

the lute, in your hands, is my heart turned inside out! Lend me your gold chain, Kwonfootse, and, Taya! come hither, and put it on his neck!"

Taya glided to the emperor, but Le-pih rose to his feet, with a slight flush on his forehead, and stood erect and motionless.

"Let it please your imperial majesty," he said, after a moment's pause, "to bestow upon me some gift less binding than a chain."

"Carbuncle of Budha! What would the poet have!" exclaimed Tang in astonishment. "Is not the gold chain of a mandarin good enough for his acceptance?"

"My poor song," replied Le-pih, modestly casting down his eyes, "is sufficiently repaid by your majesty's praises. The chain of the mandarin would gall the neck of the poet.—Yet—if I might have a reward more valuable—"

"In Fo's name what is it?" said the embarrassed emperor.

Kwonfootse laid his hand on his scimitar, and his daughter blushed and trembled.

"The broken spangle on the slipper of Taya!" said Le-pih, turning half indifferently away.

Loud laughed the ladies of the court, and Kwonfootse walked from the bard with a look of contempt, but the emperor read more truly the proud and delicate spirit that dictated that reply; and in that moment probably commenced the friendship with which, to the end of his peaceful reign, Tang distinguished the most gifted poet of his time.

The lovely daughter of the mandarin was not behind the emperor in her interpretation of the character of Le-pih, and as she stepped forward to put the detached spangle into his hand, she bent on him a look full of earnest curiosity and admiration.

"What others give me," he murmured in a low voice, pressing the worthless trifle to his lips, "makes me their slave; but what Taya gives me is a link that draws her to my bosom."

Kwonfootse probably thought that Le-pih's audience had lasted long enough, for at this moment the sky seemed bursting into flame with a sudden tumult of fire-works, and in the confusion that immediately succeeded, the poet made his way unquestioned to the bank of the river, and was re-conveyed to the spot of his first embarkation, in the same silent manner with which he had approached the privileged area.

During the following month, Le-pih seemed much in request at the imperial palace, but, to the surprise of his friends, the keeping of "wor-

shipful society" was not followed by any change in his merry manners, nor apparently by any improvement in his worldly condition. His mother still sold mats in the public market, and Le-pih still rode, every few days, to the marsh, for his panniers of rushes, and to all comers, among his old acquaintances, his lute and song were as ready and as gratuitous as ever.

All this time, however, the fair Taya was consuming with a passionate melancholy which made startling ravages in her health, and the proud mandarin, whose affection for his children was equal to his pride, in vain shut his eyes to the cause, and eat up his heart with mortification. When the full moon came round again, reminding him of the scenes the last moon had shone upon, Kwonfootse seemed suddenly lightened of his care, and his superb gardens on the Pei-ho were as suddenly alive with preparations for another festival. Kept in close confinement, poor Taya fed on her sorrow, indifferent to the rumours of marriage which could concern only her sisters; and the other demoiselles Kwonfootse tried in vain, with fluttering hearts, to pry into their father's secret. A marriage it was certainly to be, for the lanterns were painted of the colour of peach-blossoms—but whose marriage?

It was an intoxicating summer's morning, and the sun was busy calling the dew back to heaven, and the birds wild with entreating it to stay. (so Le-pih describes it,) when down the narrow street in which the poet's mother plied her vocation, there came a gay procession of mounted servants with a led horse, richly caparisoned, in the centre. The one who rode before held on his pommel a velvet cushion, and upon it lay the cap of a noble, with its gold ball shining in the sun. Out flew the neighbours as the clattering hoofs came on, and roused by the cries and the barking of dogs, forth came the mother of Le-pih, followed by the poet himself, but leading his horse by the bridle, for he had just thrown on his panniers, and was bowed out of the city to cut his bundle of rushes. The poet gazed on the pageant with the amused curiosity of others, wondering what it could mean, abroad at so early an hour; but, holding back his sorry beast to let the prancing horsemen have all the room they required, he was startled by a reverential salute from the bearer of the velvet cushion, who, drawing up his followers in front of the poet's house, dismounted and requested to speak with him in private.

Tying his horse to the door-post, Le-pih led