his favor, he determined to fight as he had never fought before. Suddenly on his startled ears there came the noise as of a swiftly rising storm. A giant ogre burst into his presence, glowering and shouting vengeance against him who had defied the gods.

Calmly and without a moment's hesitation Yu-kong leaped to the combat, without one thought of the fear that might well have made even a dozen hardy warriors quail if called upon to fight so horrible a being. One quick step forward, one terrific thrust of the blade, and the monster fell quivering to the floor. Looking closely at his fallen antagonist, Yu-kong laughed heartily. The body was no more than a paper bogie skilfully made to deceive the boldest soldier. Its grinning head wore a most frightful expression of hatred.

Now before he had time to rest one moment from his encounter, there came a second noise,

which might be likened to the thunder of some great explosion. A second monster, more hideous than the first, leaped through the open casement, spear in hand, and ready to strike the mortal form of Yu-kong dead upon the ground. Unlike the other, this demon was a master of the sword, and made his great blade twinkle about the head of the champion who dared to defy him. Coolly Yu-kong waited for an opening, and when the monster paused for a moment, the athlete sprang forward with a blow that pierced his enemy's breast.

Again he laughed loud and long, when he examined the fallen body and found it to be composed of potter's clay. But E-shen the demon had escaped from this figure, also, and doubtless in some other form would soon be ready to make a third and far fiercer attack on his bitter enemy. Yu-kong foresaw this, and for a moment was doubtful. How could he cope with such a wily foe? Strike as he would, he could not gain a lasting victory. Then the voice of valor cried aloud within him: "While the red blood courses through my veins, I cannot, will not yield. Though all the demons of darkness assail me, single-handed will I battle

against them, and try to prove worthy of my father and my Emperor!"

Stronger and more confident than ever, Yu-kong awaited the next attack. His arms, which before had begun to show the first signs of weakening, were now as fresh and sinewy as though he had but just arisen from his nightly couch. As a plant revives beneath the influence of water and becomes once more a thing of beauty, so the vigor of returning hope refreshed his body and caused it to regain that activity for which he had long been noted.

In the twinkling of an eye a giant gong sounded, while peal on peal of thunder rolled about the dwelling, and its foundations shook as if the building were in an earthquake. Sulphur fumes poured through the window, while before the startled gaze of the swordsman appeared a form so horrible that the very sight would have proved sufficient to unnerve an army.

The savage monster had seven grinning heads and seven arms. In each hand he bore a blade that dripped with blood, and, leaping about the room, he slashed and cut the air until it seemed as if each inch of space had been carved and re-

carved a hundred times. And yet so agile was Yu-kong, so steely were his muscles, that he managed not only to escape the storm of sword thrusts, but, in a moment of good fortune, to pierce the very heart of his enemy. It was E-shen's own wicked heart, which he had reached at last, and with a terrific roar of pain and rage the monster fell lifeless upon the floor.

As Yu-kong, nearly stifled by the dense sulphur fumes which filled the room, rushed to the window to get a breath of air, he saw within the court below a great concourse of citizens, who, as they beheld him uninjured, raised their voices in a mighty chorus of rejoicing. Yu-kong, dazed by this public approval of his courage, bowed low in modest thanks and gratitude. At that moment a messenger from the Emperor himself arrived, bearing a gracious message from the sovereign and appointing Yu-kong, the unbeaten, winner of a hundred contests, as Captain of the Body-guard.

THE BOY WHO BECAME EMPEROR

THE BOY WHO BECAME EMPEROR

FAR away in the hill country of China once lived a boy named Yu Shin, with his father, mother, and younger brother. Yu Shin was a good boy, but for some strange reason his parents mistreated him sadly. It was to the younger child, a spoiled and sickly lad, that they gave all their favors, while poor Yu Shin was lucky if he got through a single day without a beating.

The boy would have run away from such a cruel home, but for the advice of his teacher, a wise old man who taught the precepts of Confucius which command all Chinese boys and girls, no matter what happens, to love and obey their parents. So Yu Shin came to believe that all parents were harsh to their older children, and that a big boy like himself must learn to take all these beatings without a murmur. Whenever he saw a boy whose father treated him kindly, he thought the man peculiar, and

his eyes would follow him with wonder and doubt.

One day, it is true, in early childhood, after an unusually hard beating given for no offense whatever, except that he was present when his father was angry, Yu Shin ran to the white-haired master whom he considered his best friend and, pouring the story into his ears, asked him why men treated their sons in such a cruel fashion.

"My dear boy," exclaimed the elder sadly, stroking the child with his wrinkled hand, "the question you ask is as old as this old world itself. Ever since man was first created there has been evil in his heart. Not all men are like your father, but, alas! too many lay the hand of hate upon the innocent and weak. My son, resolve to live in such a manner that, some day, if your father is still living, he will be ashamed to think of how he acted. Resolve to rise to such a level that you will be far above all the petty trials you are now enduring."

"But my younger brother," urged Yu Shin, "why should they treat him differently from me? He disobeys them every day, runs away from home, refuses to work when they set him

to a task, and you know well his record here at school; yet they favor him as if he were a god and I a beggar."

"Alas! my boy, too true. It is well known that while merit is frequently a slow horse, in the end it always wins the race. At first the wicked may be as fleet as the wind, but they are sure to stumble, they are sure to fall. Cheer up, do not let your heart be envious of your brother. Mark my words, he will die unknown, while you—there is no telling what you may accomplish, no limit to the station to which you may some time rise."

Yu Shin left his master much comforted. He resolved, no matter what befell, to bear it like a man.

Strange to say, on the very night after he had made this resolution he overheard his father and mother plotting some evil against him.

"The boy is a curse to my sight," complained the mother. "I can endure him no longer."

"Nor I," answered his father roughly; "he's not for such a family as ours. To-morrow let us make away with him."

"Why not sell him to the traveling players?"

suggested the mother. "Might as well get a little money while we are about the business."

"That would be all right, if we were sure he would not escape and turn up when we least expect it. No, we'd better make sure of it."

After that, try as he would, Yu Shin could make out nothing of their plans. Trembling with fear, he lay on his hard bed thinking over the dreadful words that had been spoken. He tried to think of some plan for escaping on the morrow. Was there not some power which would protect him? There in his bed he breathed forth his petitions to the gods for help. Then he fell into a sweet slumber, and in his sleep he had a dream in which a fairy floated above his couch, touching him lightly upon the brow and saying, "Yu Shin, Yu Shin, be not afraid; your heart is good, and you need never fear."

In the morning the boy awoke and went about his duties, calm and unafraid. Presently his father ordered him to go after a tool which had fallen into an abandoned well, long since gone dry. Although fearful that this command had some connection with the plot against him, without a moment's hesitation Yu Shin slid

down a rope, after fastening it securely about the trunk of a tree. No sooner had he arrived at the bottom of the well than he heard a taunting voice above, and, looking up, saw that his brother was pulling up the rope. A moment later the lad in the pit was horrified to see a millstone tumbling down upon him. He had no time to think of escape, even had this been possible. Closing his eyes, he awaited the blow which he knew would crush him to the earth.

Just then he heard a voice speaking, "Yu Shin, have no fear. Gaze upward and behold."

He looked, and was astonished to find that the round white stone had been changed suddenly into a fairy, who floated over him with outstretched arms, saying, "Put your hands in mine, and all is well."

Yu Shin did not wait to be told twice. No sooner had he touched the fairy's hands than he was whisked to the mouth of the well, in time to see his brother, who had been too much frightened to linger, dashing into the cottage. Full of gratitude toward his deliverer, he turned to thank him, but saw instead the stone lying where it formerly had, by the mouth of the well; but on the top of it was a beautiful white

flower. Picking this up, he found these words written upon the petals:

"HAVE COURAGE."

The rope was lying in a heap upon the ground where his brother had left it. Gathering this up, Yu Shin started for the house. As he entered, he heard his father laughing at the younger son for being so frightened, while the mother was dishing out millet into bowls for their dinner.

"The pick was not in the well, father," said Yu Shin, calmly, laying the rope in one corner of the room as if nothing unusual had happened, and taking his place at the table.

"And did you see nothing there?" asked his brother trembling and gazing blankly at him.

"Nothing but the worn-out millstone we used to sit on," he replied. "I thought you might want it, so I left it lying by the well."

Now, although Yu Shin did not tell his father that he had lifted the great stone from the bottom of the pit, the latter believed this to be true, and thought his son must have been

aided by some demon. More than ever was he determined to kill him. He could not afford to have a son who was stronger than he; there was no telling when the boy would rebel against him. But he said nothing to Yu Shin of his evil thoughts. On the contrary, he spoke more civilly than was his wont, thinking in this manner to deceive the boy.

For some days Yu Shin was allowed to go about his daily tasks. He felt sure that he had nothing further to fear from his younger brother, as the latter, being a coward, henceforth would be afraid to injure him. He knew, however, that his parents were still plotting against him, for although they now spoke smoothly enough, they scarcely gave him time to rest, day or night. One day he had toiled hard since early morning in an outhouse cutting straw. It was extremely hot, and he was compelled to rest now and then from his labor. During one of these moments he sank down upon the straw, and went sound asleep.

Awaking with a start, he found the whole interior of the building one mass of flames. The passage to the only door was entirely blocked by fire, and as there was no other outlet

he came near giving up all as lost. His father and his brother, he well knew, would make no effort to rescue him. In fact, he felt sure that they had started the fire. But one thought came to comfort him, the fairy's words, "Have courage."

At the very instant when the flames seemed ready to seize him, a voice spoke to him, saying, "Lie down, Yu Shin, the fire shall harm you not."

Sinking to the ground, he found with amazement that, although the air a few feet from him was scorching, the space wherein he lay was cool as if a March breeze were fanning him. Again the voice addressed him: "Sleep on, Yu Shin, and fear not."

Calmly he closed his eyes, and in the midst of that fiery furnace fell asleep.

On awaking, he beheld his father and his brother standing over him, awestruck when they saw that he was still alive.

"Why, what's happened, father?" he said coolly. "Has there been a fire? I dreamed I was lying on the seashore fanned by the waves of the ocean."

Father and brother looked at him in amaze-

ment. Clearly this boy was of a different clay from that of which they were constructed; clearly the gods held him as in the hollow of their hands. So they gave over their plots to kill him.

On the morrow the father called his son before him, and said: "This place is much too small for us all to live upon comfortably. You are now old enough to take a wife and have a home of your own. Now, I want you to go over and take charge of some property I own on the edge of the mountain. Cultivate it and get all you can out of it. I'll give you a deed to the place, and what you make is yours. It will be much better for you than to remain at home."

Although Yu Shin knew that this farm was the stoniest, most worthless piece of ground in all the Middle Kingdom, he agreed to go at once. He knew that his father, in sending him there, believed it impossible for him to make a living, and thought that he would thus get rid of him easily; while the younger brother would receive the main property worth a hundred times more.

The next day, after bidding his parents and

brother farewell, and without one word of complaint at this unjust treatment, Yu Shin set out for his new home. Arriving there, he found the place even worse than he had imagined. Twenty men working night and day could not clear the ground of its stones, roots and stumps to make it yield a crop large enough for one man's support. Yu Shin saw this plainly, but went resolutely to work, while he sent a silent prayer to his good fairy to aid him.

All at once, he saw a cloud of dust in the distance and a black shadow forming overhead. Nearer and nearer came the dust-cloud; closer and closer hovered the shadow, until at last he saw to his amazement a herd of elephants approaching, and above, a flock of magpies. Then he heard a voice speaking in his ear, "Behold, the beasts of the field and the birds of the air are at your beck and call. Command, and they will serve you; lead, and they will follow."

Yu Shin thanked the fairy and went into the fields attended by his host of helpers. Under his direction the elephants tore up huge rocks from their lodgment and piled them along the boundary lines to form a wall. Patiently they rooted up the stumps, clearing the field com-

YU-SHIN SAW A HERD OF ELEPHANTS APPROACHING, AND ABOVE A FLOCK OF MAGPIES.

pletely. In the meantime the busy magpies, not to be outdone, tore from the soil every vestige of small root and weed and ended by breaking up the clods with their beaks.

So unceasing was their activity that within the short space of an hour the entire farm, which before would not have produced food enough to support one able-bodied man, had been converted into an immense plowed field of excellent quality, with sufficient cleared land to make its owner prosperous.

When the elephants and the magpies had completed their labor, the big beasts marched slowly by Yu Shin in single file, with heads lowered in reply to his hearty thanks, till they had passed out of sight; while the birds, after circling thrice about his head, disappeared as quickly as they had come.

Offering up a prayer of thanksgiving, Yu Shin turned to enter his humble cottage, when, lo and behold, he saw that it too had been transformed, and was now a handsome dwelling! Just as he was passing through the door, he looked toward the front of the field and was surprised to see nine sturdy youths walking up the pathway, followed by a beautiful maiden

riding. When these newcomers had reached the entrance, they knelt before Yu Shin, touching their foreheads to the ground.

"Arise," said the young man, filled with wonder; "I am no man of rank that you should treat me thus."

"Oh, mighty one," said the eldest of the men, advancing, "we pray you to accept our services. Your fields need cultivating and your walls must be repaired. Command us, and we shall do your bidding."

Too much surprised even to question them, Yu Shin bade his guests enter the new dwelling, and there he feasted them right nobly with what he found spread out in readiness upon the tables.

On the following day he took the maiden to be his wife, while to each of the nine assistants he assigned his place and station; and for many moons thereafter this happy household lived together in harmony and concord, ruled by the wisdom and kindness of Yu Shin. The fame of his wonderful farm and great crops soon spread abroad, and everybody was rejoiced at his prosperity, except his parents and brother. You could hardly imagine their amazement and

chagrin, but they dared not lift another finger against him.

One day a retinue of soldiers approached the dwelling and asked for the master of the estate. Yu Shin made himself known, and the leader of the company presented him a summons from the august Emperor of China to appear at once before the Dragon Throne.

Knowing nothing of what was about to happen, and yet without a tremor in his heart, Yu Shin obeyed the command. Accompanied by his wife and nine servants, he followed the soldiers, who gave him much honor, treating him at all times as though he were a king instead of a simple farmer.

Eleven days and nights they traveled, and on the twelfth day his faithful followers pointed out to him in the distance the walls of the Imperial City. Now, for the first time Yu Shin began to tremble, in spite of the knowledge that he was innocent of evil.

Then within him once more spoke the fairy, "Let your heart be at peace, Yu Shin. All is well."

With a firm step he approached the palace, entered its sacred courts, and at last arrived in

the presence of the Emperor himself. Then he pressed his head to the ground before the throne, while the nine retainers, also on their knees, ranged themselves behind him in a semicircle.

"Yu Shin," said the monarch, addressing him by name, "here into the imperial presence we have summoned you that we may confer the highest honor in our keeping. Throughout the trials of your childhood our royal eyes have been upon you. Your wise old teacher was one of my ministers, sent out to find a son who could be wise, obedient and industrious. Just as the fairies sent the beasts of the fields and the birds of the air to aid you, we, as a test, bestowed our nine sons and daughter to your keeping. You have ruled your household with a hand so skilful, with a mind so full of wisdom, with a heart so swayed by love, that one and all have sung your praises and concurred with us in our august decision.

"Know that we the ruler of the Ancient Kingdom have grown so old in years that cares of state rest heavily upon us. Therefore rise up, Yu Shin, to the Dragon Throne, for upon your head we choose to place the crown of this

imperial domain. May you, who have ruled your past life so nobly, rule this country no less wisely and well."

And thus did Yu Shin, the farmer's son, win the fame his teacher promised, and thus did his name become "worthy of being handed down through myriads of ages," among the greatest rulers of China.

THE ASHES OF DECEIT

THE ASHES OF DECEIT

LO MI bent over his mother. She was sick and he was worried. His father had left them in the spring looking for work in a distant province, and since that day the lad had heard nothing from him. Not a copper cash had been sent home, and more than once the two who had been left in poverty began to believe that he must have died in some distant field.

Although they lived in a strange village, it had not been difficult at first for the mother and son to make a living. Their small garden had supplied them with food, while straw and sticks picked up by the wayside fed the tiny fires they built each day. But now that the good woman was sick, the boy felt helpless. What could he do unaided? The more he had thought of his weakness and inability, the darker seemed the future.

It was just about this time that a foreign wise man passed through the village, and Lo Mi

summoned up courage to run out as he was riding by and tell him of the mother's illness. "Pray come in and see," he urged the stranger, "and tell me what to do for her."

The stranger looked into the boy's eager face, and after a moment dismounted from his mule and entered the cottage. His visit was not long, and when he left, he handed Lo Mi some strange mixture in a bottle for his mother, and said: "Whenever she is hungry, give her plenty of food, rich food that will build her up. Eggs will do," he added, seeing the boy's distress, "if you have nothing better. Every one has eggs in this country."

So saying, the stranger rode away.

"Eggs indeed!" thought the boy; "not a hen on the place, not a cash in the bag, and yet he tells me to give her eggs. What am I to do, what *can* I do?"

Eggs! How was he to obtain so great a luxury? The foreign doctor might as well have ordered golden nuggets so far as the boy's ability to procure them was concerned. Oh, if only they had not removed from the village of their fathers, then he might have obtained the needed food. But here in this strange town, there was

no one to whom he could appeal. As Lo Mi stood there helpless, the whirr of fast-moving wings attracted his attention, and he saw some magpies flying toward the neighboring willows. At once a happy idea flashed into his mind. "The birds are nesting in the willows. Why not gather some of their eggs for my sick mother?"

At once he slipped outside the cottage, hastened along the road, and soon found himself beneath the tall trees that fringed the river bank. High up among their branches he could see the birds flitting about, and hear the noise of their chattering. He could even make out one or two of the nests. Selecting the easiest tree he kicked off his shoes and began the ascent. Chinese boys are not given to climbing trees, but Lo Mi was desperate, and soon was sitting among the upper branches. The angry birds circled above his head as he slipped his hand into a nest. A thrill of joy shot through him as he found three eggs to reward his search. One of these he placed in his mouth for safe keeping, and, taking care of the others as best he might, he slipped carefully down to the ground.

Then pulling on his shoes, in his fear lest his

mother might have missed him, he ran at full speed for the cottage. She was still sleeping soundly. Taking care to make no noise, Lo Mi kindled a small fire. Soon the eggs were cooking, and, as good fortune would have it, his mother opened her eyes at the very moment when they were done.

"I am hungry," she murmured. "Can't you give me something good to eat? I am so tired of millet, I don't believe I can swallow another mouthful."

"Yes, mother; look, I have eggs for your supper," and Lo Mi held them up proudly.

"What!" said his mother, whose sharp eyes noted at once their small size. "What are these, my son? What makes your eggs so small?"

"They were laid by a small-sized hen, mother," answered the boy, fearing his mother would be vexed if he told her the truth.

He broke the shell of the first one and began to peel it away. As he did so, a surprised look came on his face, for, instead of finding the soft white meat that he had expected, a tiny stream of black earth came pouring out into his hand. Disgusted, he threw the dirt upon the floor.

Picking up a second egg, he was about to

break it open, when his mother cried: "Why, Lo Mi, that one looks to me as if it had dark splotches on the shell."

"Oh, no, mother, you are wrong; it is pure white. Your eyes must be affected by your sickness."

This time, when the shell was broken open, a strong gas issued forth. Otherwise, to all appearances, the shell was entirely empty. The boy dashed the shell upon the floor and ground it beneath his heel in his anger and disappointment.

"Have you any more?" asked his mother, as she saw him hesitate.

"Yes, one more, but I am afraid to crack it. Who knows what it may contain?"

"Break it," she commanded, "for it can do no harm."

He held the egg up curiously before the light, examining it closely.

"You have been deceiving me," said his mother. "Tell me the truth this time. What is it that you have?"

Lo Mi looked at her doubtfully, then at the prize for which he had worked so hard. At last he decided to make a clean breast of the

whole matter. "Yes, I have been deceiving you," he said. "The doctor told me you needed eggs. We had no money. I knew not what to do. This is a magpie's egg. To get it I climbed a tree upon the river bank while you were sleeping."

With this, he broke open the third of his treasures. Again he stood agape, for, lo, there stepped forth into his hand the daintiest little creature that his eyes had ever looked upon. For an instant he believed that he must be dreaming. Looking more closely, he saw that it was a tiny fairy dressed in the colors of the rainbow and no taller than his finger.

The dainty fairy waved her hands, and he knew that she was trying to gain his attention. After putting her upon a table, he placed his ear close beside her. In a tiny little voice she said: "Do not be afraid, Lo Mi. I will not hurt you, if you will but trust me."

The boy could hardly keep from smiling at thought of being hurt by such a midget; but just then a sharp twinge in his leg made him yell with pain.

"There, there! don't cry, little boy; but you must not doubt me."

"Oh, who's afraid of you?" he said. But he could go no farther, for his tongue stuck in his mouth, and his eyeballs burned like coals of fire.

Then the fairy spoke again: "Do you feel like trusting me now, or shall I give you another trial?"

"No, no, I have had enough," said the boy regaining his voice; "I'll believe everything you tell me."

"Well, that's better. Don't worry in the least about your mother. As long as I am here she will not suffer. See! She is sleeping now very quietly."

The boy turned and was rejoiced to see that the words of his dainty visitor were indeed true.

"Now, Lo Mi, I am going to send you on an errand. If you do faithfully what I command, your mother may get well and your father may come home again. Are you willing?"

"Yes," he answered promptly. "I am willing."

"Then go at once to the temple, and get a handful of ashes from the incense brazier which stands just by the door. Bring them to me,

and you shall see something that will please you. Hurry back, for I cannot wait here after daylight. If you fail, all hope of your mother's recovery is gone."

The boy fared forth into the night. The temple was some distance from the cottage, and he hastened his footsteps, for he was eager to learn what the fairy had promised. Arrived at the temple, he had no trouble in finding the brazier and getting the ashes she had asked for. Then he turned and sped homeward, but as he neared the gateway at the foot of the hill on which the temple stood, the night watchman stepped out suddenly and seized him by the shoulder.

"What are you holding there so tightly, boy?" he asked in a gruff voice.

"Only some chaff from the threshing-floor, to mix with my mother's medicine," said Lo Mi, frightened half to death and fearing to tell the truth lest the watchman should think he had been robbing the temple.

"Let's see," growled the officer, twisting his arm so violently that the boy's fingers flew open in an instant. "Chaff! you rascal, do you think I am blind?" and he struck the open

palm so violently that the ashes were blown away by a sudden puff of wind. "Now get away, you little thief!" he growled; "I knew you were lying."

Poor Lo Mi did not know what to do. If he should go back home without the ashes, he knew his mother could not live, for the fairy had told him this, and he could not doubt her. Oh, if he had only spoken the truth to the watchman, all might yet have been well. There was but one thing left for him to do,—to go back and get another handful of the sacred dust. But he had not gone far on the winding road up the hill before his legs began to feel tired.

"Why go all the way to the temple?" he said to himself finally. "Any other ashes ought to do just as well, and nobody can tell the difference."

So he stopped at the first wayside shrine and raked up a handful of ashes. Then chuckling to himself at the ease with which he was going to fool the fairy, he turned back toward home. By this ruse he would save a mile of hard climbing.

On reaching his own gate, Lo Mi opened his

hand cautiously to see if all was well with the ashes. No wind should snatch away his treasure this time, he thought, as he sheltered himself in the entry. To his amazement, when his fingers were wide open, he could not find a trace of what he had gathered. For the second time since leaving the fairy he had been at fault. Lo Mi's face was hot with shame. What right had he to expect the fairy's help, when all the time his own heart was black with falsehood and deceit?

Regardless of his tired limbs, he sped back toward the Sacred Hill as fast as legs could carry him. Up the long slope he toiled, and once more he drew out a handful of the precious dust.

His heart was throbbing now with a new happiness as he hurried home. Never had he felt the joy of doing right so thoroughly as now. All his life he had believed that lying was a necessity. Now he knew that truth was stronger than deceit. Down the last lane he dashed, up to the well-known entrance. This time he did not stop to see if all was right, for he had no doubts or fears. Through the doorway he went pell-mell. Daylight was just breaking in the

east, and he feared that the fairy, grown tired of waiting, would depart without fulfilling her promise.

"Well, Lo Mi, are you back, my boy? It seems as if you have been away a long while." It was the voice of his mother that greeted him, and to his wonder he saw that she was up and fully dressed.

"Mother!" he gasped, "you will kill yourself."

"No indeed, you need not fear that. The blessed fairy has paid us a visit, and once more I am hale and strong. The very instant you crossed the threshold, she vanished, saying to me, 'All is well.'"

"But the ashes from the temple! Did she not ask for them?" he exclaimed in disappointment, for it now seemed as if his efforts had all been vain.

"Ashes! yes, she said something about ashes. Let's see, what was it? Now I remember! 'Out of the ashes of deceit spring forth the golden moments of happiness.'"

Lo Mi opened his tightly-clasped hand and gazed at its contents with a cry of wonder; for there instead of ashes lay three golden eggs of

the same size as those which he had taken from the nest of the magpies.

Just then a rapping was heard at the outer portal.

"Open, Lo Mi, open quickly," said the happy mother. "It is your father knocking at the gate!"

THE BRIDE OF THE DRAGON KING

THE BRIDE OF THE DRAGON KING

THE mighty Dragon King, Lung Wang, was chafing in his palace beneath the ocean. For some time he had been growing discontented with his lot, feeling that as a king he was denied many of the pleasures which the common people were enjoying. Young and handsome he wished to go out and see the world for himself; but if he so much as ventured such a thing, his ministers would shake their heads, exclaiming, "Oh, great king, we beg of you remember that monarchs must not place themselves upon a level with their subjects."

Many a time when on the point of doing something different which would have given him a day's amusement, he had been thus foiled by the cautious advice of his counselors. At last it seemed as if these men were his enemies, always standing between him and the joys of life. One day he called in his prime minister and said:

"Honored sir, tell me why my plan to go on a journey is so extraordinary. Why should I not turn over the kingdom into your hands for a time? You are more than a friend to me, and you are far wiser than I. At this transfer of power neither I nor my kingdom would have any cause of fear."

"It is not that, Your Highness," answered the old man; "but remember that I am old and likely at any moment to pass away. As for you, as yet you are not married, and have no lawful successor to the crown. Suppose something should happen on this journey which you propose taking, what would be the fate of your kingdom here beneath the sea? I beg you, therefore, to give up your plan for the present. Yield to the arguments of your advisers and take unto yourself a bride. When a son and heir shall be born into your household, then I shall cease trying to keep you from following your own inclinations—your kingdom will be provided for."

Lung Wang was moved by the old man's pleading, and promised to stay at home for the present.

"However," he said laughingly, "you must

provide a bride with whom I shall be thoroughly satisfied. I will not marry as kings are wont to wed, but must have a woman for whom I may feel the warmest love."

The elder, much pleased with the success of his entreaties, promised to find a suitable princess for Lung Wang, one who would satisfy him in every particular. "Give me only a month," he said in parting, "and I can guarantee you perfect happiness."

But Lung Wang was harder to please than his prime minister had expected. Many an ocean princess was ushered to his palace from some neighboring kingdom, only to meet with his disfavor. The maidens returned to their homes disgraced, and murmured long against the freakish Dragon King who was so difficult to satisfy. As for Lung Wang, he had really been honest in his desire to please his people, but he was loth to sacrifice his own ideas of loveliness for the sake alone of making them contented.

"What! you would not have me, a king, in the most important matter of a lifetime make a mistake which I should regret forever?" he would say to those who grew too urgent.

"But if you do not love the one you marry, you can set her aside at will and take another," they replied.

"Would you counsel me to do an injustice?" was his scornful answer. "In my married life I desire to be a model for my people. It would be small justice, indeed, as you will all confess, for me to set aside an innocent woman merely because I fail to love her. No, far better that I should never take a bride."

Lung Wang at last began to weary of the fruitless efforts being made in his behalf, and summoning his cabinet, he announced his decision to leave the country for a year of travel. "In going," he said, turning to the prime minister, "I know that I violate the wishes of you and your associates, and yet, you must admit that you have failed entirely to provide the wife whom you promised. No longer can I restrain my desire to travel and to see the world. In one year's time I shall return to you much wiser than I go away."

His advisers were forced to yield to his wishes, though with many misgivings, and it was with much sadness that courtiers and people beheld the beloved Dragon King setting

forth from his palace. In spite of his strange ideas, they loved him with a devotion such as is shown few rulers by their subjects. The last words he heard them utter as he rose through the waters were prayers for his safe return.

For almost a year Lung Wang traveled in various lands and empires. Having the power of converting himself into any shape, it was easy for him to gain access to every palace. Fast did he become acquainted with the ways of the great world, and many were the novel ideas that he stored within his mind, thinking with pleasure that he would be able to uplift his people by introducing these reforms in his own domain. But amid the many pleasures with which he was surrounded, there was one thought always in his mind: "I must find some maiden whom I would like to be my queen." With this in view, he inspected the beauties in every palace, but in no case could he say to himself, "I love her and will have her for my bride."

One day he chanced to find himself beside the great Hoang Ho River. The sight of the yellow water flowing toward the sea made him think of his homeland and the palace beneath

the mighty deep. Lung Wang grew homesick as he stood overlooking the river, and yielding to his desire to feel for a little while the waters flowing about him, he changed himself into a little fish, and swam hither and thither in the liquid depths.

For the first time in many moons he was absolutely happy. Once more he was free to glide through that element with which his birth had made him most familiar. Just as he was beginning to think of returning to the shore, for that very night he was expected at a royal feast, he felt a sudden jerk and knew that he had been caught in the meshes of a fisherman's net. Before he had time to think of resuming his human form, he was drawn from the water and thrown, gasping for breath, into the corner of a small boat.

"Well, let's put in, boy," he heard a rough voice exclaim.

Immediately the sampan began moving swiftly toward the shore. Lung Wang struggled frantically to cast himself into the river, for so long as he was out of the water in which the fish belonged, he could not exert his magic powers.

"Alas! there is nothing," said he to himself in sorrow, "so weak as a fish out of water."

As soon as the two men had reached the shore they made their boat fast and started for home, taking with them Lung Wang and two small catfish. A woman met them at the gate, opened it for them, at the same time asking, "What luck?"

"Not much," growled her husband; "there's too high a wind blowing. Fish are all at the bottom. We got a few to eat, but none for the market."

In one corner of the small mud house, seated on the brick bed, was a young girl of sixteen engaged in sewing. As the mother entered carrying the fish, the maiden looked up from her work. Lung Wang, gasping for want of the air that was denied him, gazed at her in amazement, for, although dressed in the plainest of garments, she was more beautiful than any woman he had ever looked upon. For a moment he forgot his agony, so great was his admiration for the lovely creature. Alas! how cruel had the gods been to him. He had searched through all the kingdoms of the earth, and the sea, and had failed to find the woman

whom he could love; and behold! in a fisherman's cottage, when he was at the point of death and helpless, there appeared before him one whom he would willingly have taken for his queen!

His whole being rebelled at the thought of dying when standing thus on the threshold of success. Oh! if only he might attract the girl's attention, perhaps she might have mercy upon him. With a last effort, he jerked away from the woman's grasp and threw himself at the feet of the girl.

"My! what a beauty, mother!" exclaimed the maiden laying aside her work and stooping to pick up the helpless fish. "Poor thing! it looks as if it were almost begging me to save it."

Lung Wang trembled violently as he heard these words of compassion spoken in a voice so sweet and tender that it sounded like music to him.

"You won't need so many for supper, shall you?" she continued. "I am going to put this one into the water jar and let him have another taste of life."

So saying, she threw Lung Wang into a large earthen vessel that stood just outside the door,

and stood for some time looking at him and admiring the bright red coloring with which the pretended fish was decorated, while he in turn gazed with a new delight at her graceful poise and the healthy flush on her fair cheeks.

That night after the members of the fisherman's household were abed, Lung Wang heard the voice of the man talking to his wife.

"Yes, it's a thousand pities that we haven't been able to make a better match for the girl," he was saying. "She is beautiful enough to be the wife of a prince, but we can't seem to do better, because we are poor. They are coming to-morrow to arrange for the wedding."

"What worries me most," replied the mother, "is that the man is a drunkard, and I fear he will beat her. I can't bear to think of her having to suffer in that way."

"Well, I don't see how we're going to help ourselves. There's no way of backing out of the business now so far as I can see. It's easier to get into a net than to get out, you know."

"Quite true," thought Lung Wang, smiling.

"They will be here to-morrow at noon to settle up affairs and sign the papers."

"All I know," added the mother, "is that

our girl is worthy of a king, and if we were not poor cottagers she could marry one and make him happy."

At this moment Lung Wang, who, now that he was in the water, possessed all his former powers, suddenly arose from the vessel, and assuming the shape of a man, placed his lips at the window, saying:

> "She who deserves a kingly throne
> Shall have a king to call her own.
> The rarest jewels ever found
> Were gathered from the lowly ground."

The fisherman and his wife were so astonished at these words that for a minute they were quite unable to speak. At length the man arose and peeped out the door cautiously, but could see nothing. Then growing bolder he went out and tried the gate, but found it locked securely.

"What can it mean?" he said, returning to bed. "There is no one in the yard, and no one has departed."

"The fairies have spoken," said his wife.

"Nonsense!" he answered, laughing. "We must have been dreaming. Fairies have nothing for such as we."

"But we had not been asleep," she persisted.

On the following morning the fisherman's daughter was overcome with excitement at the strange story her parents told her. What could the voice have been that spoke such wonderful words at the window? Over and over she repeated to herself the lines:

> "The rarest jewels ever found
> Were gathered from the lowly ground."

Could it be possible that she should indeed have a king for her husband? But no, it was beyond reason, for this very day at noon her parents would give her to the miller's son, a man whom she felt that she could never love. Another surprise was in store for the mystified girl. When she stooped over the water jar to look at her fish, she found that it had escaped. Here was a second puzzle that none of the family could solve.

"Next time, better eat them all when they're first caught," observed the practical mother; "one fried fish is worth a dozen swimming."

At the hour of noon, while the fisherman and his wife were arranging with the miller the details of their daughter's wedding, all were startled at the sound of music and the clatter of

horses' hoofs. They rushed to the gate to see what was happening. A company of cavalry had halted in the road, while just behind rode a handsome young man upon a splendid charger. Following, led by a servant, was a second animal of like beauty, decorated with trappings of silver and gold.

The nobleman dismounted, and approached the humble gateway, smiling at the group assembled there.

> "She who deserves a kingly throne
> Shall have a king to call her own."

He repeated the words politely, taking the blushing maiden by the hand. No sooner had he touched her, than the simple raiment in which she was clad changed as by magic into delicately-colored silk and wonderfully-woven laces. The peasant girl was now a very princess, and in a moment she was mounted upon the second charger, while Lung Wang sprang again into his saddle.

With a farewell bow to the maiden's parents, he gave the command to advance, saying:

> "The rarest jewels ever found
> Were gathered from the lowly ground."

At their feet a shower of pearls and rubies fell—enough to make the fisher rich for life.

"Hold tightly," said Lung Wang to his bride, and in a moment, leaving behind the staring peasants, they arose into the air. Their steeds, now changed into winged dragons, were bearing them through space so rapidly that cities, villages, mountains, and valleys sped beneath them like the lightning's flash.

Soon they were upon the shore of the great ocean, where rolled those mighty torrents that the prince had known and loved since infancy. Dismounting from their coursers, they gazed with joy upon the wind-tossed billows, and their hearts were filled with gladness, for the king had already told his bride of his vacant palace far beneath the waves, and both were longing to catch sight of the home where they were to rule in harmony and love.

"Come," said Lung Wang, suddenly, "the western sun is setting in those glorious waters. Let us too sink beneath the sea."