

Childhood of Ji-shih

Everything seemed well-fed and happy. The squirrels and birds were busy hunting things to eat, to be sure, but the lad felt certain that none of them had been so long without food as he had. His wanderings at last brought him to the clear warm sunlight at the wild rice fields. There the birds were flitting in and out, to and from their hidden nests, and Ji-shih sat down to watch them.

A bobolink flew from the reeds up into the air above the nest of its brooding mate, and there it hung and fluttered and sung. . . What a wild, passionate, happy outburst of melody that was. It was like the song of a dozen birds all singing at once—a song so fast and frantic and furious, and yet so sweet. It often sounded like the melodious dropping of water. Many times the songster flew to its mate and then back again into the air, as though to try to outrival its last, happy, crazy, sweet tangle of notes.

If Ji-shih had put his new, half formed thoughts and feelings into words,