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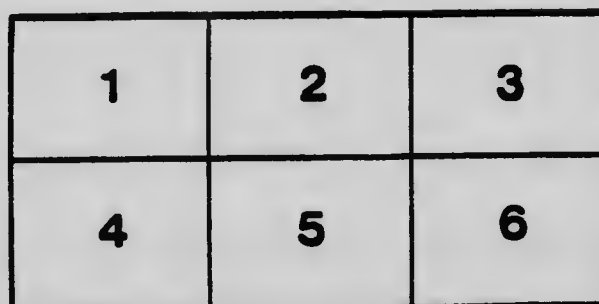
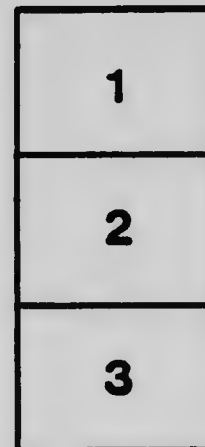
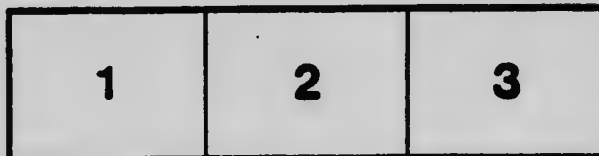
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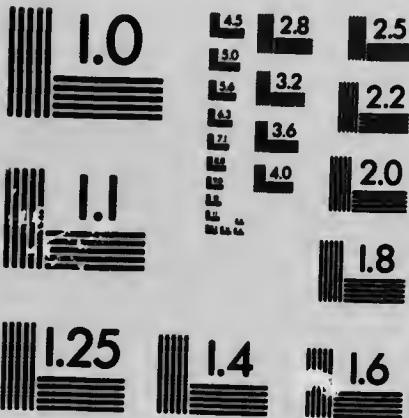
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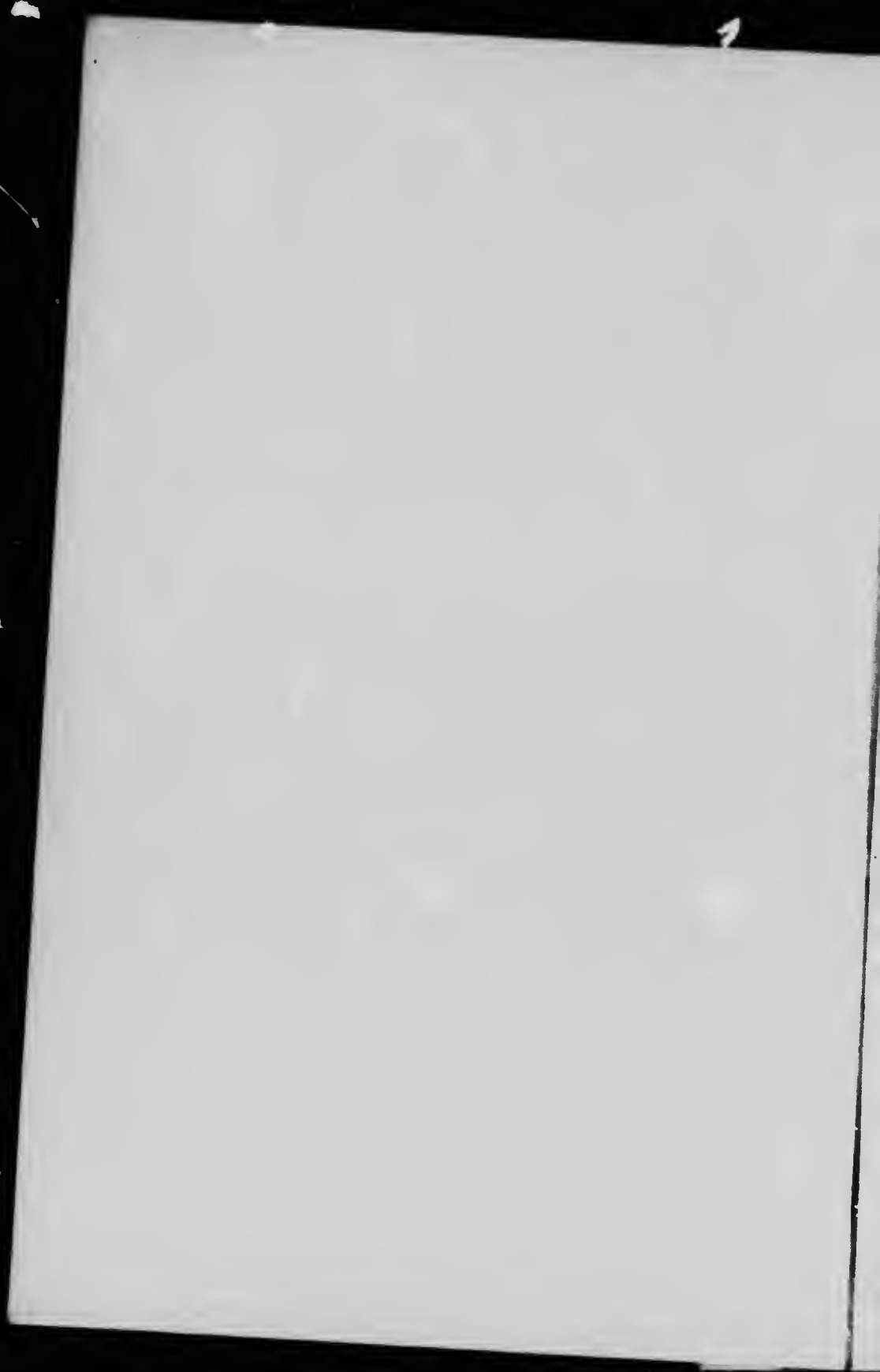


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THE WANDERER ON
A THOUSAND HILLS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE RED LANTERN

"By far the most distinguished success yet achieved in the dramatic narrative of the life of the Orient as it strikes the European imagination. . . . The great merit of the book lies in the keen sympathy with which it bridges the gulf between East and West, and translates into the language of our own world the feverish sufferings and heroic endurance of a people of alien aim and temperament. The fidelity with which this task is accomplished stamps Edith Wherry as a novelist of indisputable power from whom work of no ordinary calibre may confidently be expected."—*London Daily Telegraph*.

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LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD
∴ ∴ **TORONTO: S. B. GUNDY** ∴ ∴

**THE WANDERER ON
A THOUSAND HILLS**

BY

EDITH WHEELY

AUTHOR OF "THE RED LANTERN"



TORONTO: : : : : S. B. GUNDY

NEW YORK: JOHN LANE COMPANY

LONDON: JOHN LANE, THE BODLEY HEAD

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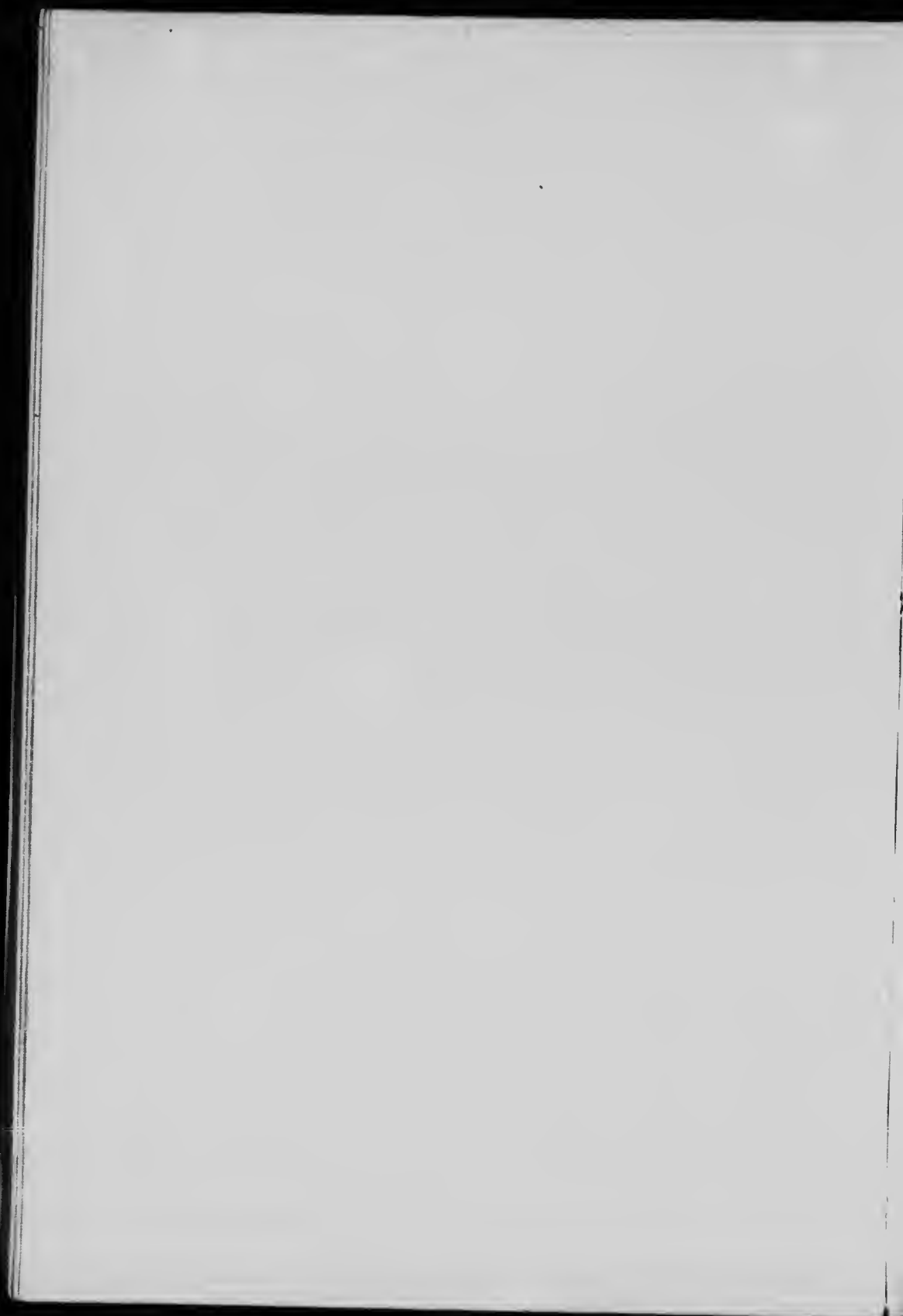
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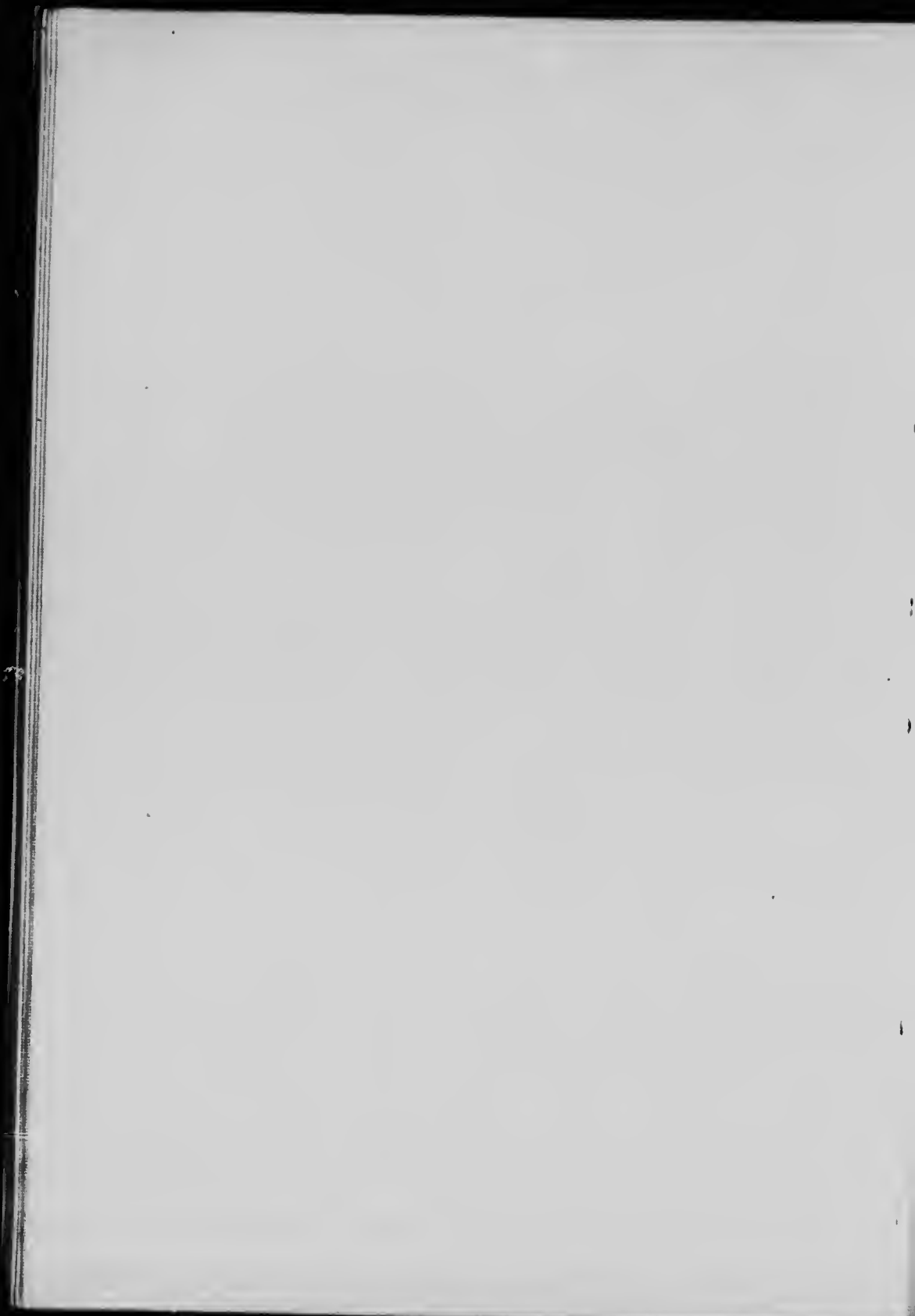
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TO
MY LITTLE DAUGHTER
ELEANOR FERRES MUCKLESTON



AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE author wishes to acknowledge her indebtedness to the late Rev. W. A. P. Martin, D.D., LL.D., former President of the Chinese Imperial University, to whose volume, "The Lore of Cathay," she has had frequent recourse in the composition of this novel. Similar use has been made of Rev. Justus Doolittle's "Social Life of the Chinese," published in 1868. The lines from the *San Tzu Ching* or Trimetrical Classic which occur in this book are given in the usual romanised spelling with a translation by Hubert A. Giles. With respect to the rhyming couplets which are put into the mouth of the two young women in the "House of Song," no pretence is made to reproduce in them the wonderful precision and elegance which characterise a true Chinese distich, of which Dr. Martin says: "These couplets often contain two propositions in each number, accompanied by all the usual modifying terms; and so exact is the symmetry required by the rules of the art that not only must noun, verb, adjective, and particle respond to each other with scrupulous exactness, but the very tones of the characters are adjusted to each other with the precision of music." If the author has succeeded in conveying something of the spirit of these charming impromptu couplets whose composition still constitutes a favourite pastime among the *beaux esprits* of China, affording them, as Dr. Martin points out, "a fine vehicle for sallies of wit," she will have accomplished her aim.



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BOOK I
THE RED SILK CORD

“When a son is born—in a lordly bed
Wrap him in raiment of purple and red;
Jewels and gold for playthings bring,
For the noble boy who shall serve the King.

“When a girl is born—in coarse cloth wound,
With a tile for a toy, let her lie on the ground,
In her bread and her beer be her praise or her blame,
And let her not sully her parent’s good name.”

From the ancient *Book of Odes*.
Translation by W. A. P. Martin.

THE WANDERER ON A THOUSAND HILLS

I

IT happened on the day that Kung, schoolmaster in the village of Benevolence and Virtue, received the summons from the great Lu that he could find no one willing to take charge of his three-year-old daughter while he was away from home, and being reluctant to leave her alone in the hut, the widower led her along with him. He feared this might be considered a breach of etiquette, but he counted on leaving her with some of Lu's servants while he went alone into the great man's presence.

There were many servants at the gateway of the farm, and one—an old woman with small feet—readily consented to take care of the little girl. The child cried when her father left her, but upon finding her open mouth suddenly filled with something deliciously sweet, she stopped crying in pure astonishment; for the sweetmeat so miraculously discovered in her mouth was the first of its kind that she had ever tasted, and it filled her with instant ecstasy. She forgot her father, gulped the tit-bit, and looked about for more. The old woman

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smiled, and catching her up, bore her into a sunny court, where she sat down with her under a big mulberry tree, and continued for a time to stuff the child's mouth with sugar-plums, telling her, after every bite, that the old Man of the Mountains would catch her if she were not good. The baby lived for ten minutes between excesses of rapture and fear, and then suddenly discovered that her old guardian was asleep. Yes, overcome by the heat of the June day, she was nodding peacefully under the mulberry tree.

It was a happy chance for little Winter Almond. She pushed herself gently away from the old woman's supporting knee and balanced herself upon her fat legs. The court, one of the three which together formed the residential part of the farm, was flooded with white sunshine. As she cautiously advanced out from the shadow of the big tree, the light bathed her tiny figure, warming the delicate skin to pale gold. All was very still. The child's eyes widened; her small limbs grew tense with secret purpose.

She first eyed reflectively two stone lions with lolling tongues crouched in stiff majesty on low pedestals not far from the mulberry tree. At the bases of the pedestals, pots of pomegranate trees had been set; the pomegranate trees were in rich red bloom, and at sight of them, the child hesitated no longer, but plunged with a cry of joy into the vivid glowing sunshine.

She was in the mystery now! It was all about her, enveloping her, making her a part of itself. It was in

the big white sun sending ecstatic quivers through every part of her little frame. It was in the glory of the red and gold and purple bloom hung aloft above her head on the tops of tree and shrub, in masses of pure colour indistinguishable to her as yet by form or name. And through the fine heat haze the mystery breathed itself in the odour of flowers, with the scent of the lilac predominating like some ineffable aroma of infancy. And more mystically still it came in the hum of the pollen-laden bees, and in the intense tremolo of invisible winged insects filling the radiant air.

For a moment or two little Winter Almond was content to circle blithely about the court, throwing out her arms towards the flowers as she went in rhythmic rapture. Then, as if seized by some new and wonderful idea, she stopped abruptly and darted a sly backward look over her shoulder. The old woman was still sound asleep, and the child broke into a flute-like laugh of triumph. In an instant she had become exquisitely alert. She plucked at her small three-cornered pinafore which constituted her only garment, and under which her chubby legs appeared mad for adventure. In another moment, like the little mouse of La Fontaine's fable, she, too, might boast:

“J'avais franchi les monts qui bornent cet état”—

The world lay open!

Drawing her little breath fearsomely at the boldness of her own design, the child first crept softly along one

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of the ornamental arcades which formed the east and west boundaries of the quadrangle. But coming to a flight of steps which descended abruptly into a great unknown space where the splash of water struck her ear with a new and delicate note, she forgot her fears and went straight down towards the hidden music. The rippling melody guided her to the edge of an artificial pond sunk in one side of the court. Here a damp coolness prevailed. Low-hanging willow branches drenched their delicate tips in the pool like a woman's tangled hair. The marble bottom of the pond was thickly bedded with moss and other fungous growth, whose shiny emerald gleamed under the transparent water like rich enamel. Gazing in between the dripping willow branches and the long-stemmed purple irises and lotus blossoms which clustered along the pool's edge, the child grew vaguely and delightfully confused in the vision of the blue sky with its rolling cloud billows reflected therein so infinitely.

It was with difficulty that she discovered the real bottom of the pool and finally saw, with a shrill little cry of wonder, the rock grottos disposed there with such fairy grace for the sportful gambols of gold-fish. Some artful hand had laid down in the crystal depths a labyrinth of water ways between tiny sunken reefs of coral. Here the gold-fish darted and chased each other or swam lazily according to their moods.

Their moods became, indeed, so fascinating a study for the little girl that to watch them more closely she

and she might easily have fallen in and become from that hour a Chinese water-baby, had not a sudden hand grasped the strings of her pinafore. She looked backward in bitter astonishment and found herself writhing in the clutch of lithe brown fingers which belonged to a boy of six or seven. He was dragging her away from the water's brink with strange guttural cries of alarm, while his black eyes sent out excited glints from between their oblique slits, as if he were experiencing all the exultation of some rescuing hero.

The first impulse of Winter Almond was to scream at thus finding herself in the arms of this small stranger; but once at a safe distance from the pond, the hero parted his lips in so sunny a smile, and displayed two such dazzling rows of little teeth, that she changed her mind and began to coo to him instead. At this he snatched off a scarlet amulet he was wearing and threw it with a superb gesture of gallantry about the little girl's neck. It had been hung on his own, no doubt, by his mother or one of the servants to ward off the Evil Eye.

He was dressed very grandly in silk, soft and light for the season, with a gorgeous cap adorned with devil chasers, but he seemed not to despise Winter Almond's more simple costume. He looked at her with great friendliness, and made no objection when she put out a curious index finger to examine his wonderful clothes. His gift glowed ruddily on her pinafore, and both children gazed alternately at it and at each other with the

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same comical intensity of satisfaction. And truly no fine lady could have been more pleased with the gift of a precious ruby, and not a prince in all the Orient could have taken a greater satisfaction in its presentation.

After a little more rapt gazing into each other's eyes, the boy suddenly flung his arm about his new friend's shoulder and whispered that his name was Jung Kuang—Glory Light—he was none other than the great Lu's son) and asked her in a dramatic whisper if she would like to play with him. Winter Almond was enchanted. With the rich earth under the willows and water brought from the pond, they made clay. Then squatting down regardless of his expensive clothes, Jung Kuang taught the little girl to bury one of her small hands in the clay and pat with the other while repeating an incantation.

P'ai p'ai, p'ai yeu—wo—erh lai
P'ai ch'u ch'ien lai, ta chiu ho!

This was intoned with an indescribable upward inflection and emphasis on the last syllable, *ho*, and may be made to rhyme thus in English:

Pat-a-pat, pat-a-pat, pat smooth the swallow's nest;
Pat out the precious coin, of wine we'll drink the best.

The trick was to pull out the buried hand without breaking the crust of the clay, and so leave a small nest wherein an old miser had hidden his money, which, be-

ing brought to light, proved to be just the price of the coveted wine.

They became so absorbed in this pastime, with bent heads and ebony pig-tails close together, that they were greatly startled at last by the perturbed figure of the old woman swooping down upon them from the further court. She was on a very gallop of a hobble, with big sleeves outspread like bat-wings, and mouth full of remonstrances.

“Wicked babe! Wicked babe! Is it so she runs away from me? Perverse infant, does she not know that the Old Man of the Mountains, who eats children for supper, is wandering nearby at this very moment?”

This terrible warning was enough to drive Winter Almond for refuge into one of the old woman's roomy sleeves. In its depths, like a baby kangaroo carried in its mother's pouch, she was taken to her father, now waiting at the gate of the farm.

Jung Kuang remained silent during the transference. Possibly he thought his dignity would have suffered had he followed his poor little guest to the gateway. Yet when by dint of much twisting and a violent wrenching away of buttons, the little girl's head appeared through a gap in the old woman's tunic, and her little hand waved him a farewell, the lips of the small Oriental once more parted in a dazzling smile over his milk-white teeth.

II

THE gleam of eager and unwonted hope which had shone in the dark and usually mournful eyes of the schoolmaster as he followed the steward of the rich house into Lu's presence, was quite extinguished when he left the great farmer's gate. He took his little daughter almost brusquely by the hand, and turned with a heavy step down from the plateau upon which Lu's sumptuous residence stood, towards the village of Benevolence and Virtue.

This is one of a cluster of hamlets at the foot of the beautiful Hsi-Shan ranges twelve miles to the west of Peking. It lies between the Female Dog Village and the Great Melon Village, and all three carry on a small "mi-mi," or trade in vegetables and fruit, with the market town of Sesame Garden twenty-one *li*, or seven miles, to the south. Of the three hamlets, the village of Benevolence and Virtue had before Kung's advent acquired the worst reputation, so that its smug name was regarded as an exquisite bit of irony by its neighbours.

Kung thought with disgust of its filth and squalor as he walked down the steep and dusty road. With what high hope had he left it two hours ago when, simultaneously with Lu's summons, he had learned that the Village King, as everybody called the wealthy farmer,

was in need of a tutor for his son. Certainly the schoolmaster had reason to aspire to the position. Was he not a *Hsiu-ts'ai**—a “Flower of Talent”? No one else in the neighbourhood could boast so much. Yet here he was trudging back to his miserable one-roomed hut with only a sense of bitterness and mortification gained from his visit to Lu.

When his burly friend, Yen, the village carpenter, stepped from behind a tree by the roadside and turned upon him questioning eyes, the schoolmaster shook his head sullenly.

“Don’t tell a man with a full stomach that you are hungry,” he muttered. “It would have been well had I heeded that wise saying.”

“What!” exclaimed the carpenter, “you have come to no agreement? He has sent you away without any promise?”

Kung nodded grimly.

Yen shook his fist towards Lu’s house.

“May the pestilence deprive him of posterity!” he cried. He had shared his friend’s high hopes and his disappointment was almost as great as Kung’s own.

The schoolmaster stopped to lift little Winter Almond upon his back. She had grown very tired after all her play and was stumbling in the road; and no sooner had he taken her up than she fell sound asleep with her arms about his neck and her little head pressed against his

* A possessor of the lowest literary title in China.

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stooping shoulders. When they were again in motion Kung spoke in self-directed sarcasm.

"How often have I declared to you that fifty invitations on red paper could not induce me to enter Lu's doorway, so greatly did I abhor the fellow's injustice, yet, chicken-livered, I succumbed to the first invitation and that without even the formality of red paper. If I have lost face, the gods have dealt with me according to my deserts."

His friend regarded him compassionately. He noticed how worn were the scholar's blue cotton robes, which hung loosely upon his thin bent frame. He had long known that Kung was so poor that he frequently broke his fast but once a day, and at present the look of weary dejection impressed upon his fine features touched Yen's heart.

"What did the tyrant want of you?" he grumbled.

"Want of me!" the schoolmaster echoed with scorn.

"Little enough, the gods know! Being without learning himself, and so unable to judge the respective merits of scholars, he proposed that I should become middle man in the matter of choosing a teacher for his son."

The carpenter frowned.

"Only a middle man! He insults your ancestors! Who better than you, honourable sir, so full of lofty wisdom, can he find for the boy?"

"He is of a different opinion," Kung answered shortly. "No doubt he believes that he will add to his prestige in securing a teacher from a distance. He

wished me to go to Sesame Garden in search of one, but I excused myself on the pretence of being too busy."

Yen looked at his friend with admiration. He knew that it was no easy matter to refuse anything to the Village King, who was a notorious bully. And the fee which Kung might have hoped to receive for his services could hardly have been an object of indifference to the schoolmaster.

"The spirits of your ancestors will be pleased with your decision," Yen said approvingly. "Yet will it not be a hard matter, now that the little slave eats so much, to keep rice in your kettle?"

By the "little slave" he signified Winter Almond, still asleep on her father's back. As the schoolmaster did not reply, Yen continued:

"It would have been well, honourable sir, if you had taken the advice of us all and disposed of the child when she was born, since the gods were deaf to your prayers for a son. Even now it is not too late. Without her you would have just enough to eat, but with her——"

Kung interrupted him.

"I will keep her," he said briefly.

The carpenter laughed uneasily. It had always seemed to him, as well as to all the other villagers, a piece of sheer folly on the part of the destitute widower to have allowed this useless female child to live. But in this respect Kung had proved stubborn.

"What do you intend doing with her?" Yen inquired, not without impatience.

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The answer made him stare with astonishment.

"I shall educate her," the schoolmaster replied with deliberation, as they turned into the village.

"Educate her?" the carpenter repeated stupidly, and then burst into a guffaw of laughter. He began to think that his friend's mind was unhinged. In his entire life he had neither seen nor heard of an educated woman. It was unthinkable that a specimen existed in the village of Benevolence and Virtue or its neighbours, the Female Dog village, or the Great Melon village, and the carpenter's imagination had seldom wandered beyond the boundaries of these hamlets.

Kung flushed a little at sight of Yen's merriment, and when he spoke it was in the tone of a superior rebuking one who had dared to be too familiar.

"A man unread in the Classics," he said with significant emphasis, "is like a hedgehog which buries its face in its own body. Such a person has a mind closed to all ideas except the most commonplace. Had you memorised the Trimetrical Classic* in youth, you would now be able to recall that among the ancient students commended for their diligence were two who, though girls, were intelligent and well-informed. Would I not, therefore, be shedding light on my ancestors if, in the absence of a son, I should educate my daughter to become like these illustrious examples of antiquity?"

Without waiting for a reply, Kung, who had now

* The San Tzu Ching, or Trimetrical Classic, is the first book studied by the Chinese pupil.

reached his hut, bowed somewhat haughtily and entered his low door with the sleeping child on his back.

The rebuke had its effect. The carpenter looked after him with renewed admiration. Any display of erudition on his friend's part invariably inspired this sentiment in the breast of the simple peasant. Yen was proud to be known as the friend of a man who had committed to memory the "Four Books" and the "Five Classics," and whose profession it was to "instruct darkness." As the whole village acknowledged, Kung was a scholar—that is, a being fitted to stand before the Son of Heaven himself. Was this the man, thought the carpenter in a new rage, whom the ignorant tyrant Lu had refused to honour?

III

TEN years or so after this day, when Jung Kuang, the son of Lu, was a grave young scholar of seventeen, pursuing his studies in a Peking Academy for young men, and when Winter Almond had progressed under her father's tutoring well into the Confucian Analects, a great event stirred to its depths the village of Benevolence and Virtue.

After a great many rumours contradicted, reaffirmed, and again denied, it became a certainty no longer to be challenged that the notorious Lu, now richer and more powerful than ever, had entered into negotiations with the foreign devils with a view to giving over to them the ancient temple of the vicinity.

The farmer had long ago got control of the temple property, as of everything else he coveted, by mere force of bullying. He had only to go to law and the prize was his. But though it was true that Lu had attained to the dignity of Bully in the village of Benevolence and Virtue, he differed in some points from the ordinary model of this functionary of Chinese society, whose ear-marks have been described as violent and aggressive manners, a studied carelessness of dress combined with a certain slap-dash touch of splendour designed to awe the beholder, and a tongue and a fist

equally forceful in maintaining their owner's true and pretended rights.*

Lu was a man of strong and selfish passions, but his manners for the most part were calm and even suave. His dress was not careless but decorous, rich and sober. His long queue was neatly braided, and his round civilian hat was worn in no rowdy fashion. He was large and well built, and had excelled in youth in "fist-and-foot," that is, in gymnastics; and no one had ever seen him in a hand-to-hand fight since he had come to the village, for such conduct would have been beneath his dignity. But he had resolved under no circumstances whatsoever to "eat loss," and in the attainment of this aim he had become the most dreaded man in the community.

In this task of subjugation, Lu had a powerful auxiliary in his wife, a shrew of the first order, whose talent for tongue-lashing was a useful instrument in the execution of her husband's cruel and unjust purposes. Her lean face, with its prominent cheek bones and skin pitted by the smallpox, was stamped by a resolve as firm as that of her husband, never to "eat loss," and she took care to let her neighbours know how pro-

* "No adequate understanding of the life of the Chinese," says the Rev. Arthur Smith, D.D., "is possible without some comprehension of the place therein of the bully, and conversely it might also be said that a just apprehension of the character and functions of the Chinese bully is equivalent to a comprehension of Chinese society."

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foundly she was impressed by this great principle of life.

Lu had begun by buying a small patch of ground whereon he had built a mud hut similar to those of his neighbours which he occupied with his wife and old father. But in exactly five years from the time he had arrived, he owned the largest and finest farm and farm-house for miles around and was the undisputed "King of the Village."

The precise record of how he accomplished this is not a part of the present narrative; it is enough to say that in direct proportion as his own wealth and power had increased, the property and influence of his fellow villagers had been seen to dwindle. Report had it that scarcely a man of any means in the village had escaped being dragged against his will into a law suit with this tyrant, who invariably emerged from it triumphant and enriched. So when Kung came to take up his duties as schoolmaster, in the latter years of the Regency of the Dowager Empress, Tze-Shi, half the inhabitants were facing financial ruin and the *Hsiang Chang* or headmen, whose function it was to maintain justice and order, were all known to be the craven minions of the great Lu.

And now yielding to his covetous soul, as well as to his ambition for the enrichment of his only son concerning whom, when an infant, brilliant prophecies had been uttered, Lu was treacherously bartering off the holy place to the hated foreigners. It is true that his action was not without precedent. The Hsi-Shan ranges were

at this period the only refuge available for the foreign population of Peking from the city heats and rains during the summer months, and by a certain irony of fate many of the old Buddhist temples of the hill-sides had already become shelters for Christian missionaries, preaching over the tidings of their gospel.

This fact—for precedent means much in China—doubtless did something to mitigate the indignation against Lu; but that feeling was still intense when it became known that the final bargain was to be concluded on a certain day. In the afternoon of this day, Lu was to meet several of the foreigners in the temple, itself, where the last papers were to be signed and the transfer of the property effected in the presence of the two old priests who had long been guardians of the place. The sale was to be absolute and final.

But early that same morning, a delegation of indignant villagers with their headmen visited Lu. They pushed themselves into the front courtyard in spite of the remonstrances of the servants and demanded to see the Village King.

He was making his toilet when they arrived, and he finished it with the utmost leisure, even to the rouging of his long finger nails, before he deigned to appear. He was not nervous, although he was fully aware that the matter in hand was critical. The only unusual precaution he took was to threaten his wife with a severe beating if she showed herself out of her chamber door. For he judged rightly that for once he would be safer

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without her aid. He came out smiling, greeted the villagers affably, as if they were his expected guests, and ordered wine and cakes for the headmen and a basket of apricots for the others.

"Fetch tables and chairs and spread the refreshments under the trees," he commanded his servants, "so that the green and leafy bowers above may throw a felicitous shade upon our harmonious company." And going from one headman to another, he pressed each one in turn to be seated, and himself poured out the wine for them into exquisite jade cups. This was all done so quickly and with such an air of assurance on the part of Lu, that the *Hsiang Chang* were completely taken aback. Accustomed as they had been for years to be domineered over by the bully, not one of them was bold enough to resist his present graciousness, and after exchanging a few sheepish looks, they all fell to eating and drinking.

This was a propitious beginning, and all might have gone well had not the temptation to disobey her husband proved too much for Lu's wife. She had been beaten before; she could stand it; and this was an occasion for the exercise of her genius which must not be missed. Without warning, she rushed headlong into the court and snatched away the cakes and the basket of apricots with furious imprecations upon those who "expelled air from three nostrils" (meddled with other people's business).

Immediately there was great confusion. Lu and his

wife were accused of sacrilege in selling the temple to the accursed foreigners. It was the climax of a bad career, for which they would be doomed to fry for all eternity in the Cauldron of Oil. Each of those who had suffered personally from the hands of the bully—and who had not!—began to shout his own peculiar grievances, demanding instant redress amid a shower of curses and threats of revenge. The servants came running into the courtyard, and, adding their frightened voices to the bedlam, made no effort to oust the intruders. Lu was equal to the emergency. Turning slightly pale but remaining calm, with his powerful hand he seized his screaming wife, dragged her into her bed chamber and bolted the door upon her; then turning towards the villagers, he spoke with imperious courtesy.

“Honourable *Hsiang Chang*,” he said, “it will be a subject of undying regret and humiliation to me that the auspicious felicity of this occasion has been so rudely interrupted by my stupid thorn. Yet if my exalted friends will deign to reseal themselves, all can yet be adjusted, and there will be time later for deliberation upon the important matter of the sale of the temple.”

The men acquiesced almost without a murmur. Cool wine and ripe luscious apricots are not easily resisted on a hot summer morning. By noon all was peaceful. The men left, reporting in the village that Lu had made a great compromise; instead of selling the temple outright, which would indeed savour of sacrilege, he would

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merely lease it for ninety-nine years. After that period, they argued naïvely, the old sanctuary would inevitably revert to Buddha. And for the interval they had made one more stipulation to which Lu had agreed. If it were decreed that the temple doors should open each summer to the followers of Yesu, there must also be some provision made for the old gods. As immortals they might dispense with the bowls of rice and millet, or the shreds of raw silk, or even the joss-sticks offered to them daily by their devotees, but in their material quality of idols made of mud and paint or of gilded wood, a shelter from the snows of winter and the rains of summer was an imperative necessity.

And so Lu promised that before signing the lease of the temple he would demand a contract from the foreigners, stipulating that until such time as natural decay should bring their proud forms to the ground in collapse and ruin, the idols should not go roofless.

The long lease and the housing contract seemed to be great concessions to the simple headmen, who saw only that the "face" of the village had been saved, and not that once more Lu had imposed his will upon them.

IV

A CHINESE girl if she be betrothed before she has reached her teens, as is almost invariably the case, is already a prisoner. The innocent raids of her freer childhood days in the streets or fields or into neighbouring courtyards must cease absolutely, lest perchance she should be seen by the family of her future husband, or even—horrible to imagine!—by that young man himself before she be brought in the red wedding sedan to his ancestral gates. Scarcely anything conceivable could be more shocking to the native sense of decency than such a premature exposure to view, and to avoid the possibility of this accident, the liveliest precautions are taken and the greatest ingenuity displayed.

But poor little Winter Almond or Tung Mei, as her mother had named her, was not betrothed. Probably she was the only girl of her age in the village who possessed that unenviable distinction. It was doubtless her father's fault; certainly the village blamed him. If in his extreme poverty he would raise a useless female, he ought at least to have judgment enough in the interest of his grain pile, provided for his use by the villagers, to get rid of the creature by as early a marriage as possible, or falling short of this, to sell her

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as slave-girl or concubine in the neighbouring market-town. She was not ill-favoured and ought to fetch a good enough price. True, she cooked and swept the hut for her father, but with his authority as school-master, he could make one of his pupils do these things for him. It was really a scandal to let her run wild.

All agreed that this "running wild" on the part of Tung Mei was the direct result of educating a girl, which reasoning was the more curious in the light of the habitual native logic which argues that every boy who does not attend school is quite "wild." But Winter Almond, who at the age of thirteen still saucily exercised her graceful limbs in front of everybody, cared nothing for these comments. Although she was not betrothed, she was healthier, happier and prettier than any other girl in the three hamlets. Her eyes set at a slightly tilted angle and shaped like the almond of her name were large and black as smoke; her hair fell to her knees in a heavy jet queue, which was bound at the end with scarlet cord; the exquisitely smooth and rounded cheeks, coloured like a Gold of Ophir rose, and the full pouting lips needed no rouge to keep them bright, although Tung Mei occasionally daubed them with some as a concession to propriety; and the little nose, slightly aspiring like the eyes, was prettily modelled.

No, she was not ill-favoured, as even the villagers rather grudgingly admitted. One of her father's pupils in a moment of more than rustic inspiration had even

likened the delicate curve of her eye-brows to the Marble Bridge which spans the Lake of the Lotus in the Imperial Palace. It is true that her feet were not bound—a shocking defect!—but they were small and daintily shod in slippers made of bits of dyed silk which Tung Mei filched impudently from a certain wayside shrine when she had need of them. She always embroidered these slippers with her best skill, for in spite of her “wildness,” she was not without coquetry. The rest of her raiment was of the simplest,—a pair of loose blue cotton trousers bound in neatly at the ankles over white stockings, and a flowing tunic of the same material. Her ears were still hung with the small brass rings which her mother had put through them in babyhood, and her wrists were encircled by the green glass bracelets which the schoolmaster’s bride had worn on her wedding day. They were the daughter’s only keepsake of her mother, and the pride she took in them was religious.

It must be said here that in spite of her “education,” which had caused so much adverse talk, Tung Mei’s learning sat lightly upon her. Although she was taught by her father only out of school hours, she had, to his astonishment, easily managed to keep pace with his other pupils of her own age; the truth probably was that her brain was less fatigued than the brains of those subjected not only to the vast amount of needless repetition always characteristic of Chinese memorising, but also to the constant deafening din of a native school-

room. While her father's pupils were in the hut roaring out their lessons like young bulls, Tung Mei was in the fields of the neighbours, ostensibly guarding the crops from birds, though more often pilfering some especially succulent date or fig, or scooping delicious juicy morsels out of the very melons she was paid three *cash* a day to protect.

Yet Tung Mei was still intellectually in the state of the proverbial "pig in the weeds," and not likely, either, to get out of it very rapidly under her father's instruction. He, poor man, weakening at last under the constant fire of the village criticism, had begun to feel some misgivings in regard to his daughter. He was very proud of her learning—could she not recite the Thousand Character Classic from beginning to end without a single mistake?—and, manlike, he was still more proud of her beauty. (He had in a moment of weakness even repeated his pupil's simile of the Imperial bridge and Tung Mei's eyebrows to his friend the carpenter.) But neither her superior education nor her beauty interfered in the slightest with her strong young appetite, and in spite of her fruit-pilfering, to which there was often mute testimony on her hands and lips, (her father pretended not to notice these tokens) the grain pile, with its tendency to diminish rapidly and disappear before the time for its annual renewal, remained an ever-alarming problem. What Tung Mei could earn by watching the crops in no wise counterbalanced this loss. Would it not be well, then,

as the neighbours said, to get rid of this devouring creature and make one of his pupils do the little cooking and sweeping which were necessary? The answer was obvious, but nevertheless the schoolmaster procrastinated until a day came when an empty purse and an empty grain corner stared him in the face seven weeks before the time due for new supplies.

Kung was aghast. He knew that his credit was not good enough to permit of his borrowing money from any neighbour; in fact, he already owed the carpenter a sum that he had never been able to pay back, in consequence of which he had detected a slight coolness on his friend's part. It was possible that the parents of his pupils might be induced to come to his aid and give him enough grain for his own sustenance during the seven weeks, but he knew full well that their bounty would not extend to feeding his daughter.

Now there is such a thing in China as a "rearing marriage," by which, when the parents of a girl are too poor to keep her until she is old enough to be married, she is made over to the relatives of her betrothed and kept by them until the young man is ready for matrimony. This, of course, always places the girl's family at a great disadvantage, being evidence of extreme poverty. But poor schoolmasters like Kung have no choice. On the day when the last grains of rice from the corner pile had been cooked and eaten by Tung Mei and himself, he closed school and visited every family with an eligible son in the three villages, pro-

posing a "rearing-marriage" for his daughter. But to his immense chagrin, he was everywhere met with a blank refusal. The truth is, no one wanted such a freak as an "educated" girl, who was also dowerless and would have to be kept several years before she would be old enough to marry. Besides, as everybody knew, Tung Mei was "wild." Had she not been seen by every boy in the village? Such a girl was not fit to be a bride.

Kung returned home very hot and weary and profoundly discouraged. He had to confess to himself that the education of his daughter had been a serious error, and his allowing her to run wild a still worse one. What could he do now? Only one thing remained; she must be sold at the Sesame Garden Market. His old father who had once lived in that town had long since died, and his brothers were as poor as himself, so there was no hope of help from them.

A destitute Chinese schoolteacher is not likely to be a sentimentalist. Yet Tung Mei, as she lighted a pith wick in a saucer of pea oil to greet her father's return, suddenly found herself blushing under the strange sad look which fell upon her from the scholar's dark and mournful eyes. He said nothing, however, and accepted in silence a branch of apricots and a musk melon, which she pulled out from the depths of her large sleeves and quietly laid before him.

She did not dare to question him, and they sat together a long time without a word, until overcome by

her youth, she curled herself upon the end of the *kang* or brick platform which served as family bed, and immediately fell asleep.

As for Kung, he continued to watch late into the night with his eyes fastened upon the sleeping girl. His mind wandered back to the day of her birth and to his bitter disappointment that she was a girl instead of the son, for whose advent he had prayed and burned joss sticks with such passionate zeal. And he recalled the secret rage he had felt against the child on the day of his wife's burial, more than a year later, when the neighbour, who had taken charge of the baby, during the interment, had brought her back to him. He remembered that he had been on the point of telling the woman that she might keep the thing or dispose of it as she thought best, exactly as if it had been a superfluous kitten, when the little creature, upon being put down on the floor, had extended her arms, and with a cry of joy had stumbled eagerly towards him. Obeying an unaccountable impulse, he had caught her up and strained her to his breast. He had immediately been ashamed of this strange display of emotion, so unworthy of a scholar, and tossing the woman who had witnessed it a few *cash* to pay for her trouble, he had roughly bidden her begone. But when he had found himself alone with the child, and the door of the hut carefully closed, he had taken her up again in his arms and stuffed a little rice through her tiny red lips. He did not know then or now what had come over him;

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it was folly, as everybody had told him, for a man in his circumstances to keep a female child, but at the moment when he had crammed her little mouth with rice, he knew in his heart that he would not part with her.

So he had allowed the little thing to stay in his hut, and had continued to feed her out of his own bowl with rice of his own cooking, and he had even made little garments for her from the tails of his worn-out cotton tunics. She had basked for hours in the sun on the door-sill of the hut while the lessons went on in a loud sing-song within, until little by little she had grown from a baby into a beautiful young girl who could read the Classics. And now—?

The schoolmaster groaned as he rose at last from his seat. He quenched the pith wick in its oil, and going almost furtively over to the *kang*, extended his forefinger and touched the firm roundness of Tung Mei's cheek, softly lighted by a moonbeam. This was the nearest approach to a caress which he had ever permitted himself to give her since her baby days.

Kung loved his daughter but was ashamed of his affection.

Tung Mei would have been sold the next day as a slave girl in the market place of Sesame Garden if that same pupil who had written so prettily of her eyebrows and who knew of the schoolmaster's straits, had not burst into the hut early the next morning with the

tidings that the foreigners had arrived the evening before, and were already in complete possession of their new summer quarters at the temple. Their servants, it seems, had preceded them with the necessary effects and had set everything in order. The relevancy of this news was made apparent by the added information that the foreign devils were opening a day school for village girls where free instruction would be given, and where one or two girls would be supported outright in exchange for certain domestic services. In the autumn, when the foreigners returned to their Peking Station, they would take back with them to the mission school any of these girls who wished to continue their education.

Kung listened to all this in silence, as became a scholar who held the degree of "Flower of Talent." Only a slight quivering of his nostrils betrayed the immeasurable relief which he experienced. At the end he gravely thanked his pupil and said that he would take the matter into consideration. But as soon as the door was closed upon the youth, he turned to Tung Mei, whose little heart was fluttering wildly at the thought of being taken to the foreign devils.

"Put on your best shoes and comb your hair neatly, my daughter," he said with gentleness. "We will go at once to the temple."

At this Tung Mei burst into tears, and dropping to her knees, *kotowed* before her father, begging that she should not be made to leave him. He gave her

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that same mournful look which had made her blush the evening before, and said in a strange quiet tone:

"It is the will of the gods, my daughter."

This was his only comment, but she knew at once that her going was inevitable. So bravely drying her tears, she made the preparations which her father had indicated.

As they passed out, Kung pinned a notice on the door of the hut saying that school would not open until noon that day. Then preceding his daughter a few feet, as is proper for a Chinese gentleman when he walks abroad with a female, he conducted her to the temple of the Spirit Light.

THE temple, which is about a mile and a half from the village, lies well up on a slope of a hill swelling out gently between two deep ravines, where the torrents from the upper ranges in their precipitous way seaward fall in tumultuous cascades, or, caught in deep cups of rock, form swimming pools for the village boys. Viewed from below at a distance, the old sanctuary has somewhat the appearance of a walled fortress of mediæval Europe; but this military aspect diminishes on nearer approach. This is perhaps due to a better view of the venerable cypresses and cedars which show their sombre heavily branched tops above the walls, lending to the place an air of immemorial melancholy.

Ascending the bare hillside by a road worn smooth by the feet of the faithful, Kung and his daughter mounted a dozen old granite steps with weed-stopped crevices and stood before the temple gate. Heavy beams supported the projecting eaves of moss-grown tiles which sheltered this worm-eaten portal; and in a hole in the rafters Tung Mei saw a nest of snakes, which, owing to a certain scrupulous courtesy to the Buddhist tradition where it affects the life of animals, had been left undisturbed by the missionaries.

At Kung's touch—for there was no gate-keeper in

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sight—the old door swung harshly on its hinges. Passing in, they came into the outer court of the temple, which resembled a mortuary grove. Here the air was still and dead, and the sound of their footsteps was lost in the thick mat of needles fallen from the old trees. Even the daylight was ghostly in this place, so tempered was it by the almost impenetrable web of branches above. In truth, it formed a region fit for religion in its most obscure and esoteric moods, and Tung Mei turned instinctively to look for the two old priests who had so long been the guardians of its mysteries. But no priests were there; through the trees, on a sort of pedestal in the centre of the court, she saw only the big temple bell of wrought bronze whose sonorous tones had been among the first recognised sounds of her childhood. But now the bell was muffled; the cross of the Christian invaders had come to silence it for the hundred years of the lease; and what would its rust-tied tongue have to say a century hence?

Yet, so far, there was no positive sign of the arrival of the strangers. Tung Mei saw her father glance about him a little uneasily. Had his pupil told the truth? Were the foreign devils really in possession of the temple? If so, certainly their entrance had been effected with extreme decency and quiet. Beyond the bell was a further flight of steps, low and broad, between long balustrades of coloured tiles, so broken and loosened that they seemed to be held together in places merely by the clinging embrace of a thick-set ivy. After an-

other moment of hesitation, Kung beckoned to his daughter to follow him up these steps, and together they penetrated into the inner court where the deepest mysteries of the Spirit Light had once been celebrated.

Strange to say, even here they saw no one, but only felt vaguely the foreigners' presence in a certain air of cheerfulness which had been, as it were, superimposed upon the mournful decay about them; it was a cheer superficial rather than fundamental, for the old lichen and mildew still clung to the walls and to the old curved roofs, and stained the cobblestones which formed the paving of the court; and this fungous green, in its turn, only partially concealed the leprous-like appearance of the decaying masonry. Saltpetre oozed out in white excrescences from between the stones and spread with the lichen over the crumbling ochre-coloured plaster of the façades, while the timbers of eaves and columns were eaten in arabesque patterns by worms and large black ants. Yet there was a massiveness about the foundations of the buildings which seemed to bid defiance to this decay and give the girl cause to wonder if the old sanctuary might not yet remain to see its lease expire amid the celebration of its ancient mysteries.

Tung Mei knew that only yesterday the wretched old gods, jumbled since by the usurpers into one poor room, had been reposing in state in the dim lofty halls of this inner court, with oblations offered, joss-sticks burning, and "prayer-mills" turning before them. But

now, as she still followed her father, who led her in rather bewildered surprise into the deserted rooms, she noticed that, like the temple bell, these bronze cones of prayer, chiselled with forgotten symbols, were still, and that the odour of incense lingered only in the carved recesses of the interior woodwork, and even there, faintly, like some aroma of a past age.

For these halls had become the habitation of aliens; the carved ebony thrones of the idols had been converted into tables and chairs for European uses, and the idols themselves had been banished from view; the walls once hung with faded tapestries, representing the bliss of Nirvana, worked in silks by hands long dead, were now neatly covered with rice paper and hung with simple scrolls of felicitation presented to the missionaries by those grateful for relief from physical or moral ills.

Tung Mei's spirits brightened as she caught sight of the pots of flowers which filled the window ledges—gay geraniums, primroses, heliotrope, and English violets; and in the rooms the same blooms set about in bowls on the ebony tables which had once upheld before the idol-thrones stiff artificial flowers in archaic vases. This old temple furniture, with its ponderous carved tables and its great square armchairs of patterns devised, one might believe, before Babylon fell, needed, indeed, the relief of colour; so, besides flowers, the missionaries' home-loving wives had brought in bright-coloured fabrics and cushions, and arranged

shelves on the walls where the glimmer of cups and plates and other objects of daily use might brighten the sombre rooms.

There was little light in these interiors, the few windows being composed of carved woodwork and translucent rice paper through which the light stole but feebly, scarcely reaching to the recesses of the chambers or the decorated ceilings above; the stone floors, too, would have been cold and damp without the thick Mongolian rugs of wool which the missionaries utilised in their housekeeping. So, although the strangers had partially succeeded by these devices in dispelling the oppressive gloom of this old habitation of idols, a sensitive child living there might come early to suffer at times from a vague melancholy, hard to define more adequately than as the essence of things too old penetrating a spirit too young and tender to withstand its subtle influence.

VI

A SUDDEN sound of music from a room rather remote from those into which they had glanced, revealed to Kung and his daughter the presence of the strangers. The missionaries were singing as a close to their morning worship the beautiful Christian hymn, "Lead, kindly Light," and the words and tune fell upon the air of the old heathen stronghold with curious and almost unreal sweetness.

Tung Mei trembled with an extraordinary emotion; in another moment she would see the foreign devils and her father would give her over to them; there would be no escape. But meanwhile the new music did not displease her; she listened to it intently, but when it came to an end, and she saw strange forms emerging into the court, she seized her father's hand in a panic of fear.

"Take me back home," she whispered, casting upon him imploring glances.

"Be silent!" he bade her, but his tone was very gentle. In fact, he was almost as timid as she, and it was not until one of the missionaries, a woman clad in grey, had approached them with kindly questioning eyes that he ventured to speak in his most formal tone.

"I have been informed that it is your honourable in-

tention to open a school for girls, and so have ventured to bring my despicable daughter that she may, if possible, profit by your lofty instruction."

The woman in grey smiled: "And is this your gracious and lovely daughter?" she asked in excellent Chinese, nodding towards Tung Mei. "What is her age, and when would she like to begin her studies?"

"The little slave is in her fourteenth year and has already memorised the Confucian Analects," Kung answered, not without visible pride, "but she is wild and needs to be subdued, so that it would be well if she could be put under discipline immediately."

The missionary showed surprise at Kung's first statement.

"The Confucian Analects!" she echoed. "You have taught her to read?" She asked the question as if the thing were scarcely credible, for this was the first time that she had ever seen a Chinese village girl outside the mission schools who had received any book instruction.

Kung repeated his statement in regard to his daughter's knowledge of the Confucian Analects, and, emboldened by the lady's interest, added that his contemptible offspring could also recite without a single mistake the entire Thousand Character Classic. By this time several other missionaries had come up and were listening to Kung's curious mixture of opprobrium and praise of his daughter.

"That is remarkable for a girl; she must be very intelligent," the woman in grey commented, smiling

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again at Tung Mei, who during this interview stood with downcast eyes and crimson cheeks. Then, turning to Kung, she continued: "What, sir, is your honourable name and your profession?"

"My name is Kung Pao Yeng, and I am the school-teacher at the village of Benevolence and Virtue."

"And do you desire that your daughter should come here as a day pupil?"

"No, that is not my miserable intention."

"You would like us to keep her altogether, then?"

"You have guessed my unworthy wish."

"And would you be willing that she should go back with us to Peking at the end of the summer?"

"That is my contemptible desire."

The missionary looked thoughtfully at Tung Mei; then turned to an elderly woman who had been listening to the dialogue.

"Mother," she said in English, "the girl seems very gentle, although her father says she is wild. Do you think she would do for baby's *amah* (nurse)? She could take charge of him out of her school hours; I must have some helper soon."

The elderly woman also looked thoughtfully at Tung Mei.

"Is she not a little young? Still, as you say, she seems gentle. I daresay she could be of help to you. Why not ask Charles what he thinks?"

Acting on the suggestion, the woman in grey summoned her husband, a man still young, with a fine

clean-shaven face, who had been talking apart with two Chinese gentlemen. After introducing the schoolmaster, she put to him in English the same question which she had asked her mother. He glanced at Tung Mei, and questioned Kung a little before he replied:

"Why, yes," he then said to his wife. "You could give her a trial at least"; and rather irrelevantly added: "She is certainly very pretty."

As soon as the matter had been arranged with Kung, the foreigner turned to the two Chinese with whom he had been conversing and beckoned to them to come up.

"This is Mr. Kung, the schoolmaster in your own village; you no doubt know each other," he said to the elder of the two.

Kung, who had been oblivious to all but the presence of the foreigners, was rather startled to find himself face to face with Lu and his son, the latter of whom was home from Peking on a brief holiday. He immediately bowed low and received polite if rather less obsequious bows in return from the two. There was no allusion made to any former meeting. In obedience to Chinese etiquette, Kung would have ignored the presence of his daughter, but the missionary kindly included her in the introduction.

"And this is Miss Kung," he said, "who must be the most intelligent young lady in your village since she knows the Classics."

He smiled blandly, as his wife had done, at Tung Mei, who, looking shyly upwards for a moment, dropped

a low curtsy to each of the Chinese gentlemen; this she performed by placing one hand above its fellow on her right knee, bending it while advancing her right foot a little beyond the other.

Lu's son fastened on her a pair of eager black eyes as he returned her curtsy by a bow far more profound than the one with which he had favoured her father. Like Lu, he was large and handsome, but his face had none of the hardness nor cruelty which marked the former's. By some gracious miracle this child of a bully and a shrew was the possessor of a tender heart. Indeed, with his high brow, large intelligent eyes, and strongly moulded mouth and chin, the youth was a fine specimen of his race, which in its finer types sometimes exhibits a remarkable nobility. He did not take part in the general conversation which followed between his father and the missionaries, but glanced frequently at Tung Mei, who continued to stand in her demure attitude.

It was only when Kung intimated in as casual a tone as he could command, that it was time for him to return to the village, that Tung Mei exhibited anything of her "wildness." A convulsive trembling then seized her, and grasping her father's hand she implored him again in a broken whisper to take her home. Although his own heart was like lead, Kung shook her off with a pretence at roughness, and after bowing again to the others, strode quickly out of the court without turning back to look at her. When she saw that he had actually

gone, the poor child bowed her head, and with her hands pressed to her small bosom, struggled in vain to keep back her choking sobs.

Lu, who had lingered with his son, laughed aloud at this exhibition of feminine weakness, and remarked to the foreigners that here was certainly "a calf without a ring in its nose," which is the native phrase signifying an ungovernable child. But evidently his son felt no such contempt; a gleam of sympathy lighted his eyes, and as his father was turning away after salutations to the missionaries, he suddenly stooped down to the young girl, and in violation of all Chinese etiquette, whispered:

"Do not cry, mei-mei (little sister); I have known the foreigners at Peking and I am sure they will be very kind to you." He had noticed a scarlet amulet that she was wearing, and some old and pleasing memory gave him courage to speak.

Then he went away, but not before Tung Mei had lifted a grateful though timid pair of eyes to his face and thanked him mutely with them. On his way out of the court he turned back three times to look at the girl, and seemed relieved when he saw her being led gently into one of the chambers by the missionary in grey.

That night Jung Kuang could not sleep. The beauty of the young maiden with the scarlet amulet seen at the temple had entered into his soul and the desire of his youth went out towards it. He remembered the

day, long ago, when he had played with the little girl by the gold-fish pond at the game of the swallow's nest, and with the memory a strange tenderness possessed him. He knew that she was poor and obscure; but was she not also rarely beautiful and intelligent? His own eyes had told him the first fact, and the missionary had informed him of the second. He was far from sharing the village prejudice against the education of girls. On the contrary, he had come into contact with the foreigners in Peking often enough to have learned to value such education as an added charm.

He tossed restlessly upon his bed for hours, but before morning dawned, Jung Kuang, son of Lu, the richest and most powerful man in the entire countryside, had taken a vow to wed with Tung Mei, the despised daughter of the humble schoolmaster who was at that very moment on the verge of starvation. In five years, he reckoned, when he should have received his second literary degree, that of *Chü-jên*, "Promoted Scholar" (he counted on having his first degree of "Flower of Talent" in a few months) the time would be ripe for his marriage. He had never been thwarted in any of his desires since the day of his birth, and he knew that even in this matter, though his will might for a time be opposed by his parents, it would finally prevail.

When he had come to this decision, he fell into a light slumber and dreamed that the swallow's nest had yielded up the old miser's coin, and that as he slipped

the shining gold piece into Tung Mei's hand, she thanked him mutely with eyes black as smoke.

. . . At the temple, Tung Mei, unaware of these thoughts about her, had been trying her best to check her sobs. The missionary in grey, whose name was Mrs. Osborne, continued to speak kindly to her when they were together in the bedroom, but seeing that the tears still fell from the young girl's eyes, she had the happy inspiration of taking her baby, a tiny boy of six months, from his crib and placing him in the girl's arms. The baby was in a merry humour and at once made a vigorous clutch at the red cord on Tung Mei's queue which had fallen over her shoulder. The action was so pretty that the girl smiled in spite of her grief; Mrs. Osborne slipped discreetly from the room, and when she returned after about half an hour, she found her little son fast asleep in his new nurse's arms, and an expression of beatific content on Tung Mei's face.

In this brief half hour a miracle had happened. The maternal instinct, latent in the young girl's breast, had sprung into powerful life, and with its birth all her loneliness, fright and tears had vanished.

VII

THE next day Jung Kuang made known his desire to his parents. They were profoundly shocked, and for the first time in his life showed anger towards him.

What! their son and heir marry a contemptible little slave who had been rejected by every family in the village! The idea was so monstrous that they could only suppose their son to be the victim of a temporary madness. The village doctor was called in hastily to feel his pulse and look at his tongue. After a long closeting with Lu and his wife, this sage prescribed a thorough purging by means of dried plums, solanum dulcamara and liquorice root, to be followed by a protracted journey. But Jung Kuang proved recalcitrant. He spilled out the nauseous medicine prepared for him, and refused to budge from the village until the red cards decorated with the gilt dragon and the phoenix, signifying the male and female elements, had been exchanged between his parents and the schoolteacher, Kung, in sign of his betrothal to Tung Mei. In vain did Lu and his wife upbraid him for unfilial conduct; in vain implore him in the name of all his ancestors to desist from his wanton course. The young man remained calm in manner but grew paler and paler under

their repeated charges, until suddenly he took their breath away by saying that they must either consent to the betrothal which he desired, or lose him forever as their son. He would espouse Tung Mei, he declared, if he had to become a beggar on the high road.

To realise the extent to which Lu and his wife were stunned by these words, it is necessary to know the immense place which filial piety holds in the category of Chinese virtues, and also to remember that for centuries the marriage of Chinese youths and maidens has been absolutely under the control of their parents. And what complicated the matter still more in Jung Kuang's case was that his father and mother had already made certain advances to a rich family at the market town of Sesame Garden with a view to a matrimonial alliance. To break up this affair, even though it was in its initial stages, would be taken by the Sesame Garden family as an unforgivable insult, repaid by everlasting hostility; for customs are rigid in China, and betrothals are not entered into nor broken lightly.

The quandary in which Lu and his wife found themselves can be easily imagined. That they, the undisputed rulers of the village, should be obliged by their own son to break off a rich marriage which they were arranging for him in favour of a penniless girl, despised by the whole neighbourhood, was no less than an open disgrace. They would become the laughing stock of everybody, and, unpopular as they knew themselves to be, they could hope for no sympathy. So extreme

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was their indignation against Jung Kuang, that in spite of their deep affection for him, they would probably have let him put into effect his threat to desert the parental roof if they had had a second son to carry on the ancestral rites and traditions. But in his capacity of only son, Jung Kuang was absolutely essential to them. The young man was fully aware of this, and knew that he could afford to wait. And, as he predicted, his will prevailed.

The storm, though terrible, was brief. In exactly a month after the day upon which Jung Kuang had announced his desire to his parents, the village of Benevolence and Virtue had a new sensation even more tremendous than that caused by the sale of the temple. The amazing fact became noised abroad that red cards decorated with the dragon and phoenix had passed between the Lu family and Kung, the schoolmaster, establishing the betrothal of the young heir of the tyrant to Tung Mei, who, as everybody knew, had escaped from being sold as a slave at the Sesame Garden Market only by the charity of the foreigners. . . .

VIII

DURING the five years which followed, Jung Kuang and Tung Mei saw each other exactly five times. This marks an extreme of liberty in China, where custom forbids any intercourse whatsoever between a betrothed couple before the actual day of marriage. But under the liberal and kindly chaperonage of the missionaries at Peking, Jung Kuang ventured to call on Tung Mei once annually at the native New Year's season.

Their conversation on these occasions was formal and ceremonious to a degree. Jung Kuang, after a profound bow to his bride-elect, invariably began by asking the Heavenly Rulers to bestow happiness upon her in the coming year. To this Tung Mei, dropping a curtsy but scarcely daring to lift her eyes, replied as invariably with a supplication to the same potentates to grant peace and longevity to the young scholar. She then timidly handed him a cup of tea and cakes, which he refused several times but finally accepted with renewed bowings and scrapings. When at last he had been persuaded to sit down, he inquired of the young girl, who still stood, whether she had eaten her rice or not, and having been informed in regard to this detail, next asked after the health of her honourable father and the progress of her studies. Then, ap-

parently forgetting her existence entirely, he turned to the missionaries and engaged them in a long and animated conversation, never once looking at Tung Mei. But at the moment of leaving, he turned back to her abruptly, drew out from the depths of his sleeve a package containing some handsome gift—usually a piece of jewelry—which he deposited on a table with a gesture signifying that it was for her, and making another low bow, again besought the Heavenly Rulers on her account; then saluting each of the missionaries in turn, he quickly left the room.

This order of procedure scarcely varied during the five visits of Jung Kuang to his betrothed. But scant as was the converse of the two, and cold in outward seeming, Jung Kuang managed to convey to Tung Mei by some magic known only to lovers, the knowledge that she was ardently beloved and desired; so that after each visit of the young man, her cheeks were left flaming and her heart quivering like those of any girl in Europe who has just received passionate protestations and kisses from her lover. She always escaped to the nursery as soon as Jung Kuang had left, and taking little Carl Osborne into her arms, kissed him as she had learned how to do with half articulate little cries of love, and swore that she would never leave him. Had she not taught him to prattle in Chinese even faster than he could in English? And did they not spend delicious hours every day squatted side by side on the nursery floor, while she related to the strange old

legends of heroes and gods, of dragons and demons, queerer even than what Mrs. Osborne had to tell of Jonah and the whale? And now in the intervals between games—the swallow's nest and others—she was actually teaching him the Trimetrical Classic just as she had learned it herself from her father:

Jen chih ch'u
Hsing pen shan
Hsing hsiang chin, etc.

Men at their birth
Are naturally good.
Their natures are much the same; etc.

She had a secret ambition to make a great Chinese scholar of him. How, then, could she leave him? Did not the three-word classic go on to say:

Kou pu chiao
Hsing nai ch'ien.
(If foolishly there is no teaching
The nature will deteriorate.)

Of course he would be taught later from the foreign books, but that was not enough; she wanted him to know Chinese as well. Besides, who would comb his hair and buckle his little shoes if she were not there?

Certainly, the little son of the missionaries was a serious rival for the son of Lu. Yet when the child was asleep, the young girl would draw out again from its case Jung Kuang's last gift to her, perhaps a pair of

jade earrings, and softly smile at her own reflection in the mirror as she tried them on.

She had reason, indeed, to be pleased with that reflection, for each year as she developed from a child into a woman, she grew more comely, with dark eyes full of intelligence and a form charmingly moulded under her loose tunic. The yearly vision of her loveliness which Jung Kuang carried away with him fed his heart with secret bliss, and so stimulated him to diligence in his studies, that in the final competition for the Master's degree of "Promoted Scholar," the name of Lu's son appeared on the list of successful candidates.

When Lu heard of Jung Kuang's brilliant success, he was so rejoiced that he forgot his former anger, and after consulting the Imperial Calendar for a lucky day, set the date for his son's wedding, ordering for the occasion a feast finer than had ever been given in the village of Benevolence and Virtue. For once the heart of this hard man was full of affection and tender pride.

But during all the preparations for the marriage feast the face of the shrew, his wife, wore a sullen look which boded no good to her future daughter-in-law.

IX

THE day of the nuptials approached. After five years of absence with the foreigners at the temple in summer and at Peking in winter, Tung Mei had come back in triumph to her father's home, whence, as everybody knew, she was destined to be carried soon in a red sedan to the great house of Lu.

It was late in the autumn after the foreigners' return to the city; Kung had made his first journey to Peking to fetch back his daughter to the village, so that all the prenuptial ceremonies might be duly performed. Thanks to certain timely presents of money received from his future son-in-law, the schoolmaster had been able to add two more rooms to his hut, so that a suitable bedchamber was awaiting the young girl upon her arrival. The village matrons who had once so scornfully rejected Tung Mei for their own sons, now vied with each other in offering their services to the motherless girl. In fact, Kung's house so swarmed with them that the distracted schoolmaster was obliged to carry on his classes in the home of one of his pupils.

Yet Kung took care that nothing was left to chance. The village astrologer, paid well for his services by Lu, after due study of the horary characters denoting the birth times of the affianced couple, had specified in

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detail the lucky day and hour for the performance of each act that custom demanded. His instructions had been carefully written on a sheet of red paper and sent to Kung by Lu's go-between. Thus there was a time set for the cutting of the wedding garments, for the placing of the bridal bed in the chamber of the bridegroom, for the embroidering of the curtains and pillows of the bed, and finally for the bride's entering into the red sedan. Once fixed, it would have been considered extremely unlucky to change these dates.

Tung Mei watched with dazzled bewilderment these preparations for her marriage. In her heart she was terrified, though she said no word. But she longed day and night for the missionaries and little Carl Osborne, from whom she had parted with bitter tears. The young man who was so soon to become her husband was almost a stranger to her, and the reports of the hardness of his parents, which she had heard all her life, were not reassuring. But though she had come into close contact with foreign ideas, she was far too Chinese to think of disputing her destiny. Even in swearing to her little charge that she would never leave him, she knew well that she must submit to the will of others in regard to her marriage.

And, after all, was she not envied by every girl in the village for making such a brilliant match?—envied by them, and flattered by their mothers, who in serving her now hoped, no doubt, for some return of

benefits when she should become the wife of the princely young Lu.

The former scorn so freely expressed at the folly of educating a girl, had now given place to ejaculations of admiration at the wonderful foresight of her father in giving instruction to his daughter, as all agreed that it was her knowledge of the Classics which had attracted the rich man's son. And several parents had even proposed that he should "instruct the darkness" of their daughters that they might meet with equal matrimonial felicity.

In short, as Tung Mei knew, she was now the village heroine, but she was clever enough also to know that if her marriage should by any chance fall through, she would immediately become the despised and rejected thing she had once been in the esteem of the villagers. Her pride revolted at this thought even though she knew that she could always find a refuge with her foreign friends.

No, the young Chinese girl never dreamed seriously of questioning her fate; she took it as something inevitable, and in the remembrance of certain glances which had fallen upon her from Jung Kuang's eager black eyes between the formal phrases of their New Year's Day dialogues, she even found a timid promise of future happiness.

Exactly one month before the wedding day, the young girl watched from a peep-hole in the latticed window of her bedroom a procession which had started out from

Lu's house carrying the "cakes of ceremony" to the bride's dwelling. These cakes, containing sugar, lard, and pieces of fat pork cooked together in a kind of batter, were stacked up in piles surmounted with dolls made of wheat-flour fastened upon slips of bamboo. They were to be distributed among the bride's relatives and friends; but though they formed the excuse for the procession, they were by no means the most important gifts. Indeed, Tung Mei saw that the whole village had turned out to behold the lavish display of presents. Rolls of brilliant silk, satin, and crêpe, costly head dresses, jewels, and artificial flowers made of velvet and rice-paper, were carried with jars of wine, dried fruits, white Chinese vermicelli and a pair of large pewter candlesticks; while two boys bore between them on a tray a pair of satin boots, a red official cap and material for a dress tunic, intended for the bride's father.

A flush of pride dyed Tung Mei's cheeks as she watched from behind the window. Had there ever been a bride in all the three villages or even in Sesame Garden who could boast presents such as these? She laughed as she saw the rear of the procession brought up by two men carrying an open-work basket, in which were a cock and a hen, a gander and a goose; while a third man led two goats, a male and a female. How she wished that little Carl had been there to see them!

The village matrons were in their element in helping to receive and dispose of these things. The silk and

satin were cut out on the proper day into bridal garments for the beautiful girl, and all went propitiously until three days previous to the great event, when the matrons assembled in solemn concourse in Tung Mei's room to perform the ancient and peculiar ceremony known as "sifting four eyes." The young girl watched with fascination while several of the women held a large circular sieve made of bamboo splints over a brasier of live coals and shook it with a slight sifting movement as, one by one, her wedding garments were laid upon it.

A thousand eyes, ten thousand eyes
We sift out;
Gold and silver, wealth and precious things
We sift in.

She heard the women chant, and as fast as they were sifted, saw them remove the articles of her trousseau and put them into a chest to remain until the day when she should wear them as a bride.

The girl's fascination became intense as the last article was brought forward and laid on the sieve. This was the heavy red cloth, embroidered with a dragon, which was to serve as her bridal veil. She saw the eyes of the matrons fastened upon it in admiration and her feeling of pride deepened. How the golden dragon glittered in the sunlight! Who would not be proud to wear such a gorgeous head-dress?

"A thousand eyes, ten thousand eyes"—the chant began again. Then Tung Mei saw the door of the room

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suddenly open and a woman in the white raiment of a widow's mourning come in, and seizing the head cloth from the sieve, fling it with a mocking laugh over her own face. She heard the matrons give a cry of dismay in recognizing a certain woman of the village who had gone insane from grief at the death of her husband. And though she was less superstitious than the others, the young girl paled and was seized by a fit of trembling.

The widow was chased from the room, and the ceremony brought to a sudden end, for all had taken the lunatic's act as an omen of impending disaster.

X

A THOUSAND years before the feet of Jung Kuang stepped lightly along the byways of the village of Benevolence and Virtue, another youth, wandering about the ancient city of Sung, observed an old man reading a book by the light of the moon.

"This," the old man said, "is the register of the engagements in marriage for all the places under the Heavens. In my pocket I have red silk cord with which I tie together the feet of those who are to become husband and wife. When the cord has been tied, though the parties are of unfriendly families or of different nations, it is impossible to change their destiny."

As the young man lent a courteous ear to these remarks, the sage, pointing over his shoulder, added, "Your future wife is the child of the old woman who sells vegetables in yonder shop at the north."

This, with a few more details, is the story of the Red Silk Cord. "*Their feet have been tied together,*" the people say of all those who are betrothed; and so they said it of Jung Kuang and Tung Mei in their native village, and repeated it many times as an unceasing marvel, until the day came when the splendid red bridal sedan, sent from the house of Lu, arrived before the hut of Kung.

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The village matrons did not leave Tung Mei alone that day. They had her up at dawn, and bathed, perfumed and dressed her in the outside garments she was to wear in the sedan. (Her other wedding robes had already gone with the rest of her trousseau to the bridegroom's house.)

Then, still in the presence of the women, Tung Mei lighted incense before the ancestral tablets that even the poor schoolmaster possessed. She had been baptised at the foreign mission at Peking, but never thought of questioning her duty in regard to this rite of a prospective bride. Indeed, as she now worshipped the tablets, she wished fervently that she had been born a boy, so that she might have stayed at her father's house and accomplished all that was required to bring peace to the souls of her ancestors. She thought of those poor souls with pity. What would become of them after her father's death? And what would become, too, of her father's spirit without a son to offer sacrifices for it? She shuddered at the vision of the evil demons who would torment it. Then a gleam of comfort cheered her in the remembrance of the new religion which the foreigners had taught her. Ah, could she not commend her father's ghost to the good Yesu? He would surely be kind to it in the spirit land.

She would have liked to express this thought to her father as she turned from the tablets to kneel in worship before him in continuation of the ceremony; but even if the heathen women about her had not made

her too timid, her choking sobs would have rendered speech impossible. Her father looked at that moment more stern and forbidding than she had ever seen him, but she read his heart and knew that he was covering his true feelings with a mask that the women of the village might not guess the deep pain he was enduring at the thought of losing her forever. As she *kotowed* with streaming eyes before him, Tung Mei's whole soul went out to her father in love and gratitude, so that the ceremony became a true act of homage.

When she was again standing erect in front of him, Kung aroused himself from his stern contemplation of her, and with an unsteady hand took the heavy red cloth veil embroidered with a dragon, and placed it over his daughter's head so that it completely covered her features. As it fell over her, she remembered the act of the mad widow, and her knees shook so that even with the help of the two matrons who led her over the red bridal carpet, she could scarcely walk to the sedan. She took her seat with the marriage wail of the women smiting her ears and heart; then she heard several of them ask for a quilt in which to toss the "cakes of ceremony," and she caught the felicitous phrases which accompanied this exercise, intoned by the cake-throwers and responded to by the others. The wail had turned into wishes for her happiness! Ah, *would* she be happy?

The curtains of the sedan dropped now, and the procession started off to a lively air. The girl's heart beat quicker and a flush of excitement rose to her cheeks.

Here she was in all her red wedding finery being carried through the village on her way to be married! Everybody would be out to see the sedan pass, and would say: "What a lucky girl!" She could imagine, though she could not see, the two men in front of the chair carrying lanterns with the ancestral name of the groom pasted on them, and the two men behind bearing lanterns of a similar design with her own humble name. The huge red wedding umbrella, which she had admired so many times at the marriage of other village girls, would come next, and then the flaming torches, and the band of musicians.

It comforted her to know that her father was even now walking beside the chair. She saw in her mind's eye his face, still very grave and preoccupied, in singular contrast to the noisy bustle about him. Lu, she reflected, had doubtless already left the farm to meet him, and when the two men should come together about midway between the two houses, perhaps not far from the shop of her father's friend, the carpenter, the important ceremony of receiving the bride would take place. How often had she seen it done in the village—that significant exchange between the fathers of the young couple of two red cards with the names of their children respectively written upon them; the low bows on both sides, while the two men in front of the procession bearing the groom's lanterns, turned and made a complete circuit of the bride's lantern-carriers, who at once turned back with the bride's father in the di-

rection of her old home. And presently, true enough, she felt the sedan come to a sudden standstill. The short distance had already been covered. She heard Lu's loud voice and the grave courteous tones of her father returning his greeting. . . . And now the cards were being exchanged!

"Ah, good Yesu!" she cried in the suffocating depths of the sedan, "do not let my father leave me."

But the chair began to sway again as the bearers carried her forward; her father had turned back to the hut; and from this precise moment, according to Chinese custom, Tung Mei, daughter of Kung, the schoolmaster, changed her ancestral name and became the property of Jung Kuang and his parents.

She was with strangers the rest of that day, except for two of the village women who stayed with her as personal attendants. On arriving within the gateway of the farmyard, the band played with extreme vigour and firecrackers exploded in all directions. As the chair stopped Tung Mei heard the voice of old Fan-Ma (Mother Fan), who had borne more sons than any other woman in the village, greeting her with propitious sentences. The sound of her cracked, familiar treble comforted the girl in her stately loneliness; she longed to throw off her cumbersome veil and return the kind greeting, and look at everything for herself; this solemn rôle of bride did not suit her. . . . Ah, who was that laughing so merrily? Oh, to be sure, little Tsang Tsan, the carpenter's son; though she could not see

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him, she could picture to herself his smiling face as he danced behind old Fan-Ma, turning his lucky mirror upon the sedan. . . . Had not all these details been arranged weeks in advance? And now they were actually being carried out, and in *her* honour!

Still completely blindfolded by her heavy veil, Tung Mei was helped out by her two women assistants and led over red carpet to the bridal chamber. It was indeed a merciful custom which spared her at that moment from meeting the hostile eyes of Mrs. Lu, who, with the rest of the household and a crowd of friends and relatives, was awaiting the arrival of the procession. Jung Kuang, on hearing the music of the band, had turned very pale; then, at a gesture from his mother, had entered alone the bridal chamber, and taken the position demanded by usage with face turned towards the bed. As soon as the veiled figure entered with the attending women, he reversed his position and stood with his back towards the bed. He waited so until, with the help of her guides, his bride had reached his side; they then sat down together on the edge of the bedstead and remained for a few minutes in death-like silence. Who can guess what passed in their Oriental souls at that moment?

Lu's son rose first and entered the reception room, into which, still led by her women, Tung Mei soon followed to perform with him the essential ceremony of the day. On a table placed in front of the hall, or "before Heaven," as the term goes, were displayed a

censer between large red candlesticks, two sugar cocks, five kinds of dried fruits, a bunch of chopsticks, a mirror, foot measure, a pair of shears, and a long case for money scales, with two curiously shaped goblets tied together by a red silk cord. Before this table, that is, towards the "open light of the heavens," the young couple *kotowed* four times, then reversing their relative positions, *kotowed* again four times. This part of the ceremony is known as "Worshipping Heaven and Earth."

After this they approached together a second table set at the back of the room, upon which candles and incense were burning before the ancestral tablets of the Lu family. They prostrated themselves before these eight times; then, after standing face to face a moment, knelt down four times. When this was done, one of the women attendants filled the goblets with a mixture of wine and honey and offered one to Jung Kuang, and the other to Tung Mei; then, changing the goblets, invited them each in turn to sip again; she likewise broke off bits of the sugar cocks and gave them to the bridegroom and to the bride. It is a curious fact that as Tung Mei tasted the bit of sugar she thought of little Carl Osborne and wished that she might share it with him. Jung Kuang now took the bunch of chopsticks and pretended to lift with them the thick cloth which covered his bride's features. But this was merely a feint; the moment had not come when he might look at her face.

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This act concluded the ceremony. Old Fan-Ma, the mother of the many male children, who had first approached the sedan, now took up the lighted red candles, decorated respectively with a dragon and a phoenix, and carried them into the bridal chamber. Jung Kuang walked with his wife into the bedroom, but at once returned to the reception hall, leaving her to be dressed for the bridal banquet.

Truly, those were no mock tears which she shed—poor little Winter Almond!—in fulfilment of the strange requirement of Chinese etiquette that a bride must weep on her wedding day. For not only was she dressed a second time completely in her house robes, but she was now obliged to submit to the torture of having her hair arranged for the first time in the style of a married woman of her class. The heavy glossy mass of it was parted and reparted, and plastered down again and again with quince seed paste before it could be made to conform to the conventional outline with its spoon-shaped protuberance at the back of the neck. And even this did not satisfy Tung Mei's coiffeurs. In order to insure a perfectly clean line about her brow and temples, many of her wayward locks had to be actually plucked out by the roots; not until then was her head pronounced fit to receive the adornment of jewels and flowers which her lover had provided in profusion. Little wonder that the smarting tears had come to her eyes!

But though tear-stained, she looked very beautiful

to her lover when he was at last permitted to behold her face at the wedding feast which was spread for the two in the bridal chamber. Custom would have allowed him to eat his fill of that feast, though she might not touch a morsel, but love had driven away his appetite, so that they both sat there trembling and mute, eating nothing and not finding a word to say to one another.

The crowd of visitors who peered at them through the open door, loudly commenting upon the beauty of the bride and her modest demeanour, rendered them still more embarrassed. But the most terrible moment of all in that terrifying day for the poor little trembling bride was that in which, just at the end of the uneaten banquet, Lu and his wife came in to inspect her. Lu was good-natured, even jocose. He bantered her on her beauty, and then said, indicating his wife: "I hope you two will not be like a rat and a cat which sleep together."

Mrs. Lu burst into a loud, hard laugh at this; then looking at the girl with cruel eyes, muttered: "You cannot expect me to turn a somersault in an oyster-shell."

Tung Mei shivered, and Jung Kuang frowned at his mother as he saw the tears gather again in the little bride's eyes; but the hard woman only sneered at the sight of them and abruptly left the room.

Presently Jung Kuang slipped reluctantly away from Tung Mei and joined the group of male guests, feasting under the red canopy which had been put up in the

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largest court. The banquet for the women was not to take place until the following day. The young man's thoughts were still with his bride, so that he saw as if through a mist the wedding feast, the jugglers, and theatrical performance which his father had ordered on a magnificent scale. Yet though the details escaped him, he was conscious that the display was lavish beyond precedent in the village of Benevolence and Virtue, and he was gratified that this was so. Was not his beautiful and learned bride worthy of all honour? The guests hailed him with laughter and good-natured banter, for he was almost as much beloved in the countryside as his father was hated; and when he finally broke away from the revels, it was late.

XI

JUNG KUANG'S heart beat rapidly as he laid his hand on the door-latch of the bridal chamber and entered. It was a large rectangular room lighted only by the two tall wedding candles. He knew the popular superstition in regard to those candles. Relighted at dusk, it was ardently desired that they should burn during the entire night, for if one or both should be extinguished, an untimely death would be certain to await one or both of the newly married couple. He knew that if the candle decorated with the golden dragon should burn out first, this would signify that the bridegroom would die before the bride, but if the candle marked with the phoenix went out before the other, the young wife would be the first to expire.

They were both burning brightly on a table near the great teak-wood bridal bed as Jung Kuang softly crossed the room. The embroidered silk curtains of the bed were only partly drawn, and he could see the form of his bride, still in her brilliant wedding garments, lying across the bed as if she had fallen there like some tired child. Her two women were still on guard, sitting at the foot of the bed and fanning the sleeping girl with large painted fans. They smiled as the bridegroom entered, and whispered that his bride was asleep. Then,

rising, they uttered several felicitous phrases and went out of the room.

And now for the first time since early childhood, Jung Kuang found himself alone with the woman he had chosen for his own. He stood gazing at her between the parted curtains, breathless with love and desire, yet not daring to awaken her. Something about her smooth rounded cheek, flushed with sleep, brought back vividly the memory of the chubby baby girl he had played with by the goldfish pond, and the childish fancy came to him to slip a golden coin into the little hand which lay half open on the silken coverlet. That would be a way to awaken her without giving her a fright. He felt for a coin in his pocket, and found one stamped with a foreign impress. Ah, that would do; he would tell her that he had stolen it from the old miser's cave!

He flung off his heavy embroidered coat, displaying a light mauve under-tunic made of the softest silk, which revealed the lines of his shapely young body; then, eagerly, he fell on his knees beside the bed and stretched out his hand to reach the hand of his bride. He slipped the gold piece into the soft warm palm and closed his own gently over it. And the charm worked! Tung Mei's black eyes opened; she gazed at him, a little frightened and bewildered at first; then, recognising her lover, she smiled like a child. The sweetness, the innocence, of that smile filled the young man's heart with rapture. If he had been a European, he would doubtless

have covered the little hand he had imprisoned with kisses; as it was, he laid his forehead upon it, feeling with delight the satin skin against his own. His face was burning; he was glad to hide it there for a moment.

When he lifted it again the smile had faded from Tung Mei's face. She was looking at him intently with a strange earnestness, as if she were mutely questioning him on the secret of life. He was awed; he wanted to creep to her side, to reassure her. Had he not a right? He was her husband, her lord. But her strange stare held him in check a moment longer. He endured it as long as he could; then he made an odd sound, only half-articulate, the sound of one soul crying to another. She heard it and answered it by the same peculiar note; a moment later a furious blush spread over the Chinese girl's face; she raised her arm and drew it across her bosom as if to protect herself from him. But it was too late. He had seen the blush and his desire sprang up within him. He grasped the silk curtains of the bed and tore them open.

The sudden draught of air created by the violent parting of the draperies caught one of the candles burning upon the table beside the bed; it flared up, then spurted and went out in thick black smoke. Jung Kuang looked backward over his shoulder. *He saw that it was the candle stamped with the golden dragon.* A cold chill struck him, yet he stood still without making

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a sound, as if indeed death had then and there overtaken him. But Tung Mei, who had witnessed the omen, uttered a sharp, loud cry.

In a moment the room was full of light. Lu and his wife, followed by Lu's old father and the male guests who had not yet left, crowded in, holding up lamps and lanterns with cries and ejaculations. The young man's parents caught sight simultaneously of the extinguished candle; Lu turned pale to the lips as he recognised the omen of death, but, like his son, remained mute. It was otherwise with his wife. As the significance of the thing penetrated her brain, the hostility of her aspect became more menacing. She grasped the dead candle in her hand, and flung it with a hoarse imprecation full in the face of Tung Mei, who was now sitting trembling on the edge of the bedstead. It struck her cheek, and the melted red wax which was not yet cold left a smear across her face like a streak of blood.

At sight of it, Jung Kuang rushed upon his mother like a young savage. All his life long he had been indulged in every whim; it is small wonder that the precepts of filial piety so laboriously memorised at school should have counted for nothing at this moment. He wrestled with his mother, trying to force her out of the room, when Lu's old father came forward and rebuked his grandson sternly.

"Shame! Shame!" he cried. "Touch not your mother with violent hands, you, who should be fanning

her pillow and warming her coverlet like the virtuous Hwang Hiang of old."

The rebuke had its effect; Jung Kuang released his hold of his mother's arm and fell back abashed. The old man took advantage of this to get the others out of the room. The guests departed reluctantly with renewed cries of consternation. The village of Benevolence and Virtue would have something to talk about the next day! Lu's wife, who was the last to go, turned and cursed her daughter-in-law again at the door, and Lu also frowned angrily, though he said no word.

When the room was again quiet, Jung Kuang stood for a moment staring at the empty place on the table where the candle decorated with the golden dragon had so recently stood. He then deliberately took up the other candle, bearing the image of the phoenix, which was still burning, and set it in the vacant spot, as if he would thus establish his wife's right to represent him when he was gone.

"If it be the will of the gods that I die soon," he said in a strange even voice, turning towards Tung Mei with dignity, "you may still live to bear me a son. Should the Heavenly Rulers bestow this boon, I now request that you teach him to offer sacrifices for my soul and perform all the ancestral rites. Cherish my memory for the sake of the love I have given you, and instruct our son to do the same."

And Tung Mei answered between her sobs: "With

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the help of Heaven, I will accomplish all my lord's will."

Then her husband lay down beside her, and very gently drew her to him.

XII

THERE was no wedding feast for the women on the following day; the sombre cloud of superstition had cast its shadow, and when his wife obstinately refused to go on with the proceedings, Lu had had no heart to dispute her will. The customary visit on the third day after the wedding of the newly-married pair to the bride's parental home for the purpose of worshipping her ancestral tablets had also been omitted. This omission had proved a sore disappointment for the village matrons who had been cooking for days in anticipation of the banquet which is always given to the bride by her friends on the occasion of the visit.

Kung had been relieved that there was to be no feast; his little house had been overcrowded for weeks with officious, chattering women, and he had welcomed a little quiet; but he had been deeply incensed that the tablets of his ancestors had not received the honour due to them. He had heard, as had all the rest of the villagers, the story of the extinguished candle, which was now coupled with that of the mad widow, and a foreboding of evil had entered his soul and had grown as the days went by without either visit or message from his daughter; a rigid rule of etiquette, which it would have been



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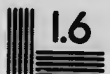
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considered a disgrace to disregard, had forbidden his making the first visit.

A month had passed; then another and still another, until six had gone by. Kung's apprehension finally became so great that he decided to go to the farm, even at the cost of his dignity. He shaved and dressed carefully, selected his best fan to carry in his girdle, and set off along the dusty road towards the plateau at the foot of the hills where Lu's estate lay. When he reached the gate of the farm, he was told roughly by the gatekeeper that he could not be admitted. He argued with the servant, and finally lost his temper and cursed him, but the fellow remained obdurate. He had had his orders, he said, from the "tai—tai," the lady of the house, and that was the end of the matter.

Angry and sore at heart, Kung turned away. He could eat nothing all that day. In the evening he lighted the pith wick floating in oil which still served him as lamp, and inscribed a letter to Lu. It was couched in the most civil terms, but beneath the suave phrases of the scholar ran a menacing undercurrent which depended for its sense upon a certain exquisite adjustment of characters almost like that in an acrostic. Kung knew that Lu could not read, but he trusted to Lu's son both to read and rightly to interpret his letter.

An Oriental can ill brook an insult, and the insult paid to Kung was a very serious one. He was poor and naturally shy, even timid, but in his heart dwelt the deep pride of race. The insult was not merely to

himself but to his ancestors; his duty then was clear. Unless there was a speedy reparation of the wrong done him, he would seek revenge. Had not Lu been a man so universally detested, he might have quailed before the task. As it was, he counted upon help from two sources: first, from his pupils, past and present, upon whose enthusiastic obedience he knew he could rely absolutely; and second, from the villagers whose hatred of Lu needed only a spark to kindle it into violence.

Kung had also another tool at his command. Usually silent and diffident, he possessed nevertheless the gift of eloquence. On rare occasions he had surprised himself by a sudden rush of words which had electrified his pupils by its intensity. He had felt in those moments new and strong capabilities. If a great cause had ever presented itself to him, this restrained man might even have become a leader. Hitherto the motive for action had been lacking. But now something vital had moved him. For besides the matter of his insulted ancestors, and his personal grievance, he had become very nervous about his daughter. His affection for her, though he had always been ashamed of it, was in reality the passion of his life. He felt that he must be assured of her welfare, or break open Lu's gate and snatch her away.

He waited several days for an answer to his letter; none came. He wrote another less subtle and waited again. Ten days went by; then late one evening as he sat down to compose his third and last letter—this

time an open threat void of all ambiguity—a knock at the door startled him. He opened the door and found himself face to face with his son-in-law.

The two men bowed, each shaking his own hands, placed fist upon fist, in salutation. Kung saw that Jung Kuang looked pale and anxious; he could scarcely control his own nervousness as he asked his guest to be seated. The beginning of their conversation was slow and laboured; even in a time like this these Chinese gentlemen did not forget their manners. On the contrary, dreading as they did the approaching crisis, they were punctilious to excess, each priding himself upon a rigid observance of the rules of etiquette. Compliments expressed in the most polished language passed between them for almost an hour before anything of real concern was touched upon. Then Jung Kuang, turning pale in spite of himself, casually referred to Kung's letters as excellent examples of literary skill. Kung bowed at this, but remained mute, watching his son-in-law from between half-parted lids. An awkward silence fell between them; the young man rubbed his hands nervously together, turned and twisted in his chair, then suddenly jumped to his feet.

"I can't help it! I can't help it!" he shouted to the astonished schoolmaster. "What can I do? I am powerless! My mother is abusing your daughter—in-sulting her in the most shameful manner every day—and unless I kill her she will never stop."

Tears started to his eyes; his whole face was convulsed.

Kung's own face twitched and his hands trembled.

"Your mother is abusing my daughter?" he repeated almost stupidly.

"Yes, she curses and reviles her in the most violent language. But I tell you, I am powerless! Your honourable daughter is already in a condition—how shall I express my miserable meaning? The gods have not been deaf to our prayers. If all goes well your daughter will be a mother by the end of the seventh moon."

Kung made an odd gesture but said nothing. Jung Kuang took a step towards his father-in-law; his eyes glowed with an inward fever.

"You have heard, honourable sir," he continued, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, "of the candle which went out on the evening of the wedding—*my* candle—the one bearing the image of the golden dragon?"

Kung nodded solemnly.

"An, then you will understand me, then you will know how urgent it is that my son, if such the child prove to be—may the Heavenly Rulers grant it!—should be born under the ancestral roof."

Kung nodded again. Jung Kuang swallowed with a look of relief.

"He must, when he comes to an age of reason, be in all respects fitted to perform the necessary rites of our household when I am—dead." The last word came out with a proud effort at indifference.

"You see now, honourable sir, in what a dilemma I have been. When my mother first made known her intentions of neglect towards you, I remonstrated violently with her. I went to my father asking him to commaud her to alter her attitude. To my surprise, he took her part. He forbade me to allow your daughter to make the customary visit to you or to make it myself, on pain of being disinherited with my offspring. I tried to steal away to your house to explain—to apologise—but I found myself watched and followed."

"Followed?" Kung echoed in surprise.

"Even so." Jung Kuang admitted shamefacedly.

"Is it possible!" the schoolmaster ejaculated. "What did you do then?"

"The time went by," resumed his son-in-law. "The gate-keeper told me of your being sent away from our gate; I was much grieved, honourable sir."

Kung slightly inclined his head; the other continued.

"I also discovered that the foreign friends of your daughter had called with their little son, and were told that she had gone with me on a long journey which would last through the entire summer."

Kung made another gesture of dismay.

"Did you tell my daughter this?"

"No, honourable sir, I dared not; she was already too unhappy. Yet I hoped for better times. Then your letters came; I read and interpreted each one in turn to my father in my mother's presence. My parents only laughed."

The schoolmaster frowned at the word, but made no comment.

"Both times," Jung Kuang went on, "there was a terrible scene. I demanded angrily that they should make amends to you. They only sneered and cursed you the louder. I was wild; I knew not what to do. By this time I had perceived the condition of your daughter. I was divided between hope and terror. I tried to frighten my father by emphasising the threats in your letter. He would not listen; he said: 'So you think he is bold enough to stroke the tiger's beard?' and laughed again."

The schoolmaster started from his seat with his fists doubled, muttering a threat; then, as if making a strong effort at self-control, he sank again into his chair.

"You may well be angry, honourable sir," Jung Kuang said. "I, too, was angry, and resolved to come to you at all hazards. For ten days I watched for an opportunity; luckily my father conceived the idea of feasting his friends to-night; he and the servants were off guard; I slipped away and came here."

He paused.

"You did well," Kung said gravely; then, with an assumption of indifference: "Has the little slave, my daughter, ever spoken of me?"

Jung Kuang smiled sadly.

"Ah, honourable sir, how can you ask it? Has she ever ceased to cry for you? She is so afraid of my mother that she keeps within the inner apartments by

day as well as by night. But even there my mother pushes in to revile her, so that I have advised your daughter to lock the door."

"To lock the door against your honourable mother! Has it come to such a point?"

"It has, indeed," the other answered. "And now, honourable sir, I must be going, for if my father finds where I have been he will disinherit me. I would not care about this in ordinary circumstances, but as I have explained—the candle——"

"Yes, yes," Kung broke in very gently; "the matter is understood."

The two men rose and looked into one another's eyes.

"You have understood," the younger one slowly repeated after a pause. "May the gods bestow happiness upon you for that! To die or to live is according to fate. Calamity, as well as good fortune, comes from Heaven. The omen of the candle has never been known to fail; death invariably follows within a year. Yet I have a great hope—a son may live to survive me. When he comes he will without doubt soften my parents' hearts so that they will no longer be unkind to your daughter and at the same time cease from neglect and insult to you, honourable sir. Meanwhile I can only beg your forbearance."

He smiled, though somewhat wistfully.

"But in the event that the child should be a——"
Kung began.

The prospective father interrupted him, frowning slightly.

"Ah, let us not look for so great an evil. I burn many joss-sticks daily and utter countless prayers. Your honourable daughter does the same and has even borrowed a shoe from the Goddess, 'Mother,' which has been placed in the niche which holds her image at home. She has also besought the foreigners' Yesu, who is said to be very powerful. It is not possible that the gods will fail us."

It was Kung's turn to smile wistfully. He remembered when he, too, had burned joss-sticks and prayed for a son! But he said nothing.

The two men took leave of one another at the door of the hut, shaking their own hands as they had done when they met.

"At the seventh moon I will send you tidings," Jung Kuang said at parting.

"May Heaven grant all your desires!" responded the schoolmaster. . . .

Kung waited; the months passed. At the end of the seventh moon a servant came to his hut with a letter. It was from his son-in-law.

"The wrath of the gods has overtaken me for my disobedience towards my parents in the matter of my marriage," Kung read. "The child, born this morning, is a girl."

The letter dropped from the hand of the haggard,

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shaken man; he turned very pale, for he knew that the time was at hand when he must take his daughter away by force from Lu's house—from the new cruelties which were sure to follow the birth of this miserable girl.

XIII

TUNG MEI lay huddled with her girl child in a wretched heap on the great teakwood bed, praying in turn to the gods and to the good Yesu for death. Sad it is for a woman, after she has made the supreme effort of body and soul and brought forth a child to her husband, to read in his eyes even a shade of disappointment; but the sadness becomes tragedy when, as with Jung Kuang, the disappointment is deep and bitter.

Since the moment when the midwife, with a scornful gesture, had raised her daughter for her to see, Tung Mei had not spoken a word. She had only watched with terrified eyes the entrance of her husband, and caught his almost agonised look when he learned the truth. She had not dared to meet his eyes again, but had hidden her face in her pillow as if she had been guilty of some heinous offence.

Jung Kuang, seeing her so, had been touched with pity, and, taking the infant from the midwife, had placed it in his wife's arms. He had smiled wanly at her, but he, too, could not speak. The year was fast drawing to a close; death might seize him at any moment, and, after all, he would die without a son! Only one who has been in close contact with Chinese thought and feeling can realise the galling bitterness that such

a situation can create. Yet Jung Kuang loved his wife, and his eyes flashed a dangerous fire, when, with the sudden opening of the door, his parents entered. Lu's wife was in advance. She reached the bed in a single bound, snatched the naked child rudely from its mother, and, when she saw its sex, gave a snort of fury. Before Jung Kuang could prevent it, she had tossed the infant contemptuously into her husband's hands. He, in his turn, glanced at it, and uttered a sharp cry of rage. He would have dropped the little creature in his utter scorn had not the young father hastily taken it from him and restored it, crying and trembling, to its mother. She gathered it fiercely to her breast and, with her back turned to her persecutors, received their volley of curses.

Lu, usually less abusive in speech than his wife, on this occasion showed himself her equal. He had entered the room with the one idea of beholding his grandson. Like Jung Kuang he was a firm believer in omens. His only son must die soon; of this he was convinced. His one chance, then, of receiving the worship and sacrifices which he thought were due him in the next world, was in leaving a grandson to survive him. His disappointment in finding a female child was of the same quality as that of Jung Kuang, with this difference: he had no affection for Tung Mei. Both he and his wife would probably, in the end, have tolerated her as the mother of their grandson; but now she seemed to them an utterly worthless and despicable creature, who was

destined to bring untold shame and calamity into their house.

So Lu had joined his wife in abusing his daughter-in-law with the obscene and violent curses with which the Chinese language abounds, until their son, in a fury equal to their own, had grappled with each of his parents in turn and pushed them from the room. This time Lu's old father had not interfered; he was away on a long visit to an old friend who lived in a distant part of the province.

All this had occurred early in the morning. It was now late afternoon of a day in August. The midwife had gone after her thankless task had been performed, leaving a single woman attendant, known as Chang-Ma (Mother Chang) to wait on Tung Mei. She was one of the two women who had assisted at the wedding; she had stayed on in the capacity of a servant, and was at this moment busy preparing food in an adjoining chamber.

Jung Kuang was not in the room. He had found intolerable the silence which had arisen between him and Tung Mei and which neither of them could break. After writing and despatching the promised letter to Kung, he strolled out into the court. It was his intention to make peace, if possible, with his parents. Undoubtedly, as he had written to his father-in-law, the gods had punished him for his disobedience towards them; the hour of death must not find them unreconciled. He was extremely apprehensive for the safety of

his wife and infant. Now that his hope of leaving a son had been disappointed, he thought seriously of taking Tung Mei and the child to the schoolmaster's house. Infanticide was so common as to have become a matter of jest in the neighbourhood. Even the hated Lus would not be blamed for ridding their household of an undesirable female. This Jung Kuang knew very well, and he knew, too, that daughters-in-law were not infrequently made away with because of alleged "unfilial conduct" and the murderers left unpunished. Certainly he must do his utmost to soften his parents' hearts. With this thought in his mind he hastened his steps towards the second court where his parents had their apartments.

In the birth chamber the heat was intense. Tung Mei lay back on her pillow with closed eyes; she was faint with exhaustion; her heart was like water within her, but her mind was wonderfully lucid. She felt minute hands on her breast, hands and a wet, groping mouth—her child, her shame, her misery! Why had it come? Had she not for months prayed daily, hourly, to every divinity she knew, heathen and Christian alike, for a son? And now! Again she remembered the anguished disappointed eyes of her husband. She broke into a low sobbing moan; the sweat poured from her; she was so weak; ah, if only she could die!

She reviewed in her mind with terror the months since her marriage. During this entire period she had been virtually a prisoner in the bridal chamber and the two or three adjoining rooms. Each time, with one excep-

tion, that she had tremblingly ventured into the other apartments or the courts of the farm-yard the sharp eyes of Lu's wife had spied her out and her still sharper tongue had lashed her without mercy. Finally, not content with this, the violent woman had taken to pursuing Tung Mei to her very bedroom, so that it had become necessary more than once to lock the door against her. Lu, also, since the fatal bridal night, had always turned on his daughter-in-law a forbidding and hostile face, although, until that morning, he had not actually cursed her.

Besides her husband and her serving woman, she had only one friend in the household. This was Jung Kuang's grandfather. He was a gentle and courteous old peasant with a passion for flowers. On one occasion Lu's wife was away on a visit and the kind old man had seized the opportunity to invite Tung Mei to go with him to see his garden. Now, as she thought of it, she forgot her heartache for a moment and smiled.

The garden was near the goldfish pond where she had once played with Jung Kuang. Many people would have ignorantly called that small plot of ground merely a flower-bed, but Tung Mei, who knew with what infinite love and care the old white-haired man tended it, would never have made that mistake. For her, as well as for him, as it burst upon their view, it was a beautiful and spacious garden—in fact, almost a park! For, although it barely covered four feet square of ground, it contained trees as well as flowers, and showed a noble ave-

nue of palms leading to a sacred mountain. On the top of the sacred mountain there was a temple to Buddha, and down the sides of the mountain a waterfall tumbled with consummate grace. It is true that the trees and palms were scarcely a span high—not so high, indeed, as many of the flowers—and that the sacred mountain, temple, waterfall and all, might have been regarded as a mole hill by the sacrilegious. But, as Tung Mei reflected, the sacrilegious are without imagination and so are perverse in their judgments.

As for the flowers in that garden, they had seemed to her, after her long imprisonment, of almost magical beauty. The queen of them all was a rare and beautiful orchid, which grew in the shadow of the sacred mountain. It was a marvellous thing of a deep velvety brown colour with veins of rich mauve and spots of bright orange. Jung Kuang's grandfather told her in a voice tremulous with pride of how every day it had grown taller and taller on its stem and swayed more splendidly in the breeze, until now, as she could see, its head was on a level with the little temple on the top of the mountain.

Tung Mei had clapped her hands with pure joy—after all she was scarcely more than a child, this young Chinese wife—and had insisted on running back for her husband, that he, too, might see the beautiful thing. He had come smiling. And while they were both admiring it, the old man had stooped, broken the magnificent flower from its stem, and, with a low bow and a smile of inim-

itable grace and sweetness, as if he were begging her forgiveness for all the wrong she had suffered within the gates of his dwelling, had placed it in her hand.

Afterwards she had wa'ked with her husband under the willows by the goldfish pond, and they had smiled at each other as they recalled their childish adventure. That evening she had shyly taught him how to kiss as she had seen foreign husbands and wives do, and he had become so enraptured with the new art that he had practised it until midnight. Ah, that had been her happiest day—her only happy day—since her marriage. Why could not their innocent joy have lasted?

But the next day Lu's wife had returned and fear and wretchedness had returned with her. In the beginning Tung Mei had wept and begged her husband continually to take her back to her father, but when he told her one day of his great desire that his son should be born under the family roof she understood him and said no more.

He never spoke to her of his clandestine call on her father, nor of the visit of her foreign friends, knowing the grief it would cause her. He protected her and, as the days went by and the hope of a son grew stronger within him, he became marvellously gentle. He had a habit of bringing her wild flowers which he found high up in the mountain ravines—bluebells, larkspur, and great yellow tiger lilies. He knew that he was followed in these expeditions, but scorned the fact, for Tung Mei loved the flowers, and his delight lay in watching her

arrange them with exquisite taste in large porcelain and cloisonné vases.

The memory of her husband's kindness came to Tung Mei now, as she lay on her pillow, but she dared take no comfort from it, because she, too, had not forgotten that his year of grace was fast drawing to a close. A month or two more, and then——!

In spite of the heat she shivered. In the spasmodic movement of her body the little creature at her side lost its grasp of her breast and began to wail piteously. She restored possession to the tiny greedy mouth and continued to dream.

What had become of her foreign friends? She knew that they were always at the temple at this season. Why had they never come to see her? A few letters had been exchanged at the time of her marriage, but since then she had been too proud to write, as she had nothing but unhappiness to record. Little Carl would now be a big boy of six years. Ah, if only he were her child, instead of this unknown and undesired creature beside her! And yet—her hand passed over the little downy black head—was she really indifferent? Would she not love her daughter if she dared? Her soul had its own answer to that question! Nevertheless, by a curious trick of her imagination all the mother love which had come to the surface of her being through the experience of her late travail, focussed itself upon the foreigner's child, so that presently when she fell asleep from exhaustion she dreamed that the little warm body against her own was

her former charge, who had now by a miracle become her son. She understood with extraordinary clearness that it would be her duty to teach him how to perform all the ancestral rites, so that her dear husband's soul might find peace when it had passed into the spirit-land.

XIV

JUNG KUANG'S advances to his parents had their effect, and after this day there was a perceptible lessening of hostility on the part of the Lus towards their daughter-in-law; or, to be more exact, they ignored her so completely that she apparently ceased to exist for them. All her meals were served to Tung Mei in her room by her tire-woman. Her husband shared them when he could, but more often he remained with his parents, for fear of offending them again.

One day Jung Kuang had climbed with his father the highest peak in the vicinity, near the top of which stands a small Buddhist temple known as Pearl Grotto. He had been away since early morning and on arriving home after sun-down the young man would have liked to go directly to his wife's chamber to give her the flowers he had gathered for her on the mountain-top, but his mother, with a hypocritical smile, appropriated the flowers for herself, though she cared nothing for them, and insisted that her son should sit down to supper. He dared not excuse himself, especially when he found that she had prepared a special dish for him.

When at last he broke away from his parents and entered her apartments, he found Tung Mei sitting alone with her baby asleep on her breast. She tried to smile

as he entered, but in the attempt her lips quivered and the tears came to her eyes, for she had passed a lonely day and evening. Although her strength had fully returned to her, she had scarcely been out of her rooms since the birth of her child. This had been peculiarly hard for one of her nature; for unlike most of the sedate, stay-at-home women of China, there had always been something of the gipsy in Tung Mei. As a child she had run freely about the fields and later had roamed the hill-sides with little Carl Osborne. Even at Peking she had enjoyed a good deal of freedom with her foreign friends. But now all that connected her with the outside world which she so loved were the wild flowers which her husband brought her; but his hands were now empty. It was strange at the end of this long day, after hours of waiting, how much the absence of this customary gift hurt her. The tears which had gathered in her eyes fell down her cheeks as her husband approached her.

"What is the matter?" he asked tenderly. "Are you not glad to see me?"

"Yes, yes, I am glad," she sobbed.

"Why, then, do you weep?"

"Have you not been on the hill-sides?" she asked with seeming irrelevance, dropping her eyes.

"Yes, to the highest mountain of all, beyond Pearl Grotto."

"Were there no flowers there?"

Jung Kuang smiled. Ah, this was the trouble, then. What a child she was!

"Yes, very many and most beautiful. I gathered a large handful for you——"

"For me? But where are they?"

Jung Kuang's face fell.

"That is a hard question to answer. Yet I must tell you the truth. Our honourable mother took them from me. She thought I had brought them for her and, of course, I could not deny it."

For the first time since he had known her Tung Mei showed anger. For almost a year she had suffered gross indignities at the hands of her mother-in-law and, in spite of much heartache, had kept her temper. But now, at this trifling thing, something within her broke, and a wave of jealous wrath swept over her face.

"You *could* have denied it!" she cried. "You could have told your honourable mother that the flowers were for me."

Then, as if in a fright at what she had said, she rose with the baby in her arms and fled into an adjoining room. Jung Kuang stared after her in grieved surprise.

"Ai! ai!" he said under his breath.

He stood there in helpless man-fashion, wondering at this strange mood. Being quite unable to decide what to do, but, noticing that the hour was late, he removed his outer garments, lay down on the teakwood bed and drew the curtains, vowing that on the morrow he would gather a whole armful of the great yellow lilies which his wife loved best of all flowers and bring them to her.

Presently he saw a dainty hand, adorned with rings and finger-nail shields, fumble at the silken draperies; they parted a little, and a tiny black head appeared like a flower dissevered from its stem; two beady little eyes blinked at him, and an infinitesimal mouth screwed itself up into an absurd grimace. Jung Kuang laughed as he recognised his daughter; then the curtains were thrown back altogether and Tung Mei's face appeared, with blushing cheeks and laughing, repentant eyes.

The young Chinese held out his arms to her and, with a little cry of joy, she sank into them, with the baby held against her breast.

FOR several days Jung Kuang was prevented from carrying out his intention of returning to the hillsides where the yellow lilies grew. The jealous eyes of his parents followed his every movement. If he started off alone one or the other would be sure to call him back on some pretext. It was a tyranny of jealous affection from which a year ago he would have found a way of escape. Now, although it exasperated him almost beyond endurance, he submitted to it for the sake of the future happiness of his wife and child. Yet he often had grave misgivings as to the final outcome. Would the memory of his filial piety be enough to save them? He could only trust that it would prove so.

Another circumstance which kept him indoors was the weather, which for some time had been fair and warm but now began to be unsettled. Sudden gusts of wind would blow black storm clouds across the blue; sometimes these would break and spill themselves in a sharp shower of rain, accompanied by lightning and rumblings of thunder.

It was not until the fourth day after the excursion to Pearl Grotto that Jung Kuang at last found his opportunity. It had turned warm again; in fact, the heat was oppressive, inclining men, as well as beasts, to drowsiness

and slumber. Lu and his wife had both succumbed to the heavy atmosphere, and at this mid-afternoon hour were asleep.

Jung Kuang went over to a bamboo divan near an open window, where Tung Mei sat half-reclining with the baby sleeping across her lap. She was drawing her finger-tips lightly through the black down, soft and glossy as silk, on the little head. The child was enveloped in swaddling clothes of a bright, cherry-tinted fabric, which made a splash of colour on her mother's tunic of old blue. One of Tung Mei's feet had escaped from its embroidered slipper and hung over the edge of the couch. Against the lattice on the window ledge above her head stood a large porcelain vase filled with chrysanthemums of a delicate lavender colour. Opposite it, on another part of the window-ledge, was its mate. This vase was empty. Tung Mei had once selected it as the chosen vessel to hold her husband's gifts of wild flowers and had afterwards reserved it for this purpose. Jung Kuang now pointed to it playfully.

"That shall be filled before sunset; I am going now to the place where the lilies are."

Tung Mei looked up quickly; her face showed pleasure, mingled with a slight concern.

"Ah, you are going to find me some of those beautiful lilies! How can I thank you enough? But are you quite prudent? It is so warm to-day and the air feels as if there might be another storm. Would it not be wiser to go to-morrow?"

Jung Kuang laughed. "I am not afraid of the wind and water demons. Besides this is likely to be my only opportunity as both our honourable parents are asleep."

"Well, then, be careful. I shall be very glad to have the flowers, especially since to-morrow I shall need decorations. Our little one will be a month old, and we must observe the ceremony of Shaving the Head."

As she spoke the young mother passed her fingers again caressingly through the black silky hair of the sleeping babe. She looked rather anxiously at her husband to see if he had remembered the date. The ceremony she had alluded to is a very important one in a Chinese family. In the case of a girl the shaving of the little head is usually done before the image of "Mother" or the Goddess of Children.

"Yes, certainly," Jung Kuang replied, not without a slight effort. "This must be done."

He had once had dreams of this rite being performed before the ancestral tablets, as is the custom when the child is a boy. In a rich family the ceremony of shaving a first-born son is attended by considerable pomp. He knew that his parents would make no festivity of the event under the actual circumstances, but he tried to enter into the spirit of it for Tung Mei's sake.

"I shall get you an armful of lilies, so that you can put some in every corner of the room," he added.

Tung Mei clapped her hands.

"Ah, how beautiful that will be! We must call the

child Yellow Lily-Bud, in honour of your flowers. When may I expect you home?"

"Not for several hours. The place where the lilies grow in the greatest profusion is some distance from here. It will be nearly sunset when I return."

They smiled at each other. Jung Kuang thought: "How beautiful she is! And to think that she can read the Classics; there is no woman like her in the whole countryside!"

Tung Mei had no thoughts; she only felt the crimson tide rising from her throat to her face under her husband's gaze and knew that she was happy. Just before he went out their hands met; then, as he released himself from the long clasp, Jung Kuang suddenly stooped and caught his wife's little foot, which still swung over the bamboo divan. He cradled it in his hands, as if it were a rare and precious thing, and finally kissed it many times in the strange foreign way which Tung Mei had taught him. Then, murmuring something in a husky voice, he went quickly out.

The lattice frame of the door had scarcely closed before Tung Mei sat bolt upright on the divan, waking the baby by her sudden movement. Her face had gone white with fear. Was it a shadow which had fallen on the floor, or a distant reverberation of thunder which had so startled her? She did not know. She was only aware that her heart was throbbing painfully and that she would give her life to have had her husband safely back in the room. She started from her seat and tried to call him,

but no sound came from her throat. Hurriedly placing the child on the divan, she went to the door and shook it open, beckoning with trembling hands to the receding figure in the court. But Jung Kuang did not see her and in another moment he was gone.

Tung Mei gasped and rubbed her eyes. What was this evil spell that had laid hold of her? Was it some demon come to disturb her? Fie! fie! Had not the foreigners told her many times that she must not be influenced by such superstitions, that the demons which torment people were only their bad fancies? She would not be so foolish as to allow this imaginary trouble to spoil her day.

The baby, left to itself on the divan, began to cry. In her efforts to soothe it Tung Mei soon forgot her anxiety. She began to plan for the ceremony on the following day. As she knew that Lu and his wife would take no part in it she decided that the details should be of the simplest. She summoned Chang-Ma, her serving woman, from one of the adjoining rooms to help her in the arrangements. They first set candles and flower-vases upon a table in front of the niche in the wall which contained an image of "Mother." Tung Mei bowed for a moment before the little figure of the gorgeously robed Goddess seated upon her tiger. She had seen many of these tigers but until her own child came she had no interest in them; but now she never passed the niche without an inward prayer that this tiger would exercise its power of drawing into its body the evil spirits in the

surrounding air which were waiting to strike sickness into her baby. With her own hands she placed upon a separate table the shaving articles and a fine porcelain water-bowl, for the use of the young father, who was himself to shave the child's head.

When these things had been made ready, Tung Mei sent Chang-Ma out to the village to buy certain other articles which she deemed essential for the occasion. The list included twenty or thirty duck eggs and a number of soft sweet cakes. The cakes were to be adorned with the apricot flower and the duck eggs stamped with gaudy representations of children, flowers and animals. These things are usually given to the child by its maternal grandmother; and Tung Mei thought longingly now of her own mother. How well they would have understood each other! Had she not been to her mother the same cause of bitter disappointment as her daughter had been to herself? And yet she doubted not that her mother had secretly loved her even as she loved her own despised child.

Soon after the servant had left the room Tung Mei was startled by the sound of rain-drops in the court outside. She went to the divan and, kneeling on it, leaned out over the window-ledge. The rain-drops were large and struck the paving-stones with a splash; one fell on her outspread hand. She drew her hand in and rubbed it dry with the other. Her anxiety increased as she looked at the lowering sky.

"Why did I let him go? Oh, why did I let him go?"

she murmured, as she turned to the restless baby who claimed her attention again.

A quarter of an hour passed before a flash of lightning made her look back towards the window. After the flash she noticed that it was much darker than it had been and that the rain was falling heavily. She leaned out once more over the window-ledge and saw that the rain from the roof was pouring in a cascade into a stone cistern set in a corner of the court. The vessel, which measured up to a man's waist, had an edge about two inches wide. Balanced on this edge, its fur flattened down and shiny with the rain, was a little striped kitter left there and forgotten by some careless person. It was mewling shrilly and persistently, as it struggled in the gusts of the rising wind to keep its position on the edge of the cistern, now half full of water.

At sight of its predicament Tung Mei rushed to the door, which blew sharply open at her touch, letting in a stream of cold damp air. Without waiting to throw anything over her head or shoulders she crossed the porch, ran down the flight of steps into the court, and, catching up the trembling kitten from the cistern's edge, raced back to her room. Even in the short distance which she had traversed, the rain which was by this time descending in torrents had wet her enough to cause the water-drops to fall from her hair, now almost as sleek and shiny as the kitten's own, and to have reduced her silk tunic to shapelessness. But she only laughed, shaking herself as she closed the window against the rain.

Picking up a towel from the table where the shaving articles had been laid, she rubbed the little animal dry, and then placed it tenderly beside the baby on the big teakwood bed.

"Here is a pretty play-fellow for you, my little Yellow Lily-Bud," she said, addressing the baby and smiling as she used the new name. But, even in pronouncing it, this fanciful name suggested her husband's errand to the distant place in the mountains and she became nervous again.

"Out in all this rain and wind and lightning—and for my sake; oh, how I wish he were back!"

As Tung Mei said this mentally the door opened; she turned with a glad cry, as at the happy fulfilment of her wish, but it was only Chang-Ma, who had come back with her basket under her arm. She had had the prudence to take with her an umbrella made of yellow oil-skin which she now deposited against a chair in the middle of the floor. It left a puddle of water on the white matting, but Tung Mei was too much relieved at having the woman back again to scold her for this carelessness. She took the basket from the servant, ordered candles—for the room was now almost dark—and, seating herself on the edge of the bed, began to take out the painted duck eggs and to count them with childish pleasure. She placed them in a row before the baby and the kitten; the baby followed the movements of her mother's hands with vague black eyes, but the kitten, now dry and warm again and ready for a frolic, pounced upon

each egg in turn, bracing its tiny paws against it, and curling and twisting around it with pretty undulating movements of its little striped body.

Tung Mei had reached twenty-six in her count, and had just laid her hand on the last egg to take it out of the basket, when she was startled by a sharp flash of lightning, followed almost instantly by a heavy crash of thunder. While she had been diverting herself with the contents of the basket, the storm had grown in strength and was now breaking over the farm in wild fury. Blinding flashes and deafening peals of thunder began to succeed each other with alarming rapidity. Tung Mei, white with terror, caught up the baby and ran into the middle of the floor. She called to Chang-Ma, who, as frightened as her mistress, came towards her moaning and helpless.

"Alas! alas! Whatever shall we do!" she cried.

The two women clung together; and as Tung Mei pressed her wailing baby against her breast, she tried to look through the window in the hope of seeing her husband; but the lightning terrified her and she could only hide her eyes. The panic that she had experienced early in the afternoon, just after Jung Kuang had left the room, was redoubled in her heart.

"Where is he? Oh, where is he?" her soul cried in anguish.

She became suddenly aware that there were others asking the same question. She heard the voices of the Lus on the verandah inquiring of a servant the whereabouts

of their son. The reply was evidently unsatisfactory, for in another vivid illumination of the sky and court Tung Mei saw through the lattice their scowling faces and gesticulating hands. Then the room was lighted anew by a lantern swung upwards and held a moment at the window. The sash was pushed open and Lu's large handsome head presented itself; his voice was harsh with anger as he asked her where his son had gone. Tung Mei's spirit was cowed at the sight of the stern man, and, as if revealing a guilty secret, she managed to say:

"Your honourable son has gone to the mountains."

The sound of swift young feet in the courtyard broke in upon this tense moment, and Tung Mei's heart surged with joy as she caught sight of Jung Kuang, leaping up the short flight of steps which led from the court to the verandah. As his father turned the lantern on him she could see that he was smiling and that his arms were full of yellow lilies. She ran forward with the baby through the door on to the porch, her immense joy overcoming all fear of the Lus. Her husband had come back! He was beautiful! He was hers! The sky flamed with a white dazzling light. Again she saw his smile—his arms full of yellow lilies; he was several steps nearer her; he called her name. . . . Then a fire-bolt fell which rendered her sightless for several moments; there was a terrific sound in her ears. When she could see again she dimly discerned her husband's lifeless body lying in a water-soaked heap on the top step of the porch. She

shrieked at the sight, and tried to go to it, but was opposed by her mother-in-law, who rushed at her, splitting the air with foul vituperation.

"Devil woman! Witch! Slayer of my son! May you be hacked into ten thousand pieces! May your bowels rot inch by inch! May you be born again as a dog or a hog!" She came nearer and spat into Tung Mei's face.

The next moment the two women were wrestling furiously with one another; the younger struggling with all the force of her being to keep her child from the hideous clutching hands of Lu's wife.

"Give me the brat, the infant witch, the little rabbit with devil for dam. Give me the brat! Drowning is too good for her, yet we will drown her, for she is none of ours. Let fish be her coffin and the waves her grave. Give me the brat!"

They struggled, they fought tooth and nail, and so great was the young mother's strength that she might have escaped with her child alive had the evil woman been her only opponent. But Lu, who had been stooping over his son's body until he was convinced that it was quite lifeless, now advanced upon the women, and with one stroke of his powerful, well-trained fist sent Tung Mei reeling against the wall of the house. He then grasped the baby by its legs, jerked it savagely from its mother's arms and held it head downward over the stone cistern which was now full of water to its brim.

"Aye, aye," he said, motioning to his wife to witness

his deed. "You have spoken well. Let fish be her coffin and the waves her grave. So perish all the offspring of devils."

Tung Mei, pinned to the wall by the extremity of her horror, saw the little black downy head sink into the water, heard a gurgling sound more awful than anything she would ever again know in life, and watched with helpless fascination until the cherry-coloured swaddling clothes were swallowed up in the cold depths of the cistern.

Then Lu and his wife turned from their fiendish work and drove their daughter-in-law out into the storm.

AN INTERLUDE
A CHILD IN OLD CATHAY

THE WIND BELLS

(Villanelle)

Pagoda-bells of old Cathay,
Of your Moon-Mountains' sorcery
Your tongues complain the livelong day.

I tremble as I hear you play
Your ancient magic melody;
Pagoda-bells of old Cathay,

Around you cling the lichens gray
To soften your deep misery;
Your tongues complain the livelong day;

Oh, what grim spell did P'u-sa lay
On these cold hills of witchery?
Pagoda-bells of old Cathay,

I see you in the dim light sway,
I feel your painful mystery;
—Your tongues complain the livelong day—

Ah, what their burthen—who can say?
Ah, what their weary minstrelsy?
Your tongues complain the livelong day,
Pagoda-bells of old Cathay.

I

IT will be remembered that before they allowed him to sign the ninety-nine-year lease of the Temple of the Spirit Light the villagers had forced Lu to demand of the foreigners a curious contract. This concerned itself with providing a shelter for the abandoned idols.

True to their bargain the missionaries had reserved one room in the temple for the old gods. A whole tribe of agricultural divinities and the deities of health and longevity, of lightning, hail and rain, of sun, moon and starlight, of pestilence, famine and abundance, with one big War God and a mild Goddess of Mercy, were all jumbled together like so much worn-out rubbish in a woodshed!

Little Carl Osborne, whose bedroom in these summer months at the Hills was next to the idol room, used to fancy at times as he lay awake in the night, that he heard the old gods whispering among themselves and sometimes even complaining loudly of the desecration they had suffered. The big War God, brandishing a two-edged sword in each of his twelve hands, must have contained a veritable petard within his deep chest, to judge from the explosions of wrath which Carl sometimes heard from his corner. And the Goddess of Mercy seemed to be always whimpering about the miseries of

this present life and complaining in a peevish undertone that the Moon Goddess was rudely crowding her.

Whether these sounds had so occult a source as the boy imagined, or whether they were merely due to the squeaking of mice, or to those changeful summer thunders which were like the varying voices of some mighty ventriloquist, Carl at least cherished a secret sympathy for the old idols, insulted by such uncivil usage. He scornfully refused to filch their hearts of silver and tin from the poor old helpless gods, as some of his ignoble playmates did, vaunting of the trick afterwards. On the contrary, to put more *heart* in the poor Goddess of Mercy, and so to stop her whimperings, if possible, he once offered as oblation a bowl of rice saved from his own breakfast, and he fancied afterwards that her divinity's tones were less querulous!

In the summer following Tung Mei's marriage, the little son of the missionaries was a slim lad of six. His face under its crown of reddish brown hair was delicately chiselled, with warmly curved lips, and strange grey eyes which went black with excitement. There was already about the boy a reserve scarcely yet defined as melancholy, which marked the dreamer. In truth there were more definite reasons than the gloom of courtyard and hall for a premature tendency to sadness in this child who spent his summers in the old temple. For the work which the missionaries carried on during the summer in the Western Hills was only a little less strenuous than that which was done throughout the year in

Peking. The medical missionary, especially, knew no rest; and the boy had become witness to the daily procession of the sick and the halt and the blind bringing to the foreign doctor at the Temple of the Spirit Light their stories of scarcely human misery.

By nature sensitive, the child suffered from these things an undefinable anguish. The *Welt-Schmerz* had already taken root in his soul!

II

THE boy had many pleasures to offset this too early knowledge of suffering. Day was bright on the hillsides above the temple, and he could roam there freely and joyfully. The end of the season after the extreme heats was the time for excursions to the more distant temples on the hills, or for climbs to the summits on the higher ranges above.

Of the many hillside temples in this region of the province of Chihli, perhaps the most remarkable is one where the Buddhist idea of Heaven and Hell is given realistic interpretation. From the Temple of the Spirit Light these materialised ghost-lands are reached by a circuitous route passing over the bases of the hills and around the beautiful lake fed by icy springs from the feet of the twin peaks, Long Life and Jade Fountain, on the northern bank of which rises resplendent the summer palace of the Empress Dowager.

Carl had long been promised by his parents a visit to the famous temple, and just before the missionaries were to return to Peking this promise was fulfilled.

It was still early on a fine September afternoon when the boy, riding his donkey at a lively canter ahead of the caravan in which his elders rode, passed out of the last hamlet on the roadway and found himself nearing

a large reserve known as the Emperor's Deer Park. It seemed to Carl on entering by the magnificent portal that he had come into some enchanted ground. Down long shadowy vistas of old cedars he caught sight of gleaming meadow-lawns rich in flowers; and in the midst of ancient groves of oak and evergreens he saw fantastic hunting-lodges, arbours and pavilions with their half-ruined colonnades festooned with ivy. Sometimes in the woodland paths a deer, or a doe and her young, would stand and gaze until the travellers passed; or a squirrel would drop from a branch, glance about him with bright shy eyes, and then frisk up another tree-trunk. From time to time Carl heard the lapping of water, and before he came to it would guess at some dreamful swan-lake, or deep artificial pond, set around with balustrades of carved marble yellowed by time. Except for this lapping and the sounds which the intruders made, all was silent in the park as in a primeval forest, with that silence of woodland where the myriad life goes on in minor key so low as to be felt rather than heard, like vibrations to the deaf.

And this was the old hunting ground of the Emperors! The child grew pensive at he knew not what obscure sentiment struggling in him. Out of the silence he seemed to hear voices and faint echoes of horns and spectral beatings of hoofs quite other than those of the company behind him. The sounds were not sad; indeed, he felt that they had been merry originally, but now they were subdued, as if coming to him through

long reaches—whether of time or space, he scarcely knew.

Yet he could but vaguely conjure up any picture of those old-time hunters. Were they clothed in Imperial Yellow, and did their horses go shod in gold? Yes, he believed it! They must have been very splendid to hunt in such a park. Perhaps even the great Yung Lo had come here—that mighty ruler of the Ming Dynasty, who, Tung Mei said, had once made all Asia tremble and bow before him. Ah, he would have liked to live in China under Yung Lo's reign, when the temples and pagodas and palaces all over the land were glittering in their new gold and green faïence, and when Peking was the most magnificent city in the world.

Carl knew that the park was seldom visited now by the sickly young heir to the throne, who was much too feeble for the manly sport of the chase. And, all at once, with the thought of this frail boy, the gay and splendid fabric of his dream dissolved, and he began to have a sense of oppression, as if the stillness around him had suddenly become tragic. He grew almost fearful, and rode on as if there were need of caution from some lurking ill. For the silence of the old woods had fallen upon him like a spell; and he felt still spellbound when he passed at last out of the reserve, and found himself with the others before the Temple of Heaven and Hell.

III

AT the entrance gate a young priest clothed in a long yellow robe, with a skull cap of the same colour, met the party with a smile which conveyed a subtle hostility under the guise of its friendliness. His face was that of an opium-eater, with sunken cadaverous eyes which gleamed with dreamy intelligence, and bloodless cheeks and lips. There was something in the slightly quivering nostrils and the inimical curl of the thin lips which drew Carl's eyes to his face in spite of the repugnance he felt. His gaze became so fascinated that the young priest grew restive under it, and began to stare at him in return with a look so adverse and uncanny that the child suddenly wanted to shriek aloud as if he had been bewitched.

There was a mysterious air, too, about the great dim courtyard where he found himself. It was closed in on the four sides by temple buildings all exactly alike with the same steeply curved roofs of a jade green, and the same number of steps leading to the same pillared porches. The court itself was paved with gigantic white stone slabs upon which dragons were disporting themselves in heavy bas-relief. Perhaps it was due to a dizziness brought on by the long ride in the sun, but the child was sure that the monsters were moving. They

seemed to be crawling languidly over each other and stretching out their jaws in a vain attempt to swallow the sundial in the middle of the court.

The voice of the young priest who had stared at him was low and courteous when he addressed the foreigners, yet Carl shuddered inwardly at the sinister impression conveyed by this guide's tones. And, indeed, there was something strangely cruel in the aspect of this man of senile youth.

"Do you wish to see first the abode of light or of darkness?" he asked, and one of the party replied in English: "Let us take it in Dante's order," and then pronounced to the priest, *Ti Yü*, the Chinese word for Inferno. They followed him across that wide court of serpents, past the sundial, and up a low flight of white steps to the porch of one of the green-roofed buildings. The boy felt his flesh creep and the roots of his hair move strangely as their yellow-robed guide fitted the largest key from the bunch at his girdle into a great rusty lock and threw open the gate of Hell.

As he stepped over the threshold, the child involuntarily put his hands to his ears to shut out the expected din of groans and shrieks. But there was no sound; the place was as still as death—muffled, as it seemed, from all sounds, even of intruding footsteps, by the soft, unclean dust which lay over everything as thick as wadding. Carl thought that it would take a hundred years of sweeping and dusting to make this Inferno clean again.

The foreigners looked about them curiously, while the priest began to chant a dirge of horrible monotony like the wail of souls accurst. And now the child stood face to face with the materialised idea of evil and its punishment as conceived by almost one-half of humanity. Against the three blank walls of a vast rectangular hall were built mountains of clay, out of which issued mock smoke, fire and brimstone. Above, below, and upon them swarmed in impotent but realistic wrath devils of all sizes and patterns. Here were fierce, harpy-like creatures with wings of bats and vultures, swooping down upon their prey; demons, with claws and teeth of savage beasts, gnawing and devouring their victims alive; and brutish monsters which lay dormant, as if they had been glutted to reluctant satiety. All were fearful beyond expression. In their clutches writhed the wicked; every conceivable manner of torture was theirs; certain ones were being perpetually ground to powder in a mortar; some were hung by their thumbs; others again were being tossed about in the air with long-tined forks held by grinning demons.

In the centre of the hall was a mammoth idol, the lord of the place. Nothing could have been more horrible! His legs were crossed under him in indolent complacency; the expression on his face was an indescribable mingling of cunning and stupid ferocity. He was twelve-armed, and in each of his hands he carried an instrument of exquisite torture. Out of his mouth and

belly issued writhing serpents, and around him stood arch-devils waiting for his commands.

Suddenly the vast hideousness of it all struck upon the child's spirit. He felt crazed and sickened by these plaster devil hordes and the unbearable refrain of the priest's chant. He turned so faint that he would have fallen upon the dust on the floor had not the priest at that moment led the way out. Perhaps he had noticed the child's pallor, for on the threshold his thin lips lengthened into an ironic smile.

"We are going now to the abode of the blessed," he said. "That will doubtless revive the young gentleman."

Even the air of the dim Court of Serpents seemed good to breathe after the dead atmosphere of the Hall of Punishment. The child's nerves were restored. He was now about to look upon scenes of delight in beauteous Nirvana, where all the good people of Tung Mei's stories went after they died. He shut his eyes before entering the door, so that the full surprise of the beautiful place might break at once in all its majestic splendour upon his senses when he should open them again. But he was doomed to keen disappointment! The same thick, soft, unclean dust lay over this abode of the blessed as he had seen in the dwelling of the evil. And the acme of bliss represented here was nothing more dazzling than the gentle exercise of riding for all eternity upon a white elephant whilst being fanned forever by attendant slaves.

The boy glanced instinctively at the young priest. The man's sensitive nostrils were quivering from some emotion he could not understand, and from the half-closed eyes of the opium-eater he caught a look which again perplexed and terrified him. Did the priest wish to laugh or curse? Carl did not know; but for the second time that day he could scarcely refrain from shrieking aloud.

IV

FOR some time after this excursion to the Buddhists' Heaven and Hell Carl did not sleep well. Without doubt, the long ride had fatigued him unduly so that he could not easily throw off the sinister impressions of his visit in the Court of Serpents.

He began to be afraid of the idols in the room next to his bedroom. The big War God, for whom hitherto he had entertained a certain cordiality in the belief that, although somewhat uncouth in voice and gesture, he would find in it a strong and valiant friend in time of battle (an emergency well to be prepared for!), now seemed to him wicked and hostile. He trembled to hear its fierce voice in the night, although he was bold enough in the daytime. He came to the conclusion that the idol was a spy sent by that terrible monarch of Hell in the distant temple, whom he could not recall without a shudder of loathing. Indeed, he was sure one night that he heard them together in clandestine conference. His small body shook with fright as a flash of lightning illuminated the room, followed by a reverberation of thunder. The eyes of the gods! The voices of the gods! They were plotting for his soul! There could no longer be any doubt of it.

"Dear Jesus! Good Buddha! Hide it from them!" he cried, and buried himself under the bedclothes.

The next morning he went into the idol-room and tore off indignantly from the warrior's arm an old silk sleeve, embroidered with a pattern of chrysanthemums, which in a more trustful mood he had bound there for Tung Mei's sake, as her favour, or lady's token, in anticipation of a sudden call to "arms" when she might need a mighty champion. The boy had never forgotten for a day his young nurse, whom he had loved and still loved passionately. The sleeve had once been hers—part of a discarded tunic which he had appropriated. Now Carl looked aghast at the idol's abominable plaster face and figure. Were these the face and form of a hero of chivalry? Ugh! How could he have been so deceived? He knew now that it was an arch-fiend lying in wait for his soul; and besides he was convinced that it was a traitor to the *Cause*. Just what cause, Carl would have been at a loss to tell, but that there was a cause, and that the war-god was false to it, he was absolutely certain. False! False! False! Beelzebub in league with Lucifer! The idol must be punished.

The child seized a bamboo pole lying on the floor and in his outraged fury struck savagely at the hideous effigy. As he was too little to reach the idol's head, most of his blows fell upon the defenceless belly, which cracked open in places and emitted torrents of dust from beneath the broken plaster. This was so piteous a sight, and the poor old god endured it so patiently, that the boy's heart

misgave him. Even if the War God were a spy and had plotted for the destruction of his soul, for the sake of the old friendship which Carl had once felt, he must desist. But if ever he heard it parleying with Satan again, woe betide it!

His trust in the other inhabitants of the idol room was likewise poisoned. The harmless rural deities took on sneering or mocking expressions, and the smile of the Goddess of Mercy, to whom he had offered an oblation out of pity, now appeared treacherous, and her long narrow eyes seemed full of evil wiles. He even fancied once that he saw the Goddess stick out her tongue as he passed by the window of the idol room; and he was sure that it was a forked tongue, darting in and out swiftly like a snake's!

In a short time his suspicions were to be amply confirmed. The old gods, doubtless too cowardly or too impotent to attack their adult enemies, were to take their long-meditated revenge on the child of the Christians.

V

IT was at the time of the September equinox, when high winds prevailed and the first hint of the coming winter desolation was showing itself in the flurry of fallen leaves and the persistent dropping of sere pine needles from the old trees in the temple courts. Indian summer was yet to follow, mild and mellow; but before that season of illusions, most seductive of all in the old land of Cathay, when Death masks as a sweet magician turning the earth into one vast Field of the Cloth of Gold, Nature had declared her true intention in a few days and nights of almost savage storm.

It was, in fact, the evening of the day of the flagellation of the big War God that the tempest actually broke, although for several nights and days preceding it, the muttering of thunder and the lamentations of the wind, which Carl had mistaken for the voices of infernal discourse, had been almost continuous. The child had been rendered so uneasy by these sounds that he had found his bedchamber almost uninhabitable. His imagination was possessed by a vision of the coming "battle," when all the gods would take sides against him. What could he, who was so little, do against these great principalities and powers, arrayed in arms and terrible with banners, coming to tear out his soul from his body? He cogitated

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a long while about the matter, and then, of a sudden, bethought him of a possible ally.

This was no other than the Lizard of the cave on the neighbouring hill above the temple, which the native superstition regarded as the god of all the reptile tribes. It was reported that once in every twenty-four hours a black streak on the rock beside the mouth of the cave turned into an enormous living lizard, gulped down a morsel of food, and then relapsed to the inertia of its slothful digestive processes. Carl had for a long time been very curious to see it in one of these interesting moments of activity when, it was said, the Lizard would grant any favour asked of it; but hitherto he had never been fortunate enough to be on hand at the right time. Now he thought it would be worth a trial. He had heard in the villages that the Lizard was a very kind and benevolent divinity, so gentle that even little children might approach it without fear; he decided that he would go to it and implore its aid in the coming conflict which, although not definite in his mind as to place or circumstance, seemed to him nevertheless more and more imminent.

He had been told by the hill children that the Lizard had a weakness for white mice as dainty titbits before a substantial meal, and he thought it would be a delicate attention to take it a couple of these that he happened to have caged as pets. But as he was much too tender-hearted willingly to see the little creatures devoured, he planned a ruse by which to let them escape, as if by acci-

dent, just before being consumed, although not before the sight of them had made the Lizard's mouth water with pleasant anticipation. While its palate was thus being tickled, he would obtain a promise of its succour in time of need, when it would marshal for his benefit whole battalions of lizards, newts, horned-toads, etc., etc., to drive away the enemy. It would be like the plague of frogs in Egypt sent to confound Pharaoh. Although balked of the delicacies, the Lizard, having once given his word, would be in honour bound, as a gentleman, to hold to it. It was an unmanly wile, and the boy was secretly ashamed of it, for deceit was foreign to his nature, but it was a case of being between Scylla and Charybdis. He was in desperate need of an ally, and yet not quite willing to sacrifice the life of a mouse to save his own soul! To have done that would have seemed to him murder, and he chose deceit as the lesser evil. Then, too, he thought that he could make it up to the Lizard by offering it other refreshments of a strictly vegetarian nature which it might like just as well as mice!

He determined to start out on his visit of supplication in the early afternoon of that same day in which he had flogged the big war-god. He was still indignant at the thought of the idol's base treachery, and believed that there was not a moment to be lost before putting in motion counter-forces to its vile manœuvres. With this thought uppermost in his mind, Carl took the cage with the two white mice, and, slipping unperceived from the inner court, went down the steps, through the melan-

choly grove of cypresses and cedars, past the great muffled bell, and out by the old worm-eaten portal; until, descending the granite stairway, he found himself on the hillside path at the foot of the temple. He skirted the long wall to the right, being careful to keep in its shadow out of the still hot sun; then, turning the angle, continued by its side until he stood above the old sanctuary and could look down on the massive tops of the trees.

From this point the whole plain stretched before the child. He noticed with curiosity spirals of dust mounting up like white genii from all parts of the land. In reality the wind was rising and the spirits of the storm were beginning to be restless before the wild revel to come. But Carl was not conscious that this was a sign of coming trouble; his attention was held by more familiar things. Close by the foot of the hill was the great well of the temple, from which, twice a day, the coolies fetched water for the needs of the missionaries. The water was carried in pails swung on the ends of a pole over the shoulder and poured into stone cisterns, deep, dark and cool, from which Carl drank daily. The well was a monumental structure, with a system of wooden bars and pulleys from which dangled two big buckets; stone troughs, green and slimy with moss, ran around the well, and at this moment Carl saw a camel-driver stop and water his immense beast, which afterwards stretched up its long neck to nip off the top leaves of a sapling growing nearby. A mile and a half

farther on was the walled adobe village of Benevolence and Virtue between its two neighbouring hamlets. He remembered his unsuccessful visit to the farm of the Lus to see Tung Mei, and he wished that she were with him now, for her soft voice and pretty ways could not fail to beguile the Lizard. But, alas! he must depend on his own blandishments.

A tremor of anxiety suddenly seized him as he turned his face upwards for the ascent and saw, across the distant gully high on the further hill, the black streak by the opening of the cave which represented the God of the Reptiles. But he felt reassured as his glance fell on the white mice in the cage in his hand, and the bunch of delicate red radishes and watercress which he had brought with him as a secondary offering. With them he believed that he would be irresistible if only he could be sure of being there when the Lizard changed! As he continued on his way, he began to pray for this with fervour, addressing, like Tung Mei, Christian and heathen divinities indiscriminately.

He climbed in an oblique direction to the right, having in mind a certain point of the ravine where the crossing was easy over boulders which projected above the water of the gully. It was a steep and long pull, and before he was half-way there he was forced to stop and rest. Indeed, the heat was singularly oppressive, weighing upon him like a thick blanket, although the sun was already veiled by a growing murkiness. Even his light raiment of "grass cloth"—a sort of delicate Chinese

linen—seemed unendurably heavy, clinging unpleasantly to his moist body. Every moment he had to wipe the beads of perspiration from his face; his hair stuck to his forehead and neck in damp strands, and the inner band of his straw hat was saturated with moisture, so that he finally took it off and carried it suspended over his arm by its elastic cord.

He was panting by the time he reached the crossing of the ravine, and sinking to rest again in the shade of the trees which bordered it, he found himself on a mossy bank with his feet dangling downwards toward the water in the gully. How deliciously cool it seemed there in comparison to the bare hillside! Fortunately it was still early afternoon, and he need be in no haste to pursue his journey. The Lizard might wait awhile! He would put the radishes and cress in the water to freshen them up a bit, and give the white mice a drink. He deposited the cage on a rock beside him, and, brushing the damp hair from his brow, sighed with deep content.

VI

IT was an entrancing place for dalliance into which the boy had entered. The trees grew thickly on either side of the ravine, almost forming a bower by the intermingling of their foliage overhead. From the branches of some gnarled old oaks the acorns hung like a thousand elfin bells. Beautiful parasitic vines softly embraced the rough trunks of the trees, or, trailing over the bank, swayed idly with the long mosses in the stream. At the foot of the boulder by which the child sat, the water was caught in a small pool, where minnows circled and aquatic insects glanced and gleamed, spinning crystal webs on the liquid surface. Below, it fell echoing over the rocks in a flashing waterfall, to sparkle away for a distance over a stony bottom, and, at last, steal out of view beneath a bed of shadowy rushes. Masses of maiden-hair fern clung to the banks on either side of the gully; with its delicate green were mingled charming sprays of bluebells and larkspur, and the soft coral pink of begonia blossoms with their richly veined leaves.

Carl, stooping over the water, formed his small palm into a cup, which he filled again and again from the pool and brought to his lips. The water dripped from his fingers over his clothes, but this, too, he found re-

freshing. From two fallen acorns he made tiny drinking goblets for the white mice, which lapped the water gratefully with their diminutive tongues, and then nibbled a bit of the white acorn meat which Carl gave them; they were so much invigorated by this that they jumped into their revolving wheel, spinning swiftly under the laughing eyes of their little master.

Carl looked at his feet dangling over the bank. How hot and dusty they felt! Why not take off his shoes and stockings and wade in the fresh pool? In a trice he had them off, and had slipped down into the water. The Lizard might wait, indeed! This was too delightful to leave in a hurry.

On the edge of the pool, between the crevices of pebbles, he arranged the radishes and cress, so that they might be kept wet without danger of being carried down the stream. After this he chased minnows and water beetles, capturing them in his hand, looking curiously at their tiny bodies, and then letting them jump back from his palm into the water. He laughed at the little splash they made, and was glad that there were so many strange little creatures alive in the world.

When he had had enough of wading, he went back to his mossy place on the side of the stream and, half-closing his eyes, abandoned himself to dreams. Oh, the pure poetry of a child's fancy—islets of sweet consciousness in the ocean of the Infinite! As he dreamed there, watching the delicate ripples that the minnows and water insects made, widening out until

they lost themselves on the border of the pool, suddenly the sound of the wind-bells from a distant pagoda came to his ear. He knew this was the sign of coming storm, for only when the *Fêng-Shui*, or wind and water demons, were up to some mischief, could the bells be heard so far. But in his relaxed and languorous mood he heeded not the warning any more than he had heeded that of the dust spirals which he had seen on the plain. The freshening of the wind which reached him through the heavy foliage of the trees was delicious. He unbuttoned his jacket at the neck and bared his throat to it, sighing luxuriously. The melody of the bells glided into his bright dreams, and under their spell he became for the time being a small Lotos-Eater; for the music of the bells seemed to him inexpressibly sad, like the voices of exiled souls suffering some endless and indefinable anguish. Yet they were gentle souls, he was sure, who were doomed unjustly, and who showed a pitiful patience even in their complaining. Perhaps they were the spirits of the little girl-children, victims of the prevailing infanticide in cruel old China. Carl knew of this barbarous custom, and he wondered how their murderers could endure the continual reproach of the voices wafted day and night from the hills. Ah, those baby-souls out on the cold hillsides crying so piteously for a mother!

VII

WHEN at last he arose with the mouse cage to resume his pilgrimage, the sun was already nearing the ridge of the highest hills to the west. Its light, coming through ever-shifting cloud reefs, was a wan glare, lending a jaundiced aspect to everything. Outside the protected bower in which the child had so long tarried the wind seemed chill. In fact, it was almost a gale in his face as he began once more the upward ascent on the further side of the ravine. He had, indeed, a moment of doubt as to the prudence of proceeding, but it seemed a pity to abandon his project now that he had come so far and was so comparatively near the Lizard's cave.

So he trudged along against the ever stiffening gale, which buffeted him about rather rudely, but which he nevertheless preferred to the suffocating heat of the earlier part of the afternoon. His clothes, instead of clinging to him as formerly, now threatened to blow away entirely. He turned once to look back at the plain where the white genii were now dancing madly, and at the old temple which he had left far below. He thought rather wistfully of his mother, but when he remembered his enemies in the idol room he determined to push his strategy to a conclusion.

Pricking himself by this thought, he climbed on and on until his little body ached with cold and exhaustion. When finally, gasping, he stood at the mouth of the cave, he was so dazed by his long buffeting that he could scarcely recollect his purpose in coming there. Oh, yes! It was to see the Lizard "change," and to ask its aid in the "battle." There it was, a great black streak on the rock, god of the Reptiles!

With the mouse cage still in his hand, he entered the opening and looked about for a place to sit down. The cave was high and deep and resounded even at the child's light footfall. From its rocky sides and floor a thousand bits of quartz and crystal scintillated in the gloom. Carl found a large rock near the cave's mouth hollowed out in the form of a reclining chair. He placed the mouse cage carefully beside him and sat down on the rock; he would wait there and rest until the Lizard "changed," which doubtless would be in a few minutes. There would surely be enough noise and stir about the miracle to advise him in time to rush out and lay his offering at the god's feet. He hoped he would not forget at the last moment to open the door of the mouse cage to let the little creatures escape before they fell into the jaws of the hungry god. He was glad that the radishes and water cress still looked so tempting; they would certainly appease the Lizard if it felt hurt at the escape of the mice. Ah, how tired he was! He had been so hot, and now he was so cold, and he ached numbly all over; he would just stretch himself out a

moment on this hard rocky old chair and wait for the Lizard to change. Then he would scamper down hill as quickly as he could, have some supper and be put to bed. Ah, how delicious that would be,—to be put to bed. . . .

He must have slept several hours, for the cave was jet black the instant after the terrific flash of lightning which awakened him. The almost simultaneous explosion of thunder shook the cave and made it echo and re-echo ominously from its inmost recesses.

With a scream of terror, the child sat upright upon the rock. Where was he? What was happening?

“Mother! Mother! Father!” he cried.

Then a dreadful certainty seized him. He was in Hell! The old idols had outwitted him. They had made him go to sleep by some obnoxious charm, and the Lizard had “changed” while he was unconscious. Oh, what a sordid trick! Now they had his soul and were torturing it in Hell!

His heart seemed to be loose in his body. It leapt frantically to his throat and then dropped like lead to the pit of his stomach. Again he could feel it beating against his temples like a wild thing, as if trying to split them open in its extreme terror.

“Jesus! Buddah! Mother! Father!” he cried, rushing from side to side of the cave and bruising his hands and limbs against the sharp stones. Another dreadful flash of lightning showed him the mouth of the cave and the mouse cage with its little occupants half dead with

cold. He caught the cage up in his hand as the thunder pealed and echoed hideously about him.

"I won't stay here! I won't be damned!" he screamed defiantly as he rushed out into the storm.

VIII

THE "Battle," indeed, was on! Every known and unknown principality and power of darkness,— gods and demi-gods, fiends, devils, goblins and sprites of evil seemed arrayed against him. They were just as he had seen them in the far-away temple, hideous and cruel beyond description, except that they were no longer plaster and impotent, but full of power and lust for his soul's destruction. As he stumbled in frenzy down the hill with his head lowered, they surged about him in hordes, brandishing their enormous double-edged swords above him, or flashing them unendurably in his eyes while they howled out horrible imprecations. Others cut him savagely with whips, or pricked him with a thousand needles at once until his flesh stung as if scorched by fire. It was the revenge of the insulted gods on the child of the Christians,—paganly cruel, cowardly, insensate!

He went on and on, staggering blindly—utterly lost, half-consciously trying to reach the ravine where he had crossed in the afternoon. It was well, indeed, that he missed the way, for the gully was now a swollen torrent, roaring down the mountain in terrible speed, uprooting trees and carrying down great rocks in its irresistible advance.

He reached at last the foot of the hills, far from the Temple of the Spirit Light. Here there were great fields

of *kao-liang*, or sorghum, a plant which grows ten or twelve feet high, shooting out a straight stalk like a bamboo, and bearing on its summit an immense bunch of coarse grain used by the Chinese for feeding cattle and distilling spirits. It grows thickly together in the fields, making an almost impenetrable forest of high upshooting stalks. It was by creeping between the stalks in one of these fields that the child, battered almost to death, at last found respite from the fierce pursuit of his enemies.

The search party from the Temple of the Spirit Light had been out all night, and now in the stormy dawn the face of the child's father, who was directing it, showed ashen as hope grew more and more feeble in his breast. In truth there was little doubt in the minds of the wearied band of missionaries and native Christians who had roamed the hills during all those terrible hours, calling unceasingly the name of the child, that the little boy had perished—had either been drowned in the swollen gully, or been devoured by the wolves, which, on such nights as this, stalked boldly abroad from their hiding-places. Two of the missionaries had even entered the cave of the Lizard after Carl's flight thence, and had discovered his hat and the bunch of radishes and water-cress. This had caused renewed alarm among the searchers, for, as the clew could not be followed up, it had confirmed them in the sickening conviction that the child had become the prey of some wild beast.



BOOK II
"ANOTHER'S CHILD"

KING SKULE: Tell me, Skald, . . . have you ever seen a woman love another's child? Not only be kind to it—'tis not that I mean; but love it, love it with the warmest passion of her soul!

JATGEIR: That can only those women do who have no child of their own to love.

—From "The Pretenders," *Henrik Ibsen*.

I

ON the evening of the great storm the schoolmaster, Kung, sat in his hut smoking and playing chess with Yen, the carpenter. Kung had used a part of the money which his son-in-law had on several occasions given him to pay off his debt to his old friend. He had even added a liberal sum as interest, with gifts of a fan and tobacco pouch, so that their relations were again very cordial.

Overhead lingering showers spattered the new tiled roof, the pride of Kung's heart; and the fresh layer of reeds, which strengthened the walls of the hut, glistened in the occasional flashes of lightning. The two friends congratulated themselves upon their comforts, for it is safe to say that scarcely a half-dozen other houses in the village of Benevolence and Virtue possessed that night an unleaking roof or waterproof walls. In seasons of unusual rain countless numbers of these Chinese clay huts, with their heavy roofs of earth and reeds or sorghum stalks, literally crumble down to the ground.

The schoolmaster and his friend were at present seated in square arm-chairs, at opposite sides of a small table which upheld the chessboard and men, and was lighted by the pea-oil lamp. Kung's face reflected the deep deliberation which marks the expert chess player when he

is about to make a move. After several moments of profound thought, he slowly extended his left hand and with it plucked back the long sleeve from his right; then, with his fingers spread apart and his long scholar's nails protruding elegantly, he lifted his queen between forefinger and thumb and placed it cautiously upon another square. As he did so, a subtle smile played about the corners of his lips, half hidden by his thin black moustache.

"Checkmate in three moves," he remarked quietly.

His action had an instant effect upon the carpenter, whose broad face showed a slight chagrin. He swept the remaining men from the board and pushed his chair back from the table.

"Well, you have me again! Thrice in the last moon! I perceive that I feel after a pin at the bottom of the ocean when I play with you. Yet I challenge you again for to-morrow evening. But let us now talk of that little rascal of mine. You say he is lazy? Do you thrash him enough?"

He extracted the new pouch from his cotton girdle and offered it to his friend. The schoolmaster's smile broadened into cordiality as he stuffed the tiny bowl of his pipe with a small quantity of tobacco.

"Your son," he admitted to the carpenter, "is in no danger of losing his eyesight from over-study, yet he is not a fool."

"You are sincere in your honourable praise? Deign to explain your lofty meaning to my feeble intelligence."

Kung gave another poke to the bowl of his little pipe before he replied sententiously: “In passing over the day in the usual way there are four ounces of sin——”

He no doubt intended to convey to his friend by this homily that no one was perfect and that, though his son had faults, there was still hope for him. But he did not finish his discourse, for at that moment a loud sharp rapping at the door made him spring to his feet. A visitor at this hour and on such a night!

Kung unbolted the door with caution. A female figure entered, carrying a dripping yellow oilskin umbrella. She peered eagerly about in the ill-lighted room.

“Is she not here? Is your honourable daughter not here?” she asked, without waiting to exchange salutations with the schoolmaster and his friend. She was out of breath from haste and wrestling with the wind, and in spite of the oilskin umbrella, her clothes were wet.

“Chang-Ma!” Kung exclaimed in astonishment. “What brings you here at this hour?”

The woman continued peering about her.

“I thought surely she would come here. It would be but natural—her father’s house. The poor darling must have lost her way.”

“Lost her way! What do you mean? Where is my daughter?” the schoolmaster cried. He had turned very pale and now grasped the woman roughly by the wrists. “Speak! Speak!” he cried again. “Where is my daughter?”

“I do not know!” Chang-Ma stammered. “I thought

she would be here. Pray release your grasp, good sir. You are hurting my wrists."

But the distracted man only gripped her more tightly.

"Where is my daughter?" he thundered once more, as if he would force from her a confession.

Chang-Ma began to cry from pain and fear.

"I tell you I do not know. They drowned the baby in a cistern and drove my mistress out from the farm-yard two hours ago. I conceived so great a fear of those evil ones that when I saw what they had done I hid myself behind a large wardrobe. I stayed there until it was quiet, and then, snatching up my umbrella, I ran to the gate. The gate-keeper and his wife were busy gossiping about the events with the other servants, and did not notice me, so I unbolted the gate and fled. I thought my mistress would be here."

Kung glared at her, speechless, scarcely comprehending.

The carpenter, who had risen to his feet at the woman's entrance, now approached her.

"What is all this? What is all this?" he exclaimed. "They drowned the baby and drove your honourable mistress from the farm-yard, do you say? What was the cause of such great anger upon their part?"

But Chang-Ma, still under the schoolmaster's grip, whimpered piteously.

"Let me go, honourable sir," she cried. "Release your hold or I will not speak."

Kung, as if recovering from a trance, flung her off.

He had no wish to hurt her, but he was beside himself with anxiety.

"What was the cause of their anger?" he echoed in a hollow voice.

The woman rubbed her aching wrists as she replied in low superstitious tones:

"The omen of the red wedding candle was fulfilled to-night, honourable sir; the son of Lu is dead, struck by a thunder-bolt. This is the reason of his parents' wrath towards my mistress."

"Woe! woe!" cried the schoolmaster.

He swayed as if he would fall, but his friend caught him under the arm and held him until he was again steady.

A silence fell upon the three in the little hut. The portent had not lied. "Calamity as well as good fortune comes from Heaven."

With sharp quick movements, Kung began to wind his long black queue about his head; he reached for a hat from a peg on the wall and jammed it down over the queue to his ears; he tightened his girdle and replaced his house slippers with a pair of heavy Manchu boots. Finally he went to the *kang* and drew from under a bolster a short dagger; this he thrust into a fold of his girdle. Then, without a word, he flung open the door and disappeared into the darkness.

The carpenter stood for a moment looking at the door; then he, too, put on his hat, gave a jerk to his girdle, and followed his friend out into the night.

II

“**P**AO-P'AE! pao-p'ae! (precious one) We shall soon be there. Courage! a moment longer; I see the light in the window; we are not far now; oh, the pretty light! It is a fire-fly in the darkness. Come, come; let us go to it quickly. Hold on fast to my shoulders. The pretty fire-fly! The lovely light!”

It was Tung Mei swaying under a priceless burden. She had found the child of her girl-love—her little Carl. Like a gift of the gods he had been brought to her by the wild night, and, crooning to him, she had carried him pick-a-pack on her hips to the sill of the schoolmaster's hut.

Like the child, she had been lost in the storm. Clad only in her light silk house garments, with the embroidered slippers as the sole protection for her little feet, she had gone forth into the cruel tempest. The thought of her father's house had come to her, and she had made some attempt to reach it, but in her wild panic and grief and terror she had lost her bearings and wandered far astray into the fields. Every few steps her feet slipped and were buried up to the ankles in mud and water; then one of her slippers fell off, and she was obliged to stumble along as best she could without it. She had no idea in what direction she was going, as there was

almost complete darkness about her, the lightning having receded by this time behind the hills, where it showed itself only in occasional flashes. But the rain poured upon her piteously, so that she was soon drenched to the skin and shivering with cold. She longed for death, yet some blind instinct of self-preservation urged her to keep on—to go until she should drop. Her wide-open eyes saw everywhere the same vision—a stone cistern filled with water and a vanishing fragment of cherry-coloured cloth.

What power led her at last to a field of *kao-ling*? What strange chance made her look at that sodden whitish heap which showed by a fitful flash from the sky? Was it Lord Buddha or the good Yesu who guided her feet hither? We do not pretend to say. We only know that things as wonderful have happened before, and will happen again for men to marvel at.

She bent over it, that strange heap, and finally, with a thrill of uncanny curiosity, touched it. No doubt her wits, even as her feet, had wandered that night, for at the moment that her hand came in contact with the whitish mass she believed that it was her child—her little drowned baby. If pure wretchedness of body and soul can unsettle the mind there was excuse enough for Tung Mei's hallucination. Yet all her intelligence came back to her on the instant, when with the second touch the truth broke upon her. No night could have been too dark to hide long from her the identity of that little form which her eager hands now explored. Had she not

bathed it, dressed it, kissed it a thousand times? Carl! Little Carl Osborne, the child of the foreigners!

And now joy wrestled with sorrow in her heart. Her dream had come true. The miracle had happened; she had lost her daughter but found her son. In the spirit-land her dear husband need no longer wander forlorn. The homage of a son would rise to comfort him. It is strange that in this first instant of recognition she had no doubt of her right to the child. She accepted him simply as a gift from the gods; her life's task would be to teach him how to perform those holy ceremonies essential to her husband's peace in the other world.

These thoughts raced through her mind, but the next moment her joy turned into sickening anxiety. He lay there so still! Was he dead? She stooped lower and placed her ear against his heart. No! no! it was beating! He was alive!

"Pao-p'ae! pao-p'ae!" she called again and again, until the exhausted child stirred, awakened, and, recognising his dear Tung Mei's voice, yielded himself with one deep-drawn sigh to her loving arms. And at the contact of his beloved body the last trace of her bewilderment left her. Now she could think clearly and act with decision. No longer would she wander aimless and lost. Unable to save herself when alone, she felt at present full of energy and resource. She would go to her father's house where her darling would be safe.

She waited for another flash from the clouds to reveal her surroundings, and when it came, she recognised

them. How stupid to lose her way on such familiar ground! She now knew that these were the fields of Mang, who had employed her as a child to keep away the crows. A little path led from these adventurous meadows straight past her father's house, which, unlike most Chinese dwellings, was not enclosed by a court. How many times had she scampered home by it at sunset after a day in the fields!

With gentle persuasion she made the limp boy climb upon her back; then, with his legs held firmly in her two hands, she groped for the path. Now that her mind was alert, she had little difficulty in finding it; here a remembered stone, there a tree, guided her; yet she had much trouble in keeping her footing. She lost her other shoe and slipped and stumbled along the dark watery path until her stockings were torn to shreds and her bare feet were caked with mud. At last she was rewarded by a gleam from her father's window. The pea-oil lamp was still burning by the abandoned chessboard.

Still swaying under the boy's weight, Tung Mei opened the door, calling her father. But he had left a quarter of an hour earlier, and had taken another path than the one by which she had come.

At the sound of her voice Chang-Ma came running to her mistress, greeting her with delight.

"Ah, my pretty swallow has come home to her nest," she cried, half weeping with relief. "Time it is that you were under a roof, my poor darling. You look as if

the wind and water demons had given you a fine chase! But what is this camel's hump on your back?"

Tung Mei let the boy slide gently to the ground.

"It is my son," she said in a strange, vibrating voice, "my son, whom the gods have given me in place of my husband and of my baby. He is my son, now," she repeated, as if there must be no mistake, "and no one shall take him from me."

She stood up defiantly in her dripping clothes and eyed the woman sternly, as if she challenged her to gainsay what she had just declared.

Chang-Ma was awed. She had never seen a foreigner, and now took the bedraggled little stranger for a beggar child. She reflected that her mistress had probably lost her mind through grief and exposure, and wisely decided not to question her further.

There was a glow of warmth in the room, for after Kung and his friend were gone, Chang-Ma had been seized with the idea of drying her wet garments, and, taking some kindling and coals from a pile in the corner of the room, she had started a fire in the small clay stove, or support for the cooking boiler, which is a feature of all Chinese country houses. Flues ran from it under the *kang*, or brick bed, which occupied two-thirds of the room, and which was at present comfortably heated.

Chang-Ma now offered to assist her mistress out of her damp clothes, and to dress her in some of her own garments, which were by this time quite dry. But Tung Mei refused all help for herself until the needs of the

ly had been fully attended to. She remembered some childish garments of her own which her father had cherished, and, running into the next room, she emerged again with them in her hands.

The two women stripped the exhausted boy, and after a brisk rubbing, dressed him in Tung Mei's old clothes. He was too tired either to speak or to notice what they were doing, and, after drinking some soup which Chang-Ma had found and heated on the stove, the child submitted to being rolled up in a quilt and put to bed on the *kang*. The contact of his weary little frame with the warm bricks, as well as the sense of loving care which he felt, soothed him, and his eyes soon closed. Tung Mei bent over him tenderly until she was convinced that he was asleep. Then she turned reluctantly from him and, collecting his discarded and mud-stained little clothes, threw them with a quick movement into the fire.

The damp cloth made a sizzling noise upon the hot coals, but was finally conquered by the fire and crumbled to ash. A peculiar expression of exultant joy tinged with cunning came into Tung Mei's eyes as she watched this spectacle. It was as if she were consciously and purposely destroying the last link which bound the boy to the foreigners. After this he would belong to her alone!

Only when she turned away from the stove did she think of her own wet clothes and accept Chang-Ma's aid in changing them. When she, too, at the kind woman's

insistence, had swallowed a little of the warm soup, she curled herself beside the boy and fell asleep.

Chang-Ma's watchful eye saw Tung Mei drop into her deep slumber, and going to the *kang*, she bent over the sleepers.

"Ah, the darling! the darlings!" she murmured. "They are like a little sister and brother fallen asleep at their play."

Her mother-heart was swept by an intuition of a future fraught with peril and anguish, and she knew that she must be the protector of these innocents.

III

WHEN Kung left his hut that night with his friend at his heels his heart was full of one idea. The hour had struck for his revenge! In the mad fury which seized him as he listened to Chang-Ma's tale, he had not fully comprehended her words. He believed that the Lus had killed not only his grandchild but Tung Mei herself. In his overwrought state he already saw her lying dead in a pool of blood beside the cistern in which the baby had perished.

Kung knew that on this evening the *Hsiang Chang*, or village headmen, were to assemble to discuss the Imperial grain tax. Their meeting-place was in a building of a gloomy court, known as "Bitter Water Yard," for in its centre there was a deep well of brackish water. These assemblies, as Kung was aware, usually lasted long into the night; and he was sure that on this rainy evening, when work on the threshing floors was out of the question, not only the actual headmen, but practically the entire male population of the village, would be congregated there. His plan was to go at once to this place, and by means of all the eloquence at his command, to arouse the villagers' old resentment towards the Lus, so that they might join him in seeking immediate re-

venge. As he turned into the court his friend, the carpenter, overtook him.

"Ah, it is you!" Kung said with satisfaction. "You have guessed my purpose and will join me?"

"Aye, aye," the other replied, doubling his fist.

Without waiting to shake the raindrops from their coats, the two friends entered a large square room crowded with men and boys. This place served the purpose of what in a more important Chinese town would have been fulfilled by the *ya-men*,* or office of the local official. The village was too small to boast of such a personage, but communicated with the district magistrate through the *Ti-fang*, or local constable, whose executive board was composed of the headmen. Now in the village of Benevolence and Virtue this constable was no other than Lu, the hated bully and tyrant, who had held and abused his power for a quarter of a century. As the question of the grain tax was a very important one, Lu, under ordinary circumstances, would not have failed to attend this meeting, but as it was, Kung rightly counted on his absence.

The manner in which he was greeted by his fellow-villagers told the schoolmaster that the news of his son-in-law's death and of the subsequent tragedy, had already been noised abroad. Some stifled cries of "Teacher! Our teacher!" came from a group of boys in a corner of the room, and were instantly followed by a solemn

* A Chinese government building, or office and residence of a Chinese official.

hush in the buzz of conversation which had filled the place. As Kung crossed the door-sill with his friend all eyes were turned upon him in curiosity or sympathy. And so strong was the reaction of this public emotion on the scholar’s sensitive nerves that he was more firmly convinced than ever that his daughter had been foully murdered. He hesitated but a moment, and then with flushed face and burning eyes stalked to a small platform at one side of the room. He ascended it without invitation from the headmen, and with a gesture commanded silence.

“You assembled here some hours ago,” he began, “to discuss the grain tax, but now your discussion is finished and you are sitting idly about without profit to yourselves or others. This would not be blameworthy, perhaps, upon an ordinary occasion, but to-night I must declare to you that it is shameful.”

At the schoolmaster’s opening words the headmen had pressed close about the platform, and now one of them, the keeper of the best shop in the village, whose two sons were pupils of Kung’s, cried out encouragingly :

“How is that, teacher? Expand to us your honourable meaning.”

“Aye, I will expand it,” Kung replied with bitter emphasis. “It is shameful, I say, to sit idle here, because there is a great work to be done—work for you all.”

“What work, schoolmaster?” several cried at once.

Kung knit his brows in sullen wrath.

"The work of Heaven begun to-night by the gods, which we must finish."

"We must finish the work of the gods!" the shopkeeper who had made himself spokesman for the *Hsiang-chang* cried in astonishment. "What, then, is this work? How may mortals dare aspire to work conjointly with Heaven?"

"I will tell you," answered the schoolmaster, speaking intensely. "You have heard it said that the doctrines of Heaven confer happiness on the good and misery on the evil, and yet there is one evil man who dwells among us, well known to all, who has prospered until this day. His kettle has always been full of rice, while those of his neighbours were empty. For years we have nourished this rat, who in the end has invariably requited all kindness and favours by gnawing a hole in the bag of every one who has trusted him, so that at the hour I speak there remains not one in the whole village who has not suffered grievous loss and insult by this person and his equally wicked spouse."

He paused and glared fixedly at his audience. There was a great nodding of heads and cries of "That is true! That is true! The schoolmaster speaks the truth! A gnawing rat is in our midst. What shall we do, teacher?"

"Ah!" cried Kung, "I see by the nodding of your heads and your exclamations of assent that my words are understood. Is there, indeed, any one here so simple that he could fail to know of whom I speak? Do I need

to name him to you? True, he has styled himself proudly ‘King of the Village,’ but I think in giving himself that title he has mistaken his rank, for to be a king a man must have subjects. And is there one in all the world so base as to be willing to own subjection to so perverse a rascal?”

“No one!” all the boys and many of the men in the room cried.

The sullen fire in Kung’s eyes brightened at the quick response to his words.

“Truly,” he continued, his vehemence carrying him from metaphor to metaphor, “this man has the mouth of Buddha but the heart of a serpent. A traitor to all, he did not even stop at betraying the gods themselves. You were all witness of his perfidy in selling the holy Temple of the Spirit Light to the foreigners?”

“Aye! aye!” answered one of the headmen. “Did we not all protest, but without avail?”

“It is not too late, even now!” cried the schoolmaster. “The gods are ready to help us avenge that old insult to them, and with it, our own wrongs. Come, my friends, let us confess that we have been blind fowls, picking at random after worms, while the strong and cruel hawk soared above, ever ready to swoop and seize us in his talons. But it is now time to put away cowardice from our hearts and join together against our common enemy.”

“It is time! It is time!” all the villagers echoed. Every one in the room was on his feet now, and slant

angry eyes and doubled fists testified to the effect of Kung's oratory.

The schoolmaster cried again above the hubbub he had created:

"If one will not enter a tiger's lair, how can he obtain her whelps? Courage, friends, the hour of fate has struck. Lu, the tyrant, the bully, the traitor to gods and men, must die to-night. Heaven, by the death of Lu's only son, has shown that wickedness must at last, like goodness, receive its fitting reward. Angered by the justice of the gods, Lu and his wicked spouse turned to most shameful murder."

The speaker paused, drawing one hand over his eyes, while he stretched out the other.

"Murder," he repeated, as if the actuality of his vision were even now before him. "I see my little grandchild drowned in the bottom of a cistern and her mother lying sightless and dumb in a red pool beside it."

A shudder of horror and sympathy ran through the room. Kung felt it, and lifted up his head with sudden energy.

"Friends, honourable friends," he said, his voice quivering with emotion, "my heart cries out for revenge, and I know by your faces that your hearts, too, must burn with the same flame. Have done, then, with delay. Come, follow me, and I will lead you to the house of Lu."

A roar of fierce enthusiasm broke from the crowd.

"Lead on, schoolmaster! Lead us to the house of Lu!"

With one hand uplifted, Kung leapt from the platform and rushed towards the door. His burly friend, the carpenter, crying out over his shoulder for all to follow, rushed after him. Snatching up their umbrellas and brandishing them in the air, the villagers pressed through the door with menacing cries, and the next moment the room in Bitter Water Yard was empty.

IV

BY the light of that same ashen dawn which showed the wearied band of missionaries returning heart-sick from their unsuccessful search for the boy Carl, the early risers in the village of Benevolence and Virtue saw a heavy two-wheeled cart hurrying on its laboured way through the miry lanes. It was drawn by a pair of black mules harnessed one behind the other. The only visible object in its interior was a large oblong chest of some dark wood carved in designs of birds and flowers.

Outside on the shafts sat two men. The larger man was guiding the plunging beasts through the series of treacherous pools to which the roads had been reduced, while the other sat hugging the side of the cart to keep from being thrown out by its frequent and violent joltings.

The men had the look of those upon whom silence has settled. The driver of the mules appeared to be absorbed in his task of keeping the cart from upsetting; his mouth was firmly closed, and his small peasant's eyes steadily followed every movement of the two animals under his control. The face of his companion also was still—almost rigid in its stillness—yet in the black, mournful depths of the man's pupils there was a curious gleam.

As a matter of fact, neither of the men had spoken since they had started on their journey. They had dragged from a stable the two black mules and the cart; with trembling, blood-stained hands they had adjusted the harness, and, after lifting into the cart the oblong chest with a carefulness in strange contrast to the haste of their other movements, they had sprung on to the shafts and whipped the mules into a gallop. For this journey was a flight, and the schoolmaster and carpenter were returning to Kung's hut with strange booty. They had killed the tyrant Lu, and in the chest—Tung Mei's wedding chest—they were bringing home the body of his son!

As they came within sight of Kung's house, which stood detached from its fellows on the outskirts of the village, the schoolmaster broke the silence.

"You are sure of your honourable nephew's loyalty?"

"He is one who eats his rice looking towards Heaven."

"That is well; his sincerity will be put to a test. In what part of Peking does he dwell?"

"A little east of the Tung Pien Gate. The coffin-shop faces Wild Duck Lane."

"You say he understands the noble art of embalming?"

"So well that no seed of corruption can sprout in any corpse that he has touched."

"He will be well rewarded."

After a pause the schoolmaster added: "It will take me but a few moments to collect what I need from my

room. Fortunately I have a considerable sum of money—the last gift of my honourable son-in-law. May his sojourn in the underworld be brief! We must be in and out of Peking before sunset.”

“By these roads,” his friend objected, “we are as likely to reach the head-waters of the Hoang-Ho.”

“Nevertheless, it must be done; the murder of a constable, even though he was hated, will not pass unnoticed by the district official. He will follow us, and the body of Lu’s son found in our company would shout aloud against us. Luckily your nephew, you say, lives hard by the Tung Pien Gate, from which we must leave to take boat for Tientsin, so there should be no delay.”

“What are your worshipful intentions when we arrive in Tientsin?” asked the carpenter.

“My first one,” Kung answered, “is to see you safe with your honourable relatives in that city, who, I am convinced, will do their utmost to restore to you your wife and little son when the murder of Lu is forgotten, as it will be soon. I will give instructions and money to your nephew to come here to-morrow and fetch the little one and his mother to Peking, where they will stay until they can join you.”

“May Buddha richly reward you! But what disposal will you make of your own august person?”

“From Tientsin,” the schoolmaster replied, without enthusiasm, as if the disposal of his august person were a matter of indifference, “the gods will guide me to the southland, where, in the city of Foochow, I have an old

school friend, who has more than once urged me to come and make him a visit. I will tarry with him for a while until Heaven shows me what to do."

His friend looked at him pityingly, but said nothing. They were by this time opposite Kung's hut, and with a final bump and splash of mud the cart came to a halt. The sky was at last beginning to clear and under the beams of the sun, which now began to break through the clouds, the mountain-tops shone in new-washed splendour. Kung glanced towards them as he leapt from the cart, and then in sudden excitement cried to his companion:

"Look! Look! The flames are rising strong and red. Buddha be praised! They have done it! They have done it! The house of Lu will soon be in ashes above his corpse!"

He pointed down the road through which they had come. A mile away on the pleasant plateau at the foot of the hills where Lu's commodious dwellings, surrounded by their luxurious courts, had so recently stood, bright tongues of flame, accompanied by dense smoke, shot up against the background of the hills. At the sight a grin of joy illuminated the broad face of the carpenter.

"So is the tyrant punished!" he cried. "On the mountains of Hades may he meet with tigers, and on the plains with serpents, and when he is born again may he be a dog or a hog."

A smile more sly but not less vindictive hovered for a

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moment about the schoolmaster's lips and then was gone, but the gleam in his eyes had deepened.

He shook open the door of his house; then stood stock-still on the threshold. The rays of the sun coming through an eastern window in the hut fell upon the face and figure of his daughter asleep on the *kang* beside her little Carl.

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V

A HARSH, guttural cry of joy burst from the schoolmaster's lips. It pierced through the deep sleep of exhaustion in which his daughter lay. She opened her eyes, and seeing her father, flung herself off the *kang* on to the floor in front of him.

"Fooching! Fooching!" (Father!) she cried, and locked her young arms about his knees, rocking herself wildly. In that passionate embrace she told him all her long story of loneliness and anguish since she had left him as a bride. He forgot the presence of the carpenter and Chang-Ma; he completely forgot, as on an occasion long ago, his scholarly dignity; he raised his daughter up to him and strained her to his breast.

They remained so for a long moment, and then she took him by the hand and led him to the *kang*; she pointed to the sleeping boy.

"The gods have given him to me. It is a celestial miracle," she whispered.

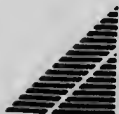
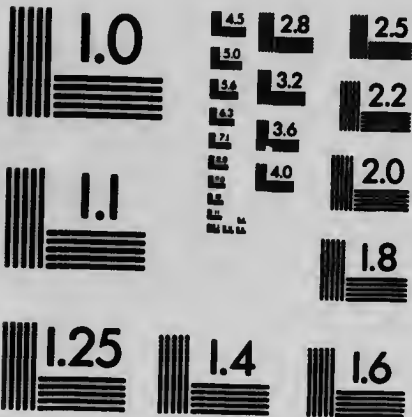
Curiously enough her father never questioned her words nor her right to keep this gift of Heaven. He merely gazed at the child and said in a strange, hoarse voice:

"Then we must hasten and take him out to the cart, for I have killed Lu and must flee at once from here."



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Tung Mei shivered at Kung's words. Her terrible father-in-law was dead—slain by her own father! She was to learn afterwards that the villagers, likewise, had given short shrift to Lu's shrewish wife, and that his beautiful house had been burned to the ground. Only Jung Kuang's old grandfather, still away on his visit, had survived. But at present Tung Mei asked no questions; her thought was turned to something else.

"Most honourable Fooching," she said, "Heaven denies me the happiness of accompanying you upon your journey." She turned upon him a white face, and her arms dropped despondently at her sides.

Kung looked at her with quick anxiety.

"What is this?" he cried. "You abandon me because I have sent the murderer of your child to the Caves of the Dead?"

"No," she answered fiercely; "I would have killed him, myself, had the gods lent me enough strength. That is not the reason."

"What is it, then?" asked her father, and the carpenter and Chang-Ma pressed around her and echoed the question. "What is your honourable reason?"

The young widow straightened herself. In the clear light of the early morning her face shone beautiful with purpose.

"I must find the body of my august husband and bury it according to the holy rites of Buddha," she answered with supreme dignity.

The face of the schoolmaster cleared as suddenly as it had clouded.

"Your pious intention deserves great praise," he said in a low, moved voice. "Of a thousand virtues, the faithfulness of a widow is the highest. Fortunately, your honourable husband's body is not far to seek."

Tung Mei's face paled still more. "What do you mean? Where is he? Oh, where is my beloved lord?" she cried with intense emotion.

Very gently her father led her to the door and pointed to the chest in the cart. He said no word, but Tung Mei understood.

"My wedding chest," she moaned, and sobs shook her as a gale that shakes a leaf.

VI

IN the little cabin of the junk, under a roof of matting which let in the morning sunlight through its meshes Tung Mei bent over her darling. The boy lay on a mattress, delirious in the fever which had followed his exposure, struggling every few moments to rise, devoured by fear of those mad gods who had chased him down the mountain. The young widow listened in agony to his wild appeal.

“Tung Mei! Tung Mei! Have they got it? Have they got my soul? Oh, hide it, hide it from them; hide it quickly.”

“Fear not, little pao-p’ae; I have hidden it safely here in my bosom. It is warm and happy, and all the ugly demons together cannot get it from t., Tung Mei.” And with a touch soft as velvet she soothed him.

The boy relaxed his clutch of her dress and fell back on the mattress.

“Ah, ah, I am glad! Hide it so they cannot see it. They want to snatch it back to Hell.”

“That they f never do, pao-p’ae. We are sailing together to a sweet Paradise in the southland, and there we shall live happily for many, many years.”

The child, as if satisfied, closed his eyes, and there was

silence again, except for the sound of the breeze overhead in the junk's sail.

It was the third morning since they had embarked on the house-boat. On the following day, if all went well, they would arrive in Tientsin. And through the long monotonous hours, as they glided down the sinuous Pei-Ho, keeping time with the rhythm of the boat, one prayer, fervent and ever reiterated, rose from Tung Mei's heart:

"Celestial Buddha, benign Goddess with thy Tiger, righteous and merciful Yesu, save my son!"

Strange trinity to evoke! The passion of her soul called out obscurely to each of the powers she knew.

Outside on the deck the schoolmaster sat with his friend, smoking and talking placidly. No remorse had visited his Oriental soul since he had killed his enemy. On the contrary, a deep content had stolen over him, for he felt that the honour of his ancestors was now vindicated, and his revenge for his own personal injuries satisfied. In fact, since the moment that Kung had seen Tung Mei, whom he had believed murdered, lying asleep on the *kang* in his own house, and the cry of joy had burst from his lips, his face had worn an expression of almost celestial peace. He had immediately in thought dedicated his life to her. What better use could he make of his wretched existence? Was she not now the virtuous widow of a man who had been very rich and important? And what had he ever been but a poor despised schoolmaster? Thus Kung justified to himself his need

of expressing that passionate affection for his daughter which he had hitherto tried to conceal. Henceforth he was to be her servant—to go where she wished, to do what she willed.

The fear of pursuit diminished in his breast with each mile gained. The bad condition of the roads, he argued, would be greatly in their favour. Soon forgetting danger entirely, Kung began to congratulate his friend upon his skill at "fist-and-foot," which in the final struggle had proved superior to Lu's own. The carpenter, in turn, praised Kung's dexterity with the dagger. It had taken no mean talent to snare and kill the "big rat," and their pride was worthy of the occasion.

Going down the current under a favourable wind, which filled the small square sail, the junk made good speed with little effort on the part of the boatmen. Only the man at the rudder was busy. It would be another story on the return trip, when the two idle ones, harnessed to the end of the long rope attached to the mast, must tow the house-boat laboriously against the current with the steadiness of a piece of mechanism. Every now and then the junk passed other house-boats being thus towed, filled with Chinese passengers on their way to the capital. These encounters were usually the occasion of mutual wishes that "Grandmother Ma-Chu," the goddess of sailors, and her two assistants, "Favourable Wind-Ear" and "Thousand-Mile-Eye," should protect the passing vessel. But the tune of the mariners changed if by any accident the junks came into collision. Then

it was the "Five Emperors," those "Rulers" who control the cholera and other pestilences, who were angrily invoked and bidden to "catch" the offending ones.

The long hours passed, and presently the sun set in a cold, still day. The breeze which had blown all day had now fallen, and the junk, propelled by oars, or even poles where the water was shallow, moved more slowly along the narrow winding river. The surface of the stream retained for a while the red and yellow reflections of the sky amidst the inverted mirroring of the reeds and willows along the banks. Finally even this light died out, leaving the waterway gloomy and mysterious in the darkness of the night.

The schoolmaster began to shiver, and proposed to his friend that they should go inside, and the carpenter replied with a laugh that it would certainly prove a temptation to the Five Emperors to "catch" them if they remained longer on the deck. In the cabin lanterns were lighted, and Chang-Ma passed about bowls of rice and hot tea. Kindly comments were made on the state of the boy's health. He was sleeping quietly now, and his head felt a little less hot. Kung promised his daughter that on the morrow, when they arrived at Tientsin, an oblation should be offered on his behalf to the Goddess of Children. No direct allusion was made to the silent passenger which the little boat carried. But the wedding chest occupied a place of honour in the cabin beside Tung Mei's mattress, and everybody felt its presence.

Finally, by mutual consent, the lanterns were extin-

guished, and all sought sleep as best they could in the narrow confines of the cabin. The junk continued on its way until midnight, and then it, too, rested among the reeds, moored to the projecting root of a tree. The boatmen descended into the hold, where they flung themselves on straw and were immediately dead to the world.

The starless night closed about the house-boat. To Tung Mei, lying quiet on her mattress, the little vessel seemed lost on an ocean of nothingness. Already her past life appeared to her as immeasurably remote. It was over; it was done! And here she was lying with her beloved dead, swallowed, like him, in darkness and mystery. Had it not been for the warmth of the child's body near hers, she could easily have persuaded herself—and rejoiced in the illusion—that she, too, was lifeless. But that warm contact saved her. The gift of the gods had brought courage with it. Out of this unreal and ghostly present, she would build for her son an honourable and exalted future.

She flung her arms protectingly over the child as once more she uttered her passionate plea to those three Merciful Ones whom she had chosen as guardians of his destiny. Then she, like the others in the little cabin, fell into a profound sleep.

VII

A SUDDEN and violent shock, followed by the quivering of the junk, startled Tung Mei from her heavy slumber. Her hand closed spasmodically over the boy's arm as she sat up on the mattress and looked about her with terrified eyes. It was still night, but the little cabin, which a moment before had been plunged in deep obscurity, was now full of the wavering light of lanterns swung inward through the curtained entrance. By the vivid but unsteady illumination, Tung Mei discerned the faces and figures of five or six men, who, with loud ejaculations of triumph, had burst through the opening. They came from another junk which had pulled alongside the house-boat and collided heavily with it.

Tung Mei saw her father rise to meet the leader, who was a tall, well-dressed man, wearing the cone-shaped hat with its gold button and red silk fringe of a seventh grade mandarin. At sight of this hat, which was a symbol of law in her eyes, Tung Mei's heart sank, for by it she knew that the man was her father's pursuer.

The magistrate raised his lantern, and, peering into Kung's face, called loudly to his men:

"Here is doubtless one of the rogues!" Then flashing the light into another corner of the cabin, where

the burly Yen was rousing himself out of his heavy sleep, he cried again in glee:

"And there is the other! A fine pair of racing turtles they are! Yet they shall not escape. Catch them and bind them with chains, while I search the place."

The magistrate's followers closed about Kung and his friend. The carpenter, uttering a cry of rage, doubled his fist and sent one of the men headlong against the side of the cabin. Another man advanced, but also fell a victim to Yen's skill at "fist-and-foot." Loud angry yells followed:

"May the crows pick out your eyes!"

"May your corpse be eaten by dogs!"

"May your incense-furnace be turned bottomside up on the wall!"

In the midst of these infuriated cries little Carl awoke, and, seeing the fighting forms in the weird light of the swaying lanterns, he knew that his worst fears were realised. The angry gods had found him, and this time there would be no escape!

His childish treble rose above the Chinese guttural in scream after scream of delirious fright as Tung Mei took him up in her arms and pressed his frenzied little face against her shoulder.

"Hush! Hush, pao-p'ae! Be still, my little one!" she murmured, but she was trembling so that she could scarcely stand after she had struggled to her feet from the low mattress. She saw that the men had succeeded in putting handcuffs on her father and that they were

dragging him roughly from the cabin after his friend, the carpenter, who had been finally overcome and secured by chains. Kung had not fought for his liberty, nor had he joined in the chorus of imprecations. His pallor alone had betrayed his emotion. But now, as he passed his daughter, tears started from his eyes. His lips opened as if he would speak, but his emotion overcame him and he could only turn away his head from her.

At sight of his bitter distress, Tung Mei surrendered the boy to Chang-Ma, who during this scene had not ceased to implore the Three Precious Ones to come to their aid. In all crises of life she was wont to invoke Buddha Past, Buddha Present and Buddha Future, who together formed the trio known as the Three Precious Ones. With her dear burden safe in Chang-Ma's motherly arms, the young widow advanced boldly towards the magistrate and dropped him a deep curtsy.

"Honourable sir," she said in a tone of admirable politeness, as if she were bidding welcome to an esteemed guest, "may the Heavenly Rulers grant you happiness like the Eastern Ocean and longevity like the Southern Mountains!"

The astonished magistrate raised his lantern until it shone full upon Tung Mei's face, and, seeing her youth and extreme loveliness, he uttered a cry of wonder mingled with pleasure.

"And may the Pearly Emperor Supreme Ruler give you peace!" he responded. "The hues of the rainbow

have turned dull; the humming-bird's wing is tarnished and the glittering gold has become a heap of ashes."

Tung Mei dropped her eyes under the stranger's fervent gaze, for she realised that he had forgotten the two "rogues" in his delight at this unexpected apparition. The shyness which had always characterised her threatened to conquer her at this moment, but the thought of her father's danger gave her courage.

"Will you deign, honourable sir, to sit down," she said. "I will order our own lanterns to be lighted and some tea brewed immediately. The weather has again turned cold and cloudy, and the hot beverage for which our Celestial Kingdom is so justly renowned will prove, I am sure, of inestimable benefit to you."

The mandarin, under the influence of Tung Mei's beauty and graciousness, dropped into the seat she offered him, ignoring his men, who stood as they had been trained to stand and awaited orders without questioning. Their forms with those of their chained captives blocked the entrance. Kung never took his eyes from his daughter, after he had silenced the carpenter's murmurs with a commanding glance.

At a nod from her mistress, Chang-Ma placed the child, who was now calmer, back on the mattress, and, after relighting the lanterns hanging from the roof of matting, began to prepare tea. Tung Mei, meanwhile, controlling her nervousness, continued in a pleasant conversational tone.

"Has your excellency's journey been a long one?"

What is its propitious goal? Is it Tientsin or one of the great cities farther down the coast?"

Without waiting for a reply to her questions, but giving her father a reassuring look, she went on:

"We have come from the village of Benevolence and Virtue, thirty-six *li* to the west of Peking, in the province of Chihli. It is too mean a hamlet, no doubt, to be known to your excellency?"

An appreciative gleam shot through the oblique eyes of the magistrate. The wit and daring of this girl were a match to her beauty.

"I have heard of the place," he answered drily.

Tung Mei appeared greatly flattered.

"Ah, is it possible, honourable sir?"

She took a cup of tea from Chang-Ma's hands and gave it to him with a smile.

"In flowery cups we dispense the fragrant tea," she quoted.

The mandarin started with surprise and fresh delight.

"I perceive that you are learned, *kuniang*," he said, giving her the title used in addressing an unmarried Chinese woman. "You are able to quote from the Celestial Ode of our Great Emperor Ch'ien Lung, which he composed on visiting the Hanlin Academy more than a hundred years ago. How few of your sex could give such a quotation!"

"If I possess some trifling ability to read and recite the Classics it is due altogether to the patient instruc-

tion of my venerable teacher," Tung Mei replied, indicating the schoolmaster with a gesture of her hand. "Of all the worthies of distinguished merit in our village and the adjoining ones, his rank is indisputably first, as his honourable friend yonder will testify." She appeared not to have noticed that they were in chains!

Thus appealed to, the carpenter boldly took his cue.

"Certainly, your excellency, that is true. There is no greater scholar in our neighbourhood than my exalted friend." He looked at Kung, who modestly lowered his eyes.

The mandarin glanced at his two prisoners with evident uneasiness. This tea-drinking and gossiping with a pretty girl was not a part of his official duty. He was aware of this, and also knew that his men were aware of it, for by this time several of them were frowning at the delay. But the aroma of the fragrant tea reached his nostrils and he again succumbed; without making any comment on the subject of Tung Mei's last remarks, he turned his eyes back to his charming hostess, murmuring:

"Beauty, wit and learning, all in one person; that is a rare combination. In what way may I hope to interest so peerless a being in my miserable self?"

A burning blush was his only reply. Tung Mei's self-confidence had forsaken her and she stood in trembling silence, for by the look which the mandarin had directed towards her she had divined what was in his mind: that he was ready to strike a bargain with her, to restore his

captives to liberty in exchange for the possession of her person. Her speechlessness made him bolder. His eyes fell on the ornate chest, near which Tung Mei was sitting on the edge of her mattress where the boy lay. He tapped it playfully with his fan.

"This is a handsome box, *kuniang*. The designs on its side are marvellous. It has the appearance of a wedding chest and might well be utilised for that purpose if a bridegroom could be found." He smiled knowingly.

He was little prepared for the effect of his words on the pretty stranger. She instantly lost all timidity, and rose to her feet with a dignity that put him to shame.

"Honourable sir," she said, speaking in a voice solemn with feeling, "it is well that you should learn the truth at once. My title is not that of *kuniang*, but *tai-tai*, as I have been a married woman. I am the daughter of Kung Pao Yeng (she nodded towards her father) and the widow of the son of Lu of the village of Benevolence and Virtue. This chest was, indeed, a wedding chest, but is now a coffin, since it contains the body of my august husband, who recently entered the Caves of the Dead. I am now on my way to the southland to give it honourable burial, according to the rites of Buddha."

The startled mandarin, who had also risen to his feet, stared with superstitious awe at the chest.

"Ai! ai!" he muttered.

His information in regard to the murder of the con-

stable Lu had been vague, owing to a pronounced unwillingness of the inhabitants of the village to discuss the matter. A few were bold enough to uphold the murderers as righteous avengers; most had taken refuge in silence, but it was easy to see that Lu had been hated by everybody, and that his death was considered a good riddance to the neighbourhood. The mandarin himself had never liked the fellow; he had heard of the result of all litigation with Lu, which was to "sue a flea and catch a bite," as the popular saying went. For these reasons, although he had put some zest into the pursuit of the murderers, he had been disposed from the beginning to deal leniently with them. But at sight of the lovely girl, his generosity had taken a calculating turn. To do him justice, he had not recognised in her Kung's daughter. He had been told that the school-master's only child, the beautiful bride of the younger Lu, had perished in the storm into which she had been cruelly driven—another reason for dealing mercifully with the avenger. Tung Mei, herself, obeying some impulse of caution, had referred to her father as her teacher. The magistrate had therefore taken her to be merely a favourite concubine of the scholar, from whom he was unwilling to part in his flight from the village.

But now he saw his mistake. The dignity and virtue of the young widow, evident in spite of her ease in conversation so unusual in a Chinese woman, compelled his respect as well as his admiration. After his first ejacu-

lation of startled surprise, he bowed very low. With the dramatic instinct of his race, he was enjoying the situation.

"Shame overwhelms me," he exclaimed, "that I have fallen into so contemptible an error. I was after two thieves who escaped from T'ung Chou three days ago with a bag of silver; I thought they were on this junk, but I see how gravely I was mistaken. It will be a matter of remorse to me until the day when I swallow the pill of immortality that I have so rudely disturbed the repose of these two honourable gentlemen."

He gave a sharp command to his men, who with astonished and reluctant obedience loosed the chains of the prisoners and retired from the cabin. Then the mandarin bowed towards Kung and Yen, who bowed low in return, murmuring their thanks.

Some one has said that China is the last citadel of good manners. Certainly the final act of the district magistrate was not without a touch of grace. He approached the mattress where the sick boy lay, and, reaching one hand into the pocket of an inner tunic, produced a large and luscious peach.

"This," he said, placing the fruit in the boy's hand, "is for the good and filial son of the most beautiful and most virtuous widow in the Flowery Kingdom."

"May the Three Precious Ones protect you!" cried the delighted nurse, but Tung Mei, whose eyes were moist with relief and gratitude, could only curtsy in acknowledgment of the compliment.

With another profound bow to all those in the little cabin, the mandarin went out through the curtains and leapt on board his own junk. In another moment it had glided away from the side of the house-boat and was headed up the river in the direction of Peking.

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VIII

IN the little house in the rice fields in a suburb of Foochow, where the travellers at last found refuge, Tung Mei gathered the boy into her arms and pressed his little head against her breast.

"Pao-p'ae," she murmured, "where is your mother?"

The child looked at her a little startled; then he shook his head.

"I do not know," he said simply.

She bent over him, gazing into his eyes. They were vague as a cloudless sky. Since his illness something had gone out of them. Yet it was not intelligence they lacked. *That which had gone out of his eyes was memory—the memory of his six years of life with his own people.* Tung Mei, perceiving the truth, trembled with a terrible joy, for now she knew that she could make him hers, completely, absolutely hers.

"I am your mother, little pao-p'ae," she cried passionately to him. "I am the only mother you have." She took his face between her hands and turned it towards hers. "Repeat to me these words, slowly and carefully," she said.

The child's eyes were riveted upon her mouth, his own lips parted, ready to repeat the syllables as they dropped from her lips.

"You are my mother," Tung Mei said with solemn deliberation, and the boy repeated with the same earnestness.

"You are my mother."

"I am your son," Tung Mei continued, "and the son of Lu Jung Kuang," and again the boy's lips formed in exact mimicry the Chinese woman's words. "I owe to my father's memory the deepest love and respect. As a pious and filial son I will worship at his tomb and at his ancestral tablet as long as I live."

She was deeply agitated and paused for an instant to gaze into the child's strange eyes. If he had shown any hesitation at that moment, she would not have dared to urge him to pronounce the lying words. But, as if hypnotised by her passion, he repeated every one with the solemnity of a young monk taking the vow which must rule him unto death.

A sob of mingled fright and joy shook Tung Mei. What had she done? She dropped the child on Chang-Ma's lap, and, running into an adjoining room, where her husband's body lay in its ornate coffin, she stretched herself at full length on the wedding chest, pressing her lips against the lid above the place where the face of the dead slept.

"Beloved lord," she murmured in strange anguish, "I have just committed a great crime, or else I have performed a deed of exceeding merit. I know not which it be; thou and the gods must judge. But, whether evil

or good, that which I have done was done for thy sake, and for the repose of thy spirit."

For some moments she lay there breathing heavily. When at last her passion had spent itself, she walked back quietly into the next room and took the boy again into her arms.

"Pao-p'ae," she said, "you shall have a beautiful new name by which everybody will know you from to-day onward. You shall be called Hsie Chin (Divine Child), because you are a gift of the gods."

So the foreign child, Carl Osborne, ceased to exist, save in the memory of his parents, who, far away in the Temple of the Spirit Light, mourned him as dead.

A few days later, in the old burying-ground on Great Temple Hill, outside the city, the Chinese woman stood with the child and the schoolmaster by Jung Kuang's open grave. As the wedding chest touched the bottom of the grave, she solemnly led the boy to its edge, and together they took earth and scattered it over the coffin. It was the young widow's part at this moment to break into loud lamentations, but she made no sound; only the great tears welling from her eyes betrayed the depth of her grief.

When the last shovelful of earth had been smoothed upon the mound, and the grave diggers had withdrawn, Kung brought forward the ancestral tablet of fragrant wood, with its carved dragons on sides and pedestal, inscribed with Jung Kuang's name and titles. Placing it

with profound reverence at the head of the grave, he knelt before it in worship with Tung Mei and the child.

"Let the bones and the flesh return to the earth and the spirit enter the tablet," the boy murmured, and, overcome by some obscure emotion, flung himself weeping on the grave. The words he had recited had been taught him by the woman who had made herself his mother, and he repeated them as the pious and filial son of the dead man. The priests broke into a chant and the tablet was lifted up again and put into the lad's arms. He accepted it as a priceless treasure, and, carrying it home in the sedan which he occupied with his mother, placed it reverently into the niche or open case provided for it.

And during many years, on the first and fifteenth day of every moon, and on the anniversary of Jung Kuang's death, Hsie Chin lighted tapers and burned incense, prostrating himself before the tablet in its little shrine, while his mother stood beside him with head bowed low over her breast.

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EVERY day, when the weather permitted, Tung Mei climbed Great Temple Hill, accompanied by her son and her father, to watch by her lord's grave. She never failed to carry with her offerings of food or flowers, which she had cooked or arranged with exquisite care. So intense was her imagination in whatever concerned her husband, that she fancied, as she laid her gifts upon his grave, that he took visible form before her. His lips were always parted in that same smile which they had worn during the last moment of his life when he had leapt up the steps towards her with his arms full of yellow lilies. And it seemed to her that as he stooped to partake of the food she had brought, he made a sign for her to draw near and eat with him, so that her offering became a true love feast. She told no one of her vision, but the daily climb to the grave on the mountain-side became her very life.

About a month after the family had taken possession of their new home, Tung Mei, standing at the window one day, saw a sedan approaching. To her surprise, the chair bearers halted at the door of the little house.

"What! Is this humble dwelling the abode of the beautiful and virtuous widow?" she heard the occu-

pant of the sedan inquire of his servant, who was walking.

"Yes, your excellency, she has lived here a month."

Tung Mei, quickly retreating from the window, heard a knock on the door; and the next moment Chang-Ma smilingly brought in the red visiting card of Wang Shwai, who was the possessor of the third literary degree of *Chin shih* (Fit for Office), which is held only by a mandarin. The owner of the card proved to be the district magistrate who had taken the schoolmaster and the carpenter into temporary imprisonment on the house-boat. As he was soon to explain to Kung, he had been so bewitched by Tung Mei's beauty and intelligence that he had despatched a servant after the junk, with orders to follow the young widow and report to him her every movement. This had been done, and Wang had now come in person on a mission of his own.

Arrayed in flowing robes of plum-coloured silk, with the emblematic dragon embroidered over his back and breast, and wearing his official hat with its golden button and red silk tassels, the mandarin entered the tiny house as if it were a palace. He bowed profoundly to Kung and his daughter, bestowed a kindly pat on the boy's head, and threw off several classic quotations which to him seemed appropriate. Then accepting with exaggerated thankfulness an armchair which Kung pushed towards him, he informed the schoolmaster that his daughter was now an heiress. He had, himself, settled Lu's affairs, and was able to bring to the young widow

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deeds and notes representing a sum of money which would make her the envy of all her neighbours. As he made this statement he drew out from the depths of one of his large sleeves a number of documents covered with official seals, and presented them with a smile and another bow to Tung Mei.

The young woman dropped a curtsy as she took them, but said nothing, for the thought of the Lus, which the papers had evoked, made her tremble. She had never dreamed of inheriting their fortune, and was reluctant to accept it. How had the magistrate found their house? She wished to be polite to him, but the wit and conversational power which she had displayed on the junk had deserted her. She was very beautiful, and the mandarin, glancing at her discreetly from the corner of his eye, found her not less charming than when he had seen her on the river-boat. His pleasure in her beauty was tinged, too, with deep respect for the heiress whose large fortune was exclusively her own. In the process of liquidating the estate he had discovered that the boy was only an adopted son, though he was far from guessing the real facts about him. Probably, like Chang-Ma, he supposed that the youngster was some abandoned beggar child, to whom the young widow had attached herself in the first frenzy of her grief and whom she was afterwards unwilling to give up.

Chang-Ma, who scented a romance, began preparing tea without waiting for orders from her mistress, but before it was served, Tung Mei excused herself to her

father and their guest, and left the room with the boy. She had been suddenly visited by a thought which had overwhelmed her by its greatness. She was now rich; she could give her son an education—the best that money could pay for; all her wealth should be used for this one object.

“Hsie Chin!” she cried, as soon as they were in another room out of hearing of the rest, “you shall become a great scholar, like your august father—yes, even greater, since he, alas! was called to the Caves of the Dead in his youth. But if the Lord Buddha and the good Yesu hear my prayers and grant you long life, you shall not stop until you have become a *Han-lin*.”*

In another moment Tung Mei's thought had leapt even to the height of “laureate” for her son. Taking the boy's beautiful head between her slender Oriental hands, she caressed it, while she stared with unseeing eyes into space as one who utters a prophecy.

“*Han-lin*—did I say? Aye, but more than that! I see my son a *Chuang-Yuan*, sitting in glory next to the Imperial throne, while he instructs the Son of Heaven in the divine art of literature.”

The child gazed at her in awe.

* A *Han-lin* is a member of China's ancient Imperial Academy, the Hanlin Yuan, and is the highest literary honour possible of attainment in the Middle Kingdom, save that of *Chuang-Yuan*, or “laureate,” who is the bright particular star picked out once in three years from these members of the “Forest of Pencils.” So supreme is the last distinction that in the late reign a daughter of a *Chuang-Yuan* became consort of the Emperor.

"Mother," he said, calling her by the name she had taught him, "I am only a little boy; can I do all that?"

"You will do it to please me, and in honour of your father's memory," she replied with rapt conviction, and then suddenly perceiving that he was indeed only a little boy, she laughed and, stooping, kissed him in the foreign way.

"Run and play now," she said, "and when you come back in an hour, I will read you a column from the Trimetrical Classic, which you will commit to memory before you have your rice."

The boy scampered out into the rice fields, where he waded knee deep in the irrigating canals, amusing himself by picking out tiny frogs from the water and making them hop back from the banks. But his imagination had been stirred by Tung Mei's words and he soon forgot the little frogs.

"Ah, I shall be a *Chuang-Yuan!*" he repeated to himself. (Even his thoughts now came to him in Chinese.) "I shall be a *Chuang-Yuan!* I shall teach the Son of Heaven to read the classics."

And he went back to his mother to listen with a new interest to the words from the Trimetrical Classic, and to repeat all of the column without a blunder before he went, as if in an enchanted world, to the bowl of rice and bean curd which Chang-Ma placed before him.

When the door had closed upon his guest, the schoolmaster summoned his daughter from the adjoining room.

His eyes, usually so mournful, were at present sparkling with pleasure.

"My daughter," he said to her with tender playfulness, "how would it please you, at the end of your three years of mourning, to change your sackcloth for the costly raiment of a mandarin's Head Wife.

For a moment Tung Mei looked at her father without comprehension. When his meaning finally dawned upon her, a crimson flood swept her face, and for the first time in her life she broke into a passion of anger with him.

"Your words sting me like wasps," she cried, "and poison me like adders. Have you so little understood your miserable slave that you could believe her capable of so infamous an act as to marry again? Never! Never! Not if I lived ten thousand ages."

With her black eyes flashing with wounded pride, and her cheeks flaming, the young widow swept out of the room. Her father looked after her with astonishment, admiration and regret.

"Ai! ai!" he said. It was the same exclamation which Jung Kuang had once uttered when for the first and last time his gentle wife had turned upon him in anger.

X

DURING the rest of that day Tung Mei did not see her father. With wounded spirit she brooded over his apparent indifference to her deep grief, and reached out in her mind for some way to protect herself from the amorous mandarin and his determination to make her his wife.

In the silence of her own chamber she heard her father pacing restlessly about in the next room and stop twice to knock at her door, but she gave no sign.

Before midnight her plan was made. She remembered a little temple which she had once passed in her wanderings near the graveyard. Over the door she had read the legend:

“Erected to hold the tablets and perpetuate the memory of virtuous and filial widows.”

She knew that widows still living came here to take vows of eternal faithfulness to their departed lords, and that when it was once known that a woman had pledged herself in this way she became an object of veneration only less intense than that paid to the memory of a suttee or widow-suicide. Tung Mei had heard that priests were there from early dawn to hear and register the vows of these widows, and she knew that

this would be a way to settle forever the question of a second marriage.

Tung Mei did not lie down to sleep that night. Instead she sat on a bench by her little latticed window watching for the first glimmer of dawn. In the next room her father kept up his restless pacing until a late hour, when she heard him throw himself heavily on a bamboo divan which served him as bed. The hours dragged; the little house was very still; outside over the quiet rice fields the moon rose and set; the stream of water which ran through the irrigating canals gleamed and finally blackened. Then after a long time of patient watching they glimmered again. This time it was the dawn which had touched them. Then Tung Mei rose from the bench and noiselessly stole out of the house. In a few minutes she was on the road leading to the temple. . . . When she returned more than an hour later the house was still quiet; she slipped silently back into her room, and, lying down on her bed, went peacefully to sleep.

The next morning she was up again at the usual hour with a strange new calm and a gravity of manner which exalted her beauty to something rare and spiritual. She received with ceremony her son's greeting, exhorting him to diligence in his studies, so that he might become a man worthy of his illustrious father; and the boy listened to her not a little awed by this new seriousness which his sensitive child-spirit received unquestioningly.

Tung Mei was obliged to seek her father that morning, since, contrary to his usual custom, he did not call her to him. She found him in the little garden beside the house seated under a banyan tree, the branches of which hung so low that they had taken root in the ground. Tung Mei's heart smote her at the sight of the bent figure, the very lines of whose garments portrayed the gloom of the thin, bloodless, aging man. But as he turned at her greeting and caught her tender smile, his deep melancholy changed to his wonted contentment, and Tung Mei had the courage to tell him what she had done at the temple,—that she had taken the vows, and that until the day of her death she would be "a wearer of a white skirt."*

Her father was startled by the news, and his first feeling was keen regret that his daughter had thrown away her chance to become a mandarin's wife, but in a moment a look of intense pride crept into his eyes. He regarded his daughter with a touch of awe. She was holy now—set apart forever from the world. When she died, she, too, might have a tablet to her memory placed among those which commemorated other "virtuous and filial widows," and even proud thought!—an honorary portal erected where all might see it. Young as she was, her vows had made her venerable.

That same evening the schoolmaster sat in the moonlight and inscribed an epistle to the mandarin, Wang Shwai, holder of the degree of *Chin-shih*. It expressed

* A Chinese term for a widow.

immeasurable sorrow that destiny had chosen to interfere with their honourable projects and forbid a closer union between the two families than that of friendship. For inasmuch as his daughter had made her way secretly to a temple where in the presence of the priests and the Three Precious Ones she had taken vows of eternal fidelity to the ghost of her late husband, his august friend could understand how impossible had become all hope for a future marriage between himself and the young widow.

When the mandarin received this communication, he sighed, and wrote a sonnet lamenting his lost love in terms of inconsolable anguish. But a few days later, coming upon some golden hair ornaments which he had bought for Tung Mei, he gave them to his favourite concubine and elevated her to the position of "Head Wife."

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XI

AFTER that visit at break of dawn to the temple, the fame of the beautiful widow's piety spread quickly throughout the neighbourhood. Doubtless it was enhanced by Chang-Ma's stories of the magnificent mandarin who had come courting and had been sent away hopelessly lovesick and forlorn. The little house in the rice fields came to be regarded by many as a semi-sacred abode; young girls were exhorted by their parents to take its mistress as their model of virtue and filial duty, and little boys were told to imitate the example of the widow's son, who never failed to worship his father's tablet on the appointed days as well as to accompany his mother on her daily pilgrimage to the grave.

The colour of Hsie Chin's hair,—a dark brown slightly tinged with red,—as well as his grey eyes and foreign features were the subject of some comment on the part of a few observant ones, but for the most part these peculiarities were regarded merely as freaks of nature. As soon as his hair grew long enough it was bound in the usual Chinese queue, while the front of his head was shaved, lending to his already high forehead an appearance of intellectuality far beyond his years. Yet it may well be that what seemed a sur-

prising maturity was merely the shadow of the ancient world in which he dwelt.

This old world shadow is indeed the explanation of much of the oddness of children of the West brought up in the Far East. Such children seem both too old and too young for their years. They see with uncomprehending eyes the extreme of human misery and degradation; they tremble before images and symbols with significances so old that the origin of them is obliterated from the memory of man, yet which stir in their childish minds incalculable fancies. They almost lose their identities in the labyrinths of old stories and legends crooned to them by their native nurses, and imbibe from the same source ancient superstitions which touch them to secret frights; or they puzzle their little brains over esoteric utterances, which, once full of meaning, are now mere lingo for street jugglery.

Such children often astonish their elders by sage and quaint reflections on life and destiny, and at times they show almost adult moods of sadness, as if they were already weary from too long living. Yet they are at heart true children, and in many respects remain unsophisticated longer than children brought up in newer civilisations. It is as if these little beings had been set to solve some intricate mathematical problem, couched in forgotten signs, before they had mastered the rule of three.

Such a child was Carl Osborne, metamorphosed into the Chinese lad Hsie Chin; and the Oriental world

which he was now taught to claim as his inheritance—his birthright—had closed in upon him.

His days were passed in the companionship of Tung Mei and the gentle, indulgent schoolmaster, listening to columns from the *San Tzu Ching* or Three Word Classic, which they read to him, and which he memorised and recited to them in the early evenings after he had wandered at will for hours through the lanes and fields.

Not far from the house in a small moss-grown court, which was locked against a contaminating world, was a deep well of pure water. Every day saw Kung with swinging buckets, and followed by Hsie Chin, on his way to the courtyard gate which he unlocked with one of the magical keys hanging from his girdle. The boy slipped expectantly in behind his grandfather; he watched the removal of the bars which held the well cover in place, and then the lowering of the bucket at the end of its creaking chain into the dark water below. Creeping up on hands and knees to the extreme edge of the well curb, he would see, with a catch of his breath, the swift fall of the vessel, the splash and foam in the blackness, and finally the heavy dripping ascent of the bucket to the top again. Then, still lying flat on his stomach, he pulled the bucket towards him and drank to his fill. To his childish imagination no water could taste like that from this well, for he imagined that the stars he saw reflected in its depths were still in the water when it reached the surface, lending

to it a divine flavour of far-off things. There came a day when he ventured to explain this fancy to the schoolmaster, who only grinned and said: "Wo pu hsin!" (I do not believe it!) Hsie Chin looked at him in surprise, which changed to pity as he whispered to himself: "I will pray to the Lord Buddha that my honourable grandfather may taste the stars."

It was at this period of his life that Hsie Chin used to go daily to see a wall which was set like a square screen directly in front of a rich man's abandoned dwelling. The great charm of this bit of wall for the boy lay first in the fact that it had been erected to keep away the wind and water demons which always travel in straight lines, and are thus unable to dodge wall corners; and secondly, in the fantastic beauty of its half-ruined surface where the strawberry-coloured stucco had scaled off, and where there had grown delicate bits of lichen and moss, shreds and tendrils of things grey and green, spreading in ways too exquisite to be called design; they were rather like the musings of line and colour. Stretched out in front of it, with elbows dug in the grass and hands supporting his head, the boy would gaze at the wall for hours at a time like a small Buddhist bonze doing penance; and by dint of long gazing he would often end in half-hypnotising himself. For as some imaginative children see images in the clouds, this child made out in similar fashion from the wall's rich discolourations and suggestive tracery of lichen and moss a thousand pictures to illuminate

the stories told him by his mother and Chang-Ma, and by means of these random limnings followed again delightedly the thread of many a dim legend.

Or he would use his own powers of imagination, and in clusters of maidenhair fern growing in a cranny of the wall, he would see the flowing locks of an ancient divinity of the place, whom he called the Pine Tree Lady, after a large evergreen tree overshadowing the gateway. In the silvery roots which mingled with the fern and which looked like dainty hairpins, he traced the elaborate coquetry of hair ornaments which the Goddess affected, while some yellow patches were her charming draperies. Two spans away, above an oval spot of saltpetre on the ancient wall, a waterfall seemed to tumble down a precipice in frenzied foam; while below it, three rivers divided and flowed through glades of feathery bamboo,—the whole forming a park for the Goddess and her friends. For, as the boy argued, even divinities needed to keep cool lest they be consumed by their own internal glory!

At times out of the cosmic elements of the child's fancy, there would arise on the surface of the wall whole continents with their countries of fair plains and valleys and snow-capped mountain ranges, or single beautiful peaks where the Three Precious Ones dwelt and together paced through cool forest aisles; or he would follow some Mongolian Robin Hood to his wild fastnesses and live for months snowed up in chill ice grottos; or going down to the plains, he would enter into

the destinies of ancient cities; until finally the wall would seem to change into a chart of the Universe marked with great constellations of stars above which floated the vast sweet fields of Nirvana, where heroes and holy sages conversed in words of wisdom. And sometimes, gazing longer than usual, the inhabitants of all these varied worlds would join in a mighty procession and pass in review before him. There were strange beasts, and fish and birds, hobgoblins and fairies, emperors and warriors, priests and sages, gods and their worshippers, and many another unnamed one. In a word, all the quaint, fearful, and beautiful images of a child's fancy, enriched from a thousand sources, the boy wove into one priceless tapestry and hung on the old stuccoed wall.

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XII

FROM the cemetery on Great Temple Hill, Hsie Chin had often seen a large white pagoda within the walls of Foochow which had so fascinated his imagination that from time to time he had begged to be taken to it. One bright morning in winter, the schoolmaster, waking up in an indulgent mood, decided to gratify the boy's whim. Even on this day, Hsie Chin was not excused from his usual lesson in the Classics, and it was only after he had "backed his book," or, in other words, made his recitation, standing with his back to his grandfather in the attitude of small Chinese scholars of his age, that the two started out on their adventure.

Tung Mei, who had come to the door of the little house to say farewell, smiled to see them go off together—that kind indulgent father, fast aging now and more thin and bent than ever, and the boy, child of her adoption, with his flower-like face and his deep caressing eyes. Ah, truly he was her own! No mother's love could be greater than hers, and the glorious career which she would make possible for him would be the ample justification of what she had done. As if he divined these thoughts and approved of them, the child turned back his glowing face and waved his hand in

farewell; and then, unable to contain the joy with which the bright morning had filled him, he began to race down the road in front of the schoolmaster, singing at the top of his voice. His song was no more than a handful of notes thrown into the air where they tumbled and chased, pirouetted and balanced like a flock of swallows. The exquisite jubilation of it borne back on the wind to Tung Mei filled her own soul with bliss, and it was not until her two dear ones were lost to view in the distance, and the last echo of the boy's fresh voice had died in silence, that she turned back with a happy face to her household duties.

Kung and Hsie Chin took the road which led them through the suburb in which they dwelt to the nearest gate of the walled city. Passing through it, they were at once swallowed up in a labyrinth of narrow streets. In these contracted thoroughfares, made still narrower by the innumerable sign-boards a foot or more wide, placed in a perpendicular position in front of the shops, no wheeled vehicles were visible, and even sedans often had difficulty in passing each other. More than once the schoolmaster and the boy were pushed to one side or other of the street by coolies bearing bulky burdens on their long carrying poles; or by passing barbers or crockery menders who were going with their unwieldy apparatus to some favourable site where they might attract to themselves any unshaven crowns or broken teacups in need of their skill. But the boy rejoiced in these inconveniences; they gave free play to his fancy.

"Honourable grandfather," he said, "when I am a *Chuang-Yuan* I will beseech the Emperor to come here in his yellow sedan with a thousand outriders, and when he sees how narrow the streets are, he will order the sedan to stop until they are made wide enough for him to pass with his mandarins riding one hundred abreast."

The schoolmaster smiled indulgently.

"When you are a *Chuang-Yuan*," he replied, "beware lest you be like a tiger eating a fly. If you would really become a worthy counsellor of the Son of Heaven, avoid disproportion and extravagance in both speech and action."

This homily was delivered at a moment when they were wedged in between two separate crowds of people—the one intent upon the loud proclamations of a medicine vendor claiming that he would ward off all the blows of the Five Rulers by his potions; the other watching the antics of some trick birds which were flying into the air from the hands of their masters and returning with marble balls thrown up at varying heights. The birds caught the marbles in their beaks and, after depositing them upon their trainers' palms, received a grain of millet apiece for their cleverness; or they would pick out from among a hundred others a bit of paper which enclosed a coin, and again they would be rewarded. Hsie Chin clapped his hands at the sight of them. This was a holiday, indeed! The bright winter sunshine which tempered the keen air

to mildness had turned the day into one of gala; jostling and jostled, everybody was alike good-natured, and many had a cheerful greeting for the little boy and his venerable companion. For in the old land of Cathay children are loved and ancients respected.

Squeezing themselves out of the crowd, they passed along the streets in front of windowless shops where merchandise of every description was exposed to view. Here a butcher's stall displayed the flesh of the mountain-goat and the domesticated buffalo or water-ox, along with ducks, geese, chickens, pheasants, and an almost endless variety of fish and shell-fish; further on they stopped at a fruit-seller's stand while Hsie Chin picked out two bright red pomegranates, several persimmons and a handful of lungan or "dragon's eyes," and the schoolmaster selected a fine pumelo and a coconut to carry back to his daughter. This fruit of the southland was still a novelty to them, and to eat it more conveniently, as well as to give the schoolmaster, who was greatly fatigued, a chance to rest, they entered a pretty kiosk, where they were served by a young Chinese with cups of tea and luncheon cakes of wheat flour. As they were coming out of the pavilion, they heard loud and excited shouts, and in another moment saw a strange procession rounding a street corner.

Sixteen men bore upon their shoulders a boat about twenty feet long made of paper and bamboo; at the bow of the vessel was a gorgeous figurehead of a dragon, and seated in the boat were the paper effigies of the

Five Rulers themselves—those “corrupt gods” feared by all, who, nevertheless, must be honoured from time to time to keep them in good humour. Images of the boat’s crew, together with miniature furniture and samples of food materials such as rice, salt, fruit, etc., had been placed in separate compartments of the vessel. Behind the boat there followed a number of weird figures walking in pairs or in companies of four. The Chinese youth who had served Kung and Hsie Chin see the procession began to cry out in great excitement with tea, and had followed them out of the kiosk to ment:

“Ai! ai! Here they come! See! See! That’s the Tall White Devil”—he indicated a slim gigantic figure clad in white cotton cloth with a blue sash, which advanced in great solemn strides, “and that little one, wagging its head and moving its tongue, is the Short Black Devil. Ha! Ha! He’s a bad one!”

He pointed out a hideous effigy, stubbed and pursy, with black face, clothes and hat, which, moved by the man inside it, was springing and leaping from one side of the street to the other like an excited maniac. At the sight of these two policemen from Hell, the people shouted themselves hoarse.

“White Devil! Black Devil! See, how the blood drips from their tongues! The big one feels the heat of the sun; he’s fanning himself to keep cool; his hair is so long and dishevelled one could believe he’d never

seen a comb. Ha! look out where you go! The Short Black Devil will spring for you in a minute!"

But an instant later the crowd's curiosity was turned towards some other queer images,—creatures of immense stature dressed in white or bluish cloth with heads of animals. The youth from the tea shop named them to Kung and Hsie Chin as they passed.

"The Buffalo-headed Assistant, the Horse-faced Assistant, the Cock-headed Assistant, and the Duck-mouthed Assistant."

He waved his hand as the last stalked by.

"Assistants of whom?" the boy whispered in awe-struck tones, peering curiously at the strange idols.

"Ah, do you not know, little one?" the youth answered in a tone of superiority. "It is their Majesties, the Five Rulers, who give them orders. If our people did not provide these great Emperors with many servants, and make a big pile of money for them once in so often, everybody would die of the colic or the dysentery."

The boy shuddered, placing his hands across his little stomach. He wished that he had not been so reckless as to devour all his fruit at once!

Such was the confusion of the streets that the schoolmaster and the boy did not dare venture down the steps of the tea pavilion for a good hour after they had started out of it, and by the time they reached the white pagoda it was already afternoon and Kung was exhausted.

XIII

IT seemed to the boy when they came to the foot of the tapering fantastic tower standing by itself on a grassy elevation, that they were before the dwelling-place of some rare and supernatural being. He gazed with delight at each of the eight or nine stories with its octagonal fringe of roof from which little bells dangled and chimed in soft-toned melody, and he wondered if perchance the Pine Tree Lady herself might not be peering at them from one of the narrow slitted windows.

Filled with a desire to penetrate this house of mystery, Hsie Chin took Kung's hand and began to draw him towards the entrance; but the old man did not move swiftly enough to satisfy the eager young feet, and turning almost impatiently to urge his grandfather to hasten, the boy was horrified to find him the colour of wax, and with his hands gripped tightly over his heart. In another moment Kung had fallen heavily at the base of the pagoda, and the shrieks of the child brought two gardeners running to the spot, who, bending over the schoolmaster, saw that his end was very near.

Such was the agony of his seizure, that it seemed to the watchers as if he would die before he could speak.

But after a few moments, recovering consciousness, he turned his eyes, still clouded with pain, upon the sobbing child, who, drawn by that look, crept close to the side of the dying man.

"Little one," the schoolmaster whispered, "the gods have caught me in their strong net. Give me your hand and listen."

The grief-stricken child timidly stretched out a little hand to meet the cold, dying handclasp of his old friend, who, supported by one of the gardeners, spoke in feeble tones, and unconsciously true to his life-long habit of thought, used words from the Classics in this supreme moment of his life.

"Little one," he half whispered, "Kaotze has said: 'Nature is a stick of timber—goodness the bowl carved out of it.'—Remember—to carve your bowl—with skill——"

"Yes, yes, honourable grandfather," the boy answered in a voice choked with tears.

"Little one, come close," and Hsie Chin crept nearer. "Your virtuous mother—love her—care for her—till death. Then honour—her memory."

His eyes grew dim with tears which rose as he spoke of his idol, the daughter whose face he should never again see; yet with the patience bred of his hard life he uttered no complaint. And now the mist of death closed in upon the old man who clung to Hsie Chin.

"Ai! little one—I die—caught in the net of the gods.

The rush of waters—I sink—ai—Love—my little Tung Mei——”

The last word ended in a faint sigh. Kung's body quivered in its final agony; then his head fell backwards over the gardener's arm. He was dead.

“Oh, honourable grandfather, honourable grandfather!” the child wailed, and flung himself in a paroxysm of grief on the old man's body. . . .

Just what happened afterwards the boy never clearly remembered. He was vaguely conscious of a crowd forming, of much talking and gesticulating with frequent allusions to the Five Emperors, and finally of a man who seemed to have some authority arriving and giving orders in a loud voice to the two gardeners. Then he found himself walking through the growing dusk by the side of a wheelbarrow which the gardeners trundled in turn. Hsie Chin knew that the inert form of his grandfather lay in the vehicle, which was so small and clumsy that, in order to contain its burden, the knees of the schoolmaster were doubled up against his thin breast so that they touched his chin; the lad could see the outlines of the body under a blue cotton tunic which one of the gardeners had flung over it.

They traversed the whole length of the city through those narrow labyrinthine streets through which that same morning the schoolmaster and the boy had walked so gaily. Now these streets were dark and terrifying, lit only by the wavering light of lanterns attached to the lintels of doors, or swung in the hands of the passers-by.

Everywhere, leering and wagging their heads at him through the darkness, the child in his tired fancy saw dreadful things—Tall White Devils and Short Black Devils with bloodshot eyes, and red dripping tongues, and nameless animal-headed monsters that protruded towards him hideous moving snouts. Yet it was not these which made the child tremble with the greatest fear that night, but rather that silent Thing whose obscure outline he could see under the blue cotton tunic on the wheelbarrow.

When they reached the little house in the rice fields night had fallen. From some distance off the boy saw his mother waiting in the doorway, candle in hand. At sight of her, he ran wildly towards the house, and as he ran he threw his hands upward over his head and shrieked. With a cry Tung Mei ran forward to meet him, and as she caught him to her the child fainted.

XIV

THE schoolmaster's body was buried on Great Temple Hill next to the tomb of his son-in-law. The passionate grief of his daughter and of the boy gradually spent itself, as all grief must do if it does not kill at once. But the grave of Jung Kuang now shared the visits and offerings of Tung Mei and Hsie Chin with the grave beside it; and when on the appointed days the boy prostrated himself in filial worship, it was to *two* ancestral tablets that he paid his homage.

If this practice was not in strict accord with the national custom which permits only a son, or a son of a son, to kotow before the ancestral shrine, it nevertheless served to satisfy Tung Mei's yearning tenderness. Could she allow the beloved shade of her father to wander alone and without honour? And who, if not her son, was there to burn the sacred incense? By this time Tung Mei had all but persuaded herself that Hsie Chin was the child of her own flesh and blood.

As the months and years went by she rarely remembered that either the boy or herself had ever been connected with the foreigners. The English words and phrases she had learned, and which she was careful never to pronounce in the presence of the child, gradually passed out of her mind, and with them almost

all recollection of the missionaries in whose home she had once been an inmate. It is true that on the rare occasions on which she left her suburb and went with Hsie Chin into the streets of Foochow, she would sometimes see foreign men and women entering or leaving their spacious *hongs** and residences, and for a while these meetings caused her painful twinges of conscience. But as a vista of years formed itself behind her, even the sharpness of these reminders became blunted.

About a year after Kung's death, having decided that her own instruction was no longer adequate, and that it was time for her son's formal education to begin, Tung Mei dressed the child in his finest raiment, with tasselled cap, and shoes, and belt embroidered with her best skill, and in company with Chang-Ma led him to the nearest school in the suburb. Here the "little Confucius," as Chang-Ma playfully called him, *kotowed* in turn to a picture of the Great Sage and to the reverend teacher who was henceforth through many years to guide his stumbling footsteps in the path of knowledge.

Tung Mei's eyes were at once proud and sad as she turned away with her servant from the door of the school. In her tenderness she yearned to keep the child always near her; he seemed so little to be left alone with all those strangers. Yet if he was ever to become the great scholar of her dreams, she knew that his regular

* Offices or counting rooms.

school life must no longer be postponed. Chang-Ma's emotions had less of regret.

"Ah, the little Confucius! the little Confucius!" she chuckled. "In his heart already is the maxim written: 'If one has a mind to beat the stone, the stone will have a hole in it,' and I know that one day we shall see him a Holy Sage."

Owing to the careful instruction he had received from Tung Mei and her father, and also, perhaps, to the superior mental alertness which he had inherited from his own race, Hsie Chin, like Jung Kuang before him, soon surpassed all the other scholars at his school, and the fame of his intelligence became equal to that of his filial piety. When a learned visitor made his way into the schoolroom, with its rows of almond-eyed boys, it was always Hsie Chin who was called upon to "back his book," and when, as invariably happened, the visitor expressed astonishment at the faultless precision of the boy's recitation, the teacher never failed to recall to mind how the Emperor Ch'ien Lung once wrote of one of the most brilliant scholars of his reign: "He drew his learning from a hidden source, a virtuous mother imparting to him her classic lore."

"And it is not otherwise with our little one here," the teacher proudly added, patting the child's head. "His esteemed mother possesses learning only matched by her beauty and her virtue, as everybody in our neighbourhood will tell you."

The stages of study were many through which Hsie

Chin passed on his road to that far-off shining goal of *Chuang-Yuan*, or scholar laureate of China, which Tung Mei's ambition had set for him; for he was fairly caught now in the vast and ponderous system of Chinese education, which, with its ramifications extending to every district and province of the empire, has controlled for centuries the minds of millions. But to keep within the limits of this narrative, it becomes necessary to relate in a few pages that which Hsie Chin took years to accomplish.

The child was able to pass through the first arid stage of memorising in half the time usually allotted for this task; and when he was ten he had already been initiated into the mysteries of Chinese composition with its binary compounds and its parallels culminating in a highly artificial prose called *Wen Chang*, which from time immemorial has been the base of all scholarship in the Middle Kingdom. So well did he succeed in these difficult exercises, that the degree of "Flower of Talent," which the schoolmaster Kung had barely won at the age of twenty-eight, was bestowed upon the precocious lad in his early teens, and his name of Divine Child became linked with the legendary Hsie Chin, who, it is recorded, at the age of ten composed a volume of poems still in use as a juvenile textbook.

On the day when the fourteen-year-old boy went home with his newly won honours to his mother, who was waiting to receive him under the shade of the great banyan tree, she threw her arms about him and kissed

him repeatedly and passionately. She kissed his forehead, his cheeks, his eyes and at last his lips, straining him to her breast in an abandonment of maternal tenderness.

"Pao-p'ae! little pao-p'ae!" she cried. "My son whom the gods have given me!"

Then abruptly, though still with gentleness, she held his face from her, and looked at him with her large black eyes full of a half mournful playfulness.

"Illustrious Flower of Talent," she said, "no more must I caress you in this silly way; it is a foolish fashion I learned, I know not how nor where, and though while you were little it was harmless, it is now neither becoming to your dignity nor in accord with our honourable customs."

The astonished boy saw his mother's eyes brim with tears; and when he attempted to caress her in turn—to kiss the tears away—she escaped from him and fled into the house. They never kissed after that day.

The next morning Tung Mei exacted a promise from Hsie Chin.

"My son," she said, "your conduct is all that I could wish, and the diligence which you have displayed in your studies is worthy of that which the holy sages showed in their youth. Only one more thing do I desire of you that my happiness may be complete."

"What is that, my honourable mother?" the boy asked fondly.

"Your promise that you will not under any circum-

stances speak to or have anything to do with the *Huang Kiang*.^{*} They are dangerous," she said with deep solemnity, "very dangerous, my son."

The boy, who believed his mother to be actuated merely by the common native prejudice against the "foreign devils," readily gave his promise; yet he noticed that a few hours later Tung Mei, with a quiver in her voice, bade him give thanks to the good *Yesu* as well as to the other gods for his success in his examinations.

* "Foreign children," or foreigners.

XV

THE years passed in the little house in the rice fields. When he was two-and-twenty, Hsie Chin presented himself with about eight thousand other "Flowers of Talent," assembled from all parts of the province, in the great examination grounds in the north-eastern quarter of Foochow.* Here, during three sessions of nearly three days each, he was confined in a cell with a little food for his bodily use, and writing-materials for the brain which was working at fever heat. He emerged very sick and white, and went staggering home to Tung Mei, who was praying for him in her chamber. A few days later his name appeared at the head of the list of successful candidates for the second degree, which was posted for all to read on the south side of Foochow's great Drum Tower. By the evening of that day there was scarcely a man, woman or child in the city and its seven suburbs who did not know that Hsie Chin, son of the beautiful and virtuous widow, was the youngest as well as the greatest of the new "Promoted Scholars" of the province.

The honours paid to the stripling were immense. A pair of flag staves was erected before the house in the rice fields, and multitudes of people, including the

* Foochow is one of China's great educational centres.

thirty thousand strangers who had travelled to Foo-chow in company with the aspirants to literary honours, made a pilgrimage to it, so that it became necessary to set a guard about the little home day and night to keep the curious from too close an approach.

Several days after the list had appeared on the Drum Tower, Hsie Chin, in the presence of Tung Mei, whom he believed to be his only living relative, "worshipped Heaven and Earth," and afterwards prostrated himself with profound humility before the ancestral tablet of Jung Kuang. Not a shadow of a doubt had ever touched the young man's mind that in this act, which he had repeated countless times, he was doing otherwise than paying rightful and due homage to the ghost of his own father. And when he rose from his knees and stood before Tung Mei to be invested according to custom with a graduate's scarf of red silk, crossed twice on back and breast, he smiled at her with all the confident tenderness of an only son looking into the face of his mother.

But Tung Mei's hands trembled at the moment of tying the scarf, for a dreadful fancy seized her that there was something questioning and even suspicious in his gaze. The fact is that the marvellous success of Hsie Chin, and the adulation paid him, which were prophetic to her mind of still greater honours, had caused her such intense emotion that her mind had for the time become overwrought, and when the young man had left the house after the pious ceremonies had

been concluded, she turned with a curious cry to her old serving woman.

"Chang-Ma! Chang-Ma!" she said, as if the reality of her fear were already facing her. "What if the gods should withdraw their favours and choose the present moment to reveal the truth to Hsie Chin?"

"What truth?" Chang-Ma echoed blankly, and Tung Mei, looking at her intently, was strangely comforted when she saw that the old woman had completely forgotten that Hsie Chin was not in very fact her own son.

Meanwhile Hsie Chin, dressed imposingly in his graduate's robes of black silk with crimson scarf, short thick cape, and court hat adorned with two golden ornaments, led a procession of fourscore new *Chü-jên* to the *yamen* or official residence of the governor of the province. Here a feast was spread for the serious scholars, who listened with reverent attention to the honorary ode addressed to their poet, Hsie Chin, and delivered by the great mandarin in person. Hsie Chin heard the deep voice of the high official uttering the words of praise which likened the literary style of the youngest of the graduates to a dragon-fly sipping dew from the chalice of a lily whose reflection smiled back from the shallow water in which it grew; and his thoughts went back of the exquisite imagery to the days when he had gazed into the waters of flower-rimmed pools and had had his visions. He was roused from his reverie by the burst of applause which marked the end of the ode, and rose with a flush of crimson man-

ting his face to acknowledge with a bow of gentlest modesty the honour bestowed upon him.

When, after the feast, Hsie Chin was again with his mother, they climbed Great Temple Hill together to the graves of Jung Kuang and Kung, where amidst fragrant incense the youth made his thanksgiving offering, and took the vow that he would not cease his studies until he had reflected a great and abiding lustre upon the names of his exalted ancestors.

On this same evening it was decided that in the spring of the following year, when the great triennial examinations were due to take place in the capital, Hsie Chin should go to Peking and present himself for the third degree of *Chin-shih* (fit for office). From this distinction to a seat in the Imperial Academy, and at last to the unique glory of election by the Emperor himself as *Chuang-Yuan*, or scholar laureate, was a sequence of ideas which had become familiar to the ambitious mind of Tung Mei. And, moved by a secret fear, she resolved that she would not remain behind on that journey.

XVI

A YEAR later, towards sunset of a fine spring day, Hsie Chin and Tung Mei entered the capital by the Tung Pien gate, through which they had passed out on their southward journey seventeen years before.

In these years, Hsie Chin had grown to tall slender manhood. Notwithstanding his arduous studies, his body showed the grace and agility of youth, though a slight sinking in at the temples on either side of a high and too white brow betrayed the strain that his long and close application had cost him. He had also a habit of passing his hand frequently over his forehead, as if to soothe some pain there. His deep-set eyes were those of a dreamer, but his lips had kept the full curves of his childhood days, and when he spoke his voice was as clear and melodious as a flute, with the exquisite inflections of one accustomed to the stately language of the Chinese Classics. In accordance with the dignity of a "Promoted Scholar," the young man wore a gown of rich and sober silk, and carried at his girdle a jewelled case for a fan, and another containing the *wan fang sz pao*, or "four precious things of the library," namely, the pen, ink, paper and inkstone. These had been gifts from his mother and he deemed them indeed "precious." In spite of the slightly reddish

tinge of his queue and his fair complexion, the youth easily passed for a Chinese, so perfectly had he by this time acquired the native speech and manner.

Tung Mei, in the same years, had changed less. Her girlish loveliness had merely been warmed to riper beauty in the deepening of that grave and placid dignity which she had brought home with her from the temple on the day that she had taken her vows of perpetual widowhood. Yet underneath the serenity of her exterior she had carried with her through those years a Fear,—that secret dread which made her unwilling to stay at home when Hsie Chin should go back to the city, where, as she believed, his own people still lived. And now that she found herself in Peking, those old half-buried memories of the foreigners with whom she had once dwelt suddenly sprang to life within her, and her fear threatened to become a torment.

After some inquiry and searching in strange streets, the two had found lodgings less than the distance of a *li*, or third of a mile, from the august Hanlin* itself, the goal of so many hopes and aspirations. In a small back court behind an alley known as the "Lane of Green Beetles," they took three rooms arranged in the usual Chinese adjoining series. Now the poetical name for copper *cash* in China is "green beetles," just as a sheet of paper is a "flowery scroll," or an epistle a "wild goose"; and the lane came by this appellation through

* Hanlin, or Hanlin Yuan, the Imperial Academy, as distinguished from the literary title or degree of *Han-lin*.

the fact of there being in it a famous "House of Song" where *cash* was taken in each evening as entrance fees. Being strangers in Peking, mother and son did not know of the existence of this place, and when, soon after entering their chambers, the gay strains of flutes and Chinese guitars were borne in through the latticed windows from a neighbouring dwelling, they smiled at each other with naïve pleasure. It was only in the morning on going out to buy rice and cornmeal cakes for their breakfast, that Hsie Chin learned from the shopkeeper the nature of this house. It was an opium den of secret renown, known only to the élite of the young *litterati*, who, though enjoying its license, had purged from it the grosser elements of such resorts. In other words, it was the favourite haunt of those fastidious cultivators of *belles-lettres* who, like a famous Chinese poet,* did not spurn the occasional society of the "soiled doves," especially when these gentle creatures were capable of appreciating their lovers' poetry amidst the soothing fumes of opium.

Hsie Chin, learning of these things, decided not to disturb his mother's peace of mind by telling her of them; for his own knowledge of the proximity of a form of enjoyment for which he was now eligible proved strangely troubling to him, and the soul of the young provincial burned with curiosity. What went on behind the closed doors of that House of Song? The melodies which the evening breeze had wafted to him the night

* The poet Liu Chia Chu, born about 1810.

before haunted his memory. They brought up to his imagination all the most charming and sensuous images in the ancient Book of Odes, as well as in the lyrics of a score of later Chinese poets,—pages saturated with the fragrance of old sandal-wood, of delicately painted fans held between exquisite feminine fingers, of pink lotus flowers gathered as one gilded idly on Imperial lakes in company with lovely ladies. Women—always women!—beautiful, gifted beings, sparkling with grace and wit. Ah, did they really exist outside of sonnets and canticles of love? Yes, his mother must have been such an one in the days of her youth. And how he had always adored her! But he had looked in vain for her peer among the women he had sometimes seen by chance through a door left indiscreetly ajar, or the partly opened curtains of a sedan. It is true that his eager roving eyes had often lighted upon a pretty face, but he had never been completely satisfied; for the prettiest of the faces had always lacked something—intelligence, animation—they were too doll-like with their powder and rouge and glittering hair ornaments, which stuck out like spikes around their coils of shining black hair as if to ward off too curious glances. Was it possible that in those concealed chambers, where the music of the evening before had had its ecstatic birth, there were women of the kind he had dreamed of, who were gifted with rare intelligence as well as with beauty? He knew well that he could not hope to find one like his mother there, whose purity, as he had once written in an ode

addressed to her on her birthday, was like the "spring sunlight quivering on the first tender green of the willows." But if they were not chaste, the "soiled doves" might not be lacking in other charms!

The thought brought a delicate flush to the young man's cheeks, and made him hasten home from the cook shop with a sense of unworthiness which was new to him. He even avoided his mother's eyes when she playfully asked him how much he had squandered on the beggars he had passed, or if he had rescued any wandering ants from the footpath's dangers, or lifted them from watery graves in chance puddles to insure success in his coming examinations. He smiled without replying, and after breaking his fast with her on the corncakes and steamed rice, he asked her politely but with some abruptness if she would grant him her honourable permission to go forth into the air. She laughed again at his solemnity, saying that she could guess to what place his footsteps would turn. Hsie Chin flushed a little at his mother's words, for he knew that she could not imagine that he would go elsewhere than to the sacred precincts of the great Academy, and that it would be no comfort for her to know that he intended on his way to the Hanlin to try the effect of "green beetles" upon the porter whom he had seen standing by the gate of the House of Song. He wished merely to penetrate into the court behind the gate, not, of course, to enter the chambers themselves. Vexed with himself that he found it so difficult to resist this

foolish impulse when such weighty matters were ahead of him, he yet excused himself; for what could be more natural than his desire to see the sights of the capital? And this House of Song where the great poets met for their pleasure had so aroused his curiosity that he decided that the quickest way to get the thought of it out of his mind was to see the place.

A few strides brought him to the gate, where he tried to appear at ease.

"How many green beetles?" he demanded haughtily.

The gateman, instantly recognising the provincial, mentioned thrice the actual fee. Hsie Chin counted the sum out from some strings of *cash* concealed in the folds of his girdle and extended it towards the porter, who held out a greedy hand for it; but as Hsie Chin stepped nearer he interposed his body between the young man and the gateway, saying cunningly,

"Not so fast, if you please, young sir; only literary gentlemen are permitted inside."

"Let me pass!" cried Hsie Chin with still greater hauteur. "I am a *Chü-jên*."

The gateman looked at him incredulously, thinking it improbable that so young a person should be so advanced a scholar. He had seen few holders of the second degree under thirty or thirty-five, and many of them were above middle age. Hsie Chin bore no outward sign of his literary rank; for in his modesty he had put aside the court hat with its golden ornaments which Tung Mei had offered him, and had reached for

the round black cap of the ordinary Chinese which he was now wearing.

"It is one thing to say that you have harpooned a whale and another thing to prove it," the gateman said with an impudent grin.

Hsie Chin flushed with anger.

"Will this prove it?" he enquired with sarcasm, pulling out another string of *cash* from his girdle and thrusting it into the gateman's hands.

He had gauged the fellow rightly, for with a sly smile he unbarred the gate.

"The entertainment does not begin until the evening," he remarked drily, "but since the honourable *Chü-jên* (he pronounced the title with ironic emphasis) so ardently desires entrance, far be it from such a wretched slave as myself to keep him out."

Scorning a reply, Hsie Chin passed through the large oaken portal and found himself in a spacious court. He had been prepared for beauty of a sort, but the place surpassed his expectation. Its charm lay less in the architecture, which followed the usual Chinese lines, than in the detail which adorned it. The pavement of the court, except where it was broken to give room for trees and flowering shrubs, was carved in arabesque of great beauty, and the same designs were followed out in the marble railing about an artificial pond set in the centre of the enclosure. At the right of the pool a willow drooped its gracile branches over the fantastic roof of a small round pavilion, the slender

pillars of which were reflected in the clear water below. Hsie Chin drew in his breath between his teeth in a faint hiss of delight; and his eyes wandered to the opposite side of the pond where the marble of the pavement rose in steps and expanded above them into a broad terrace, beyond which was a house with a steep green-tiled roof ornamented at its corners with dragons. The porch of this house, formed by an extension of the roof supported by six large pillars, was at the moment when the young man entered the court the scene of some animation. Two young women of noticeable beauty, dressed in silk robes embroidered gaily about their hems and sleeves, were seated on divans engaged in the pastime of composing impromptu couplets in verse. They eyed each other over a low table supporting a slender jar of plum blossoms and a porcelain bowl of rare fruit; and the taller girl, whose sleek black hair arranged in the winged bow style bespoke her Manchu origin, chanted in musical cadence:

“The cold moon of winter has sunk in the sea.”

Her companion, gently swaying an ivory fan, matched the line:

“The sunbeams of springtime dance over yon tree.”

The enchanted youth, believing himself unnoticed, and wishing to listen without being detected, quickly stepped into the summer house under the willow. But the lady of the fan, whose delicate oval face was lighted by a pair of mischievous eyes, saw him and made a little

sign to her companion, who, darting a sidewise glance at the pavilion, lilted another line with a coquettish animation:

"Methinks in the kiosk a youth I espy!"

The lady of the fan with feigned astonishment:

"A youth! dear sister! Has he dropped from the sky?"

Hsie Chin felt the blood mounting to his face as he listened to what to his provincial mind seemed to be great boldness. Yet he was not wholly displeased; he would have liked to step bravely forth, but shyness pinned him to the spot. Meanwhile his fair tormentors continued without mercy. Leaning slightly forward with her head on one side, the Manchu peered into the summer house:

"A scholar I'd say from the cut of his dress."

And her companion, looking at him over the delicately carved ivory fan, replied coyly:

"Perhaps; but his face! What a look of distress!"

The Manchu in a tone of mock pity:

"Some *Flower of Talent* they've threatened to pluck."

The lady of the fan:

" 'Tis clear the gods have not granted him luck."

The Manchu provocatively:

"The youth is so backward; he says ne'er a word."

The lady of the fan in the same tone:

"His maxim no doubt is: 'Be seen and not heard.'"

This last challenge proved effective. Hsie Chin, struggling successfully with his diffidence, emerged from the pavilion, and bowing towards his persecutors, recited with classical purity of inflection:

"Fair ladies, since you my degree wish to know,
I'm a *Scholar Promoted* just one year ago."

A ripple of musical laughter greeted his début; and the two women, holding out exquisite welcoming hands, drew him up to the porch beside them. With pretty gestures they plied him with questions and flung out their comments.

Ah, ah, he was really a *Chü-jên!* And so young! What illustrious—what celestial talent! Would he so far condescend as to seat himself? Would he even, perhaps, accept a peach?—the finest and ripest one in the bowl should be his. And pipes—a little wine too. Music,—did you say, dear sister? By all means—guitars, the cithern! . . .

They had their way with him. The fumes of opium soon made him drowsy—but not too drowsy to feel the pleasant burning sensation of the wine as it went down his throat; nor the soft bosom with the delicate oval face above it upon which his head had miraculously found a pillow. He heard the voices of the women crooning to him melodiously sweet old lyrics composed centuries ago for the delight of emperors. A graceful hand waved an ivory fan which cooled his cheeks; the

breath of spring laden with perfume came up to him from the flowering shrubbery in the court below; he closed his eyes. . . . He knew that he had fallen into the Pool of Illusion, but he was not sorry. He was glad, as the curves of his warm lips showed.

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XVII

TOWARDS mid-afternoon the young man found himself once more in the Lane of Green Beetles, and the thought of the Hanlin brought with it acute humiliation! During all his hard years of study, the great Imperial Academy had been the one mistress of his heart, and scores of times he had repeated to himself in anticipation of the day on which he would stand before its portals the lines from the Ode of the Emperor Ch'ien Lung:

“Before me is the pure, bright, pearly Hall;
Compared with this, who vaunts the genii on the islands of the
blest!”

How then had it happened when he was almost on the threshold of its celestial delights that he had turned aside to seek the company of the “soiled doves”? Bah! was this the way to attain the eminent dignity of a *Chuang-Yuan*? He thought, too, of his mother, wondering what she would be thinking of his long absence; and he felt that he must not return to her before he had seen and could give an account of the famous hall of learning.

He hastened his steps and soon found himself in front of the entrance to a small *yamen*, situated near the foot of a bridge spanning the Imperial Canal a little

to the north of the British legation. The young stranger looked at this gate with puzzled eyes, for though he had carefully asked his way through the maze of streets, and though the gateman in answer to his anxious inquiry had assured him that he had reached the right place, and that this was indeed the entrance to the Hanlin, Hsie Chin could scarcely believe that he had really arrived at his destination. Did this unpretentious door lead to the "pure, bright, pearly Hall"? A feeling almost of chagrin came over him, followed by the thought that perhaps the very simplicity of its entrance might be a device to protect the place from an annoying curiosity; and once within the gate the wonder of the great Academy would be revealed.

But as on an occasion long ago, now eclipsed from memory, when his childish feet had stood on the threshold of the Buddhist Paradise, he was destined to disappointment. The porter opened the door, and Hsie Chin, trembling with emotion, stepped in. His first sensation was that of grey desolation, unredeemed by the warmth and brightness of the spring sunshine which seemed left outside and very far away. Several open quadrangles fallen into ruin, broken pavements strewn with rubbish, dust like unclean snow drifts in every corner—these were the courts of fame, and where was its Pearly Hall?

Hsie Chin gazed about him in bitter bewilderment. He saw five squat buildings of one story, looking like so many empty barns; and flanking them in two rows

of even more miserable structures, resembling half-ruined stables. This at first glance was all. Not a soul was in sight. He entered one of the low buildings, over the door of which was the legend "Composing Rooms," and found that the meanness of its interior matched that of its outward aspect. As he came out again, Hsie Chin passed his hand over his forehead in the gesture which had become habitual. His disillusionment was like an ache of which he wished to rid himself. How was it possible that these dusty dilapidated buildings, set in their forlorn courts, could be the chief seat of the Empire's learning? Must he replace his long-cherished dream by this squalid reality? He began to regret that he had ever left the court of the House of Song, and he determined to go back there on the morrow. Those black eyes sparkling in the delicate oval face—the wine—the music—the soft scented bosom—ah, he must see, he must feel them once more! What, after all, were arid scholastic honours compared with such memories?

Then his glance fell on the last of the transverse buildings and he saw that its roof was of yellow tiling. The Imperial colour! He went to the door and tried to open it; it was locked, but, by peering into a window, Hsie Chin was able to discern in the growing shadows the outline of a throne. Even here the general dust and decay were not absent, yet somehow the young man's disgust lessened. What was the secret of this bare and unadorned place that even the Son of Heaven should

choose to sit here and address to it odes of glowing poetical imagery?

He began to read the inscriptions on the walls of each of the buildings in turn, and found that they all alike warned him that his feet were treading on sacred ground. Like all men of learning in China, Hsie Chin had a profound respect for the written character; and here in these shabby halls it was to be seen everywhere. He suddenly perceived that this was the Hanlin's elegance!

And as he stood reading the inscriptions, the words of an ancient poet came to his mind:

Do you not reflect that the elements of immortality are within
you?

Do you not know that the elixir of life is within you?
For soul and spirit they are the root and fountain! *

And like a flash the secret of China's great Academy was revealed to him!

* From the Kuan Yin Ching, a metrical biography of the Goddess of Mercy.

XVIII

THE sunbeams were making long paths of gold across the Imperial Canal when Hsie Chin emerged from the Hanlin. He felt exalted in spirit, as if in those dusty desolate courts which he had just left a message from the infinite had been communicated to him; and, by the light of this new wisdom, he understood that, although the fire of his youth was still unquenched, he would never again enter the House of Song, since from that Pool of Illusion, Buddha the Boundless One, stretching forth a saving hand, had plucked him.

Longing for space and height, he decided to return to his lodgings by way of the Tartar Wall, which rose to the south beyond the British legation. A short walk brought him to a ramp by which he ascended to the top of the gaunt and barbaric old bulwark, and a moment later he found himself moving along a promenade almost fifty feet wide between two rows of crenellated battlements. Here the whole sky, which had suddenly become flushed and streaked with the intense colours of sunset, was visible in a wide arch; while below him the city, with its myriad trees touched to faint green by the spring warmth, appeared like some vast sunken pond overgrown with rushes.

As he walked along this lofty deserted highway, Hsie Chin's exaltation increased. The opium which he had smoked earlier in the day had left his mind so singularly lucid, so detached, as it almost seemed, from his body, that he wondered half whimsically if, in accord with the Taoist notion, his "essence" had not become unconsciously separated from its old material grossness and was about to be wafted to the abodes of the Genii. He went to one side of the wall and, leaning over the battlements, gazed into the sunset. And as he gazed, he saw, with the old visioning of his childhood, the gorgeous sunlit clouds roll gradually together and form themselves before his eyes into a sublime tableau.

From the centre of a mystic saffron lake, a lotus flower of matchless beauty rose and expanded immeasurably until it had become a gigantic throne over which flocks of luminous birds with iris-coloured wings fluttered and soared. At first the throne was empty, but as the young man still watched, the sky above it opened and a great golden Buddha descended like a cloud upon the royal seat. And when this happened, the sense and reason of all things seemed for one immortal moment to become clear to Hsie Chin. Stretching out his arms towards the serene cloud image, he burst into a hymn of praise.

"In the beginning there was nothing," he chanted, in his pure young voice. "All was emptiness, and the five elements had no existence. Then thou, O Adi-Buddha, didst reveal thyself under the form of a flame of light.

Thou art the great Buddha who existest of thyself."—
The rapture of the voice increased as the chant rose to sublimity—"All things that exist in the three worlds have their cause in thee; thou it is who sustainest their being. From thee and out of thy profound meditation the universe has sprung into life. . . ."

Abruptly the chant broke off. Behind him were two persons speaking in a foreign tongue.

"Listen! listen!" a girl exclaimed in a low vibrating tone. "What a wonderful voice! What is he saying?"

And a man answered:

"I think it must be a hymn to Buddha—a sort of sacred chant. Sh! he hears us! He has stopped!"

"Oh, I am so sorry! Let us walk quietly by!"

And they went on their way.

Hsie Chin, standing like a stone image by the parapet, waited until the sound of their footsteps was lost along the darkening wall. When at last he turned, the rapture on his face had given place to a look of bewilderment. Until a few moments ago he had believed that he knew no other language than Chinese; *yet now he had understood the meaning of all that they had said!*

An intense curiosity began to take possession of him. He wanted to follow these people, to hear more of their speech, so alien yet so strangely familiar. He ran forward along the wall; two figures were silhouetted in the distance against the sky, in which a faint flush still lingered; one was dressed in black, and the other wore

white. Undoubtedly they were the foreigners; and yielding to impulse, Hsie Chin advanced in stealthy rapid strides. He hoped for a chance to hear them speak again without being himself seen, and his opportunity soon came. The man and woman, who were leaning towards each other like lovers, slackened their pace to a slower and yet slower stroll until at last they came to a standstill, looking about them as if in search of an agreeable resting place. They found it on a wide ledge of stone at the base of one of the parapets, where they seated themselves with their faces turned towards the city; and after a moment they were absorbed in conversation. When Hsie Chin, watching from a distance, saw this, he crept noiselessly forward and hid himself in a shadowy recess of the wall directly behind the pair. Their words came to him with perfect distinctness. The man was speaking in a tone of tender pity.

"You must often have been lonely, then?"

And the girl's voice answered as if the admission gave her exquisite pleasure:

"Yes, sometimes I have been a little lonely, but that has all passed now for you are here."

A pause followed; then the man spoke again sympathetically:

"The life of an only child has always seemed a sad one to me. At my home we seven children were so much to each other. Did you never long for a brother or a sister?"

"Passionately," the other replied; then a moment

later in a strange voice: "Did you know that my parents had another child—a little boy—who died a few months before I was born?"

The man's tone betrayed surprise.

"Is it possible! No, I had not heard. Why did you never tell me?"

The answer came in a sad musing tone.

"I hardly know why; probably because the subject is never mentioned at home. Two years ago when I was alone with mother one Sunday evening, she told me the whole story in a strained formal way as if she were forcing herself to speak. She said that she had almost gone out of her mind at the time, and that father's prematurely white hair had dated from the night when my brother was lost. I saw that it was torture for mother to tell me even so much as she did, and I have never asked her any questions since. But just the other day I found a little illustrated Bible with the name of my brother written in a childish hand on one of the pages.—It made me cry."

The man's voice was full of sympathy when after a short silence he spoke again.

"What was your brother's name?" he asked.

"Carl—Carl Osborne." The words were uttered in that low solemn tone which is used in speaking of the dead.

The Chin, hidden in his shadowy recess, had a convulsive start. The ghost of memory had leapt from its grave and stabbed him. Controlling himself by

a supreme effort, he remained in his hiding place, listening intently.

"Mother told me that Carl was six when he was lost," the girlish voice went on. "He was a wonderful little boy, it appears, full of the quaintest fancies. He would have been about twenty-three now, as I am just seventeen."

"How strange," the other rejoined with deep interest, "that I never knew before that you had a brother. You speak of him as *lost*—do you mean that—?"

"Yes, he was really lost," the girl responded with sadness. "It was at our old temple in the hills; one afternoon he wandered off alone and some hours afterwards the most terrible thunder and rain storm began which had occurred in many years. Everybody from the temple was out all night searching for the little fellow, but he was never found. The wolves were out, too, that night and it was supposed—it was supposed—oh, I cannot tell you—it is too horrible—only his little hat was found in a cave."

Hsie Chin, listening with strange thrills throughout his being, heard sobs mingling with the consoling tones of the lover.

"Do not try to tell me any more, dearest Ruth. I am sorry I asked you questions. Poor, poor little lad! And your parents—I never dreamed that they had such a great sorrow in their lives."

Then in a different tone:

"Don't you think we'd better go back to the mission now? See, the sun has set."

Hsie Chin heard the rustling of garments and the soft answer.

"Yes, Alan dear, I am ready," as they moved off together, leaving him alone and groping in the night of his memory.

XIX

FOR some time Hsie Chin did not change his position. He stood in the same listening attitude like one enthralled long after the two foreigners had disappeared.

A small coloured picture, contained within a circle, formed and re-formed itself before his eyes. It was on the first page of a little book and represented a kneeling child, dressed in white with hands clasped in prayer. Under the picture were the printed words: "*The Infant Samuel.*" Above the picture written in an irregular hand was another name, and this name was *Carl Osborne*.

Behind this troubling image, multitudes of half-formed questions ran riot in his brain, among which a few took definite shape and reiterated themselves insistently.

What was the reason for his mother's apparent deep dislike of the foreigners? Why had she on the day he had been made a "Flower of Talent" required from him a promise never to speak to or have anything to do with the *Huang Kiang*? Was she merely moved by the common prejudice against the white devils, or was her reason stronger and more personal?

He gave a start as he remembered a curious thing.

More than once he had heard his mother invoke the aid of the good Yesu—the god of the foreigners! And on the very day she had forbidden him to have any intercourse with the white people, she had come back to tell him to include their deity in his prayers of thanksgiving to the gods for success in his examinations. What was the meaning of this strange paradox? Then with even sharper emphasis he questioned: How did his mother know of Yesu at all—she who had lived quietly all her life in the rice fields outside of Foochow?—And a moment later:—But *had* she lived there always? He remembered vaguely a journey they had made on a little boat and then on two big ones. They had carried with them a large box very beautifully carved with birds and flowers like a wedding chest. What was in that box? At the question which he put to himself Hsie Chin shivered. He remembered! That chest was his father's coffin; he had seen it lowered into a grave. His *father*?—Yes, his father, Lu Jung Kuang, upon whose tomb on Great Temple Hill he had prostrated himself times without number. Would he worship the shade of a stranger?—he asked himself with scorn.

But at that instant the page of the little book stood out before his eyes with the legend: *The Infant Samuel* at the bottom of the encircled picture of the kneeling child, and above the circle he saw again, with a growing terror, the loosely scrawled name: *Carl Osborne*.

He clasped his head in his hands. Was he losing his wits? What had this name to do with him? If he

knew no other language than Chinese, how was it possible for these foreign letters to form themselves again and again in an identical combination—a combination, too, which appeared to hold for him a deep significance? And if he knew no other language than Chinese, how had he understood the conversation of the two foreigners? For he *had* understood it; he even found himself repeating many of the words.

"Mother told . . . Carl was six . . . lost . . . temple at the hills . . . wandered off alone . . . thunder storm . . . little hat was found . . . cave . . ."

All these words and phrases were perfectly intelligible to Hsie Chin. Not only had he followed the story of the little boy who had wandered away from the temple, but he had followed it with an agony of sympathy. Yet—strangest fact of all—he *knew*, in spite of his sympathy, that the foreign child had not perished—had not been devoured by wolves.

Whence came this strange knowledge and profound emotion? He had never been in Peking until yesterday. These foreigners were absolute strangers to him; he had not even seen their faces while they talked. Yet their words, uttered in a foreign language, had stirred him as nothing else had ever stirred him.

His mind leapt back to that vaguely remembered journey. It was curious that his mother had never spoken of it; had she some reason for wishing him to forget it?—He tried to remember: a little boat, and then two big ones . . . great terrifying cities deafening him with

their noise. Then it suddenly flashed upon him that it was the very journey that he and his mother had so recently made—the same journey *reversed!* Instead of starting from Foochow, they had on that other occasion started from Peking . . . Peking! After all, he had been here before! He felt his legs tremble under him, and he put out his hand to grasp the top of the parapet and steady himself. He must think out one or two more things before he could go to his mother.

Several details came back to him. He saw himself as a young child sitting on his mother's lap in their little house in the suburbs of Foochow. He was weak and limp, as if he had been very ill. Presently his mother turned his face towards hers and made him repeat after her very solemnly a number of sentences.

Hsie Chin, standing on the old Tartar wall, groped in his memory for those lost words, and one by one in the gathering shadows of the night they seemed to become audible.

"You are my mother," he heard Tung Mei's deliberate voice say, and his own childish one respond:

"You are my mother."

And again his mother's voice followed by his own echo:

"I am your son and the son of Lu Jung Kuang.

"I owe to my father's memory the deepest love and respect.

"As a pious and filial son, I will worship at his tomb and at his ancestral tablet as long as I live."

The sweat stood out on Hsie Chin's forehead. These were the words, but why had he been made to repeat them? Why had his mother deemed it necessary to impress upon his mind the obvious truth that he was her son and the son of her husband? Was not this extraordinary? And the past answered him with yet another memory.

It was of that strange sound almost like a sob, yet half triumphant, which had burst from his mother's lips as she dropped him on Chang-Ma's lap and ran from the room. It was the memory of that, and of what had followed. For she had returned a few moments later—he remembered it now as if it had happened yesterday—and drawing him again into her arms, had cried out joyfully:

"Pao-p'ae, you shall have a beautiful new name. . . . You shall be called Hsie Chin because you are a gift of the gods."

A new name! Then Hsie Chin had not always been his name, and if he had once had another, what had that other name been?

Again the page of the little book flashed white in front of his eyes—the encircled picture with the legend below it and the scrawled name above it:

CARL OSBORNE

The young man put his hands to his head and, groaning, fled back along the wall to the ramp by which he had ascended. He ran down by it into the city, and

stumbled through dusky tortuous streets to the lodgings in the Lane of Green Beetles.

His mother met him at the door; and the candle which she held high in her hand shone on a face as haggard as his own.

XX

TUNG MEI regarded Hsie Chin with wide-open eyes; terror which had grown greater through every hour of agonised waiting looked out from them like a wild thing, but she forced herself to speak calmly.

"You are late, my son."

He echoed her in the same tone:

"I am late, my honourable mother."

With a trembling hand, she pushed a chair towards him, waiting for explanation or excuse, but he remained standing, eyeing her strangely.

"Honourable mother," he said, speaking nervously, "I feel distraught like one who tries to stand on two boats at once. My head is in a whirl—I know my life yet I seem not to know it. *You* know—you must tell me."

She shrank from his gaze. "*I* know—I must tell you?" she faltered.

"Yes, you must tell me," he repeated, still eyeing her in that strange way. "Foreign words—I have heard foreign words; I have understood them."

The flame of the candle which Tung Mei held in her hand leapt up and then flickered as her arm suddenly dropped. She righted it with an effort as she again echoed him weakly:

"You have understood foreign words?"

She cowered before his look as he stepped nearer to her.

"Honourable mother," he demanded imperatively, "tell me how I could understand those foreign words?"

She gathered up her forces for evasion, crying out as one alarmed.

"You are sick, my son; you frighten me; you talk as one in delirium."

Hsie Chin straightened up, endeavouring to hold himself in stern control.

"Honourable mother, I am not sick, nor am I delirious; it is as I tell you; I stood on the Tartar Wall and heard two foreigners talking together as they passed; I comprehended words; I followed them; I listened to them as they conversed further and as I listened——"

Tung Mei interrupted him, hiding her fear under a guise of anger.

"That you promised me not to do!"

"I could not help myself. Something compelled me to listen and I forgot my promise. And, after all, why did you ever require such a promise from me?"

He looked at her searchingly, almost sharply.

She quailed, but answered with something like defiance.

"Because the foreigners are dangerous people. Everybody will tell you that. Are they not called devils?"

"That is true," Hsie Chin replied more quietly. "Yet in calling them so, I believe we do them an in-

justice and only prove ourselves to be like those who look at the heavens from the bottom of a well. The conversation of the foreigners which I overheard was not wicked nor cruel; instead it was kind and compassionate."

Tung Mei found nothing to answer. She simply stood with the candle still in her hand, not daring to move enough to set it down.

The young man spoke again with his eyes still fixed upon her face.

"They were talking of a child—a boy of six, who was lost many years ago."—Hsie Chin noticed the start his mother gave but he continued.—"He wandered away from a temple and was overtaken by a great storm. His parents believed that he was devoured by wolves and mourned him bitterly. The child's name was——"

"Stop! Stop!" cried Tung Mei with sudden violence. "I do not wish to hear more. What is this story to me? I care nothing for the foreigners!"

She went hastily out of the room, leaving Hsie Chin in darkness. A moment later he heard convulsive sobbing.

"Mother, honourable mother!" he called in great distress; but when after some groping and stumbling he reached the door of Tung Mei's bed chamber, the sobbing had ceased and the door was locked.

He waited irresolutely for a few moments and then recrossed the common room and went into his own bed

chamber on the opposite side. He remembered that the next day at dawn he must enter the cell which would be assigned to him for the first of the three sessions required for the impending examinations. The calling of the roll of candidates was to take place before day-break.

His whole life as far back as he could recall it had been one long and toilsome preparation for this event. Whatever else had happened or was destined to happen, he must not fail in this. He knew that the physical and mental strain would be great,—too great, perhaps, for men were not infrequently taken out dead from the cells into which they had entered as competitors during these great triennial examinations; and he knew that to fit himself for the strain, he must have sleep.

Throwing off his outer garments, Hsie Chin stretched himself on the *kang*, but his sleep was fitful and it seemed to him that he had been unconscious only a few minutes when his mother, looking like a spirit in the grey light of early morning, entered his room to bid him rise.

XXI

MOTHER and son greeted each other with restraint. Hsie Chin knew by the swollen appearance of Tung Mei's eyes that she had wept much and probably, like himself, had slept little; and as he hastily put on his clothes, he accused himself of base and unfilial conduct.

Why had he disregarded his promise to her and followed the foreigners, and then troubled her with insistent questions about them? She had given to his welfare the thought, the love and the devotion of her whole life; she had made it possible for him, if the gods were still propitious, to attain to the highest honours of the Empire. Yet he had forgotten these great benefits, and after allowing himself to be lured into self-indulgence, he had been guilty of disobedience towards her. He felt that he must atone for the grief which he had caused her by winning glory for her sake in the great test before him. It was the solemn duty demanded of his filial piety and he steeled himself to meet it.

At present his sense of reality in the scene on the Tartar Wall was weak; he was inclined to believe that he had been the victim of his own distempered fancies, or of an unnatural mental excitement due to his first

indulgence in a dangerous drug. For the time being, the foreign words including even that haunting troubling name which he had been able to repeat—or fancied that he had been able to repeat—the night before were gone from his mind. He was immeasurably relieved by this fact, as he wished to concentrate all his energies on the imminent trial of his scholarship. He had won great distinction before; he would win a still more eminent dignity now.

He longed to say something comforting to his mother before he left her, to kiss her as he had done when he was a child, and to beg her forgiveness; but something strangely stern and fixed in her aspect made him afraid to speak any more than was necessary. They were to be separated for three days before the first of the two recesses of twelve hours which were allowed between the sessions. Under the most favourable conditions this waiting alone would be hard for his mother, and now he had made it doubly difficult. It was with an almost guilty sense that he took from her hands at the moment of his departure the box of provisions and a little portable stove for making tea which her loving care had provided for his use in the cell. He murmured his thanks, and turned back to wave his hand to her as he crossed the court to go into the Lane of Green Beetles; and then his heart smote him again, for he saw that she had begun to weep.

He found a great multitude of people at the examination grounds, situated not far from the Hanlin Acad-

emy, into which he was admitted after showing certain credentials. An aged "Flower of Talent," a Pekingese of over threescore years, told Hsie Chin that there were more than ten thousand candidates for the several degrees, and between four and five thousand servants and attendants, including a body of soldiers, whose duty it was to patrol the premises day and night in order to keep out intruders or to prevent any communication between the competitors inside and their friends outside. The old man confessed that he had attended the examinations for the second degree regularly every three years during four decades, but without success, and that though he had little hope of better luck, he considered it his duty to persevere.

"If the gods grant me longevity," the old scholar added with unconscious pathos, "the Son of Heaven will no doubt bestow the *Chü-jên* upon me on my eightieth birthday as he did upon the venerable Chau of the Village of the Makers of Fine Tooth Combs. But I may yet win success through my own exertions.—I take it that you, honourable young gentleman, are here to compete for the first degree."

"Your guess is correct, reverend sir," Hsie Chin replied gently. It was a benevolent lie which he felt sure the gods would approve. Chinese ethics do not permit any open or implied admission of superiority over the aged, and Hsie Chin took pains to lose himself in the crowd apart from the old man before he joined the

group of "Promoted Scholars" to answer to the roll call.

Immediately after the calling of the roll, just as the sun was rising, Hsie Chin was assigned one of the cells, arranged like calf-stalls in long rows opening on narrow alleys, which the Chinese government has provided for the educated talent of the land. Each row of cells is designated by a single character taken from the Thousand Character Classic and the cells are numbered, and are guarded by men who during the examinations pace continuously up and down the alleys. Hsie Chin had previously noticed a three-storied tower from which a strict watch was kept on all the movements within the large walled enclosure. If, as the ancient "Flower of Talent" had informed him, the examiners, mandarins of high rank and literary eminence, had "washed their hearts," vowing before Heaven to deal justly by the candidates, it was evident that they had also taken every precaution against cheating on the part of the candidates themselves.

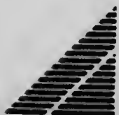
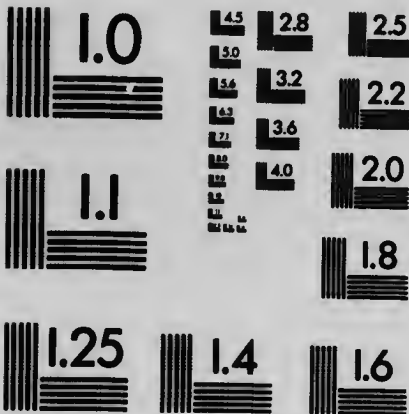
The cell which Hsie Chin entered was similar to the one which he had occupied some months previously in Foochow—a mean and narrow apartment, scarcely three feet wide, with its back and two sides made of brick plastered roughly with white lime, and just high enough to permit him to stand upright. Its furniture was of primitive simplicity, consisting merely of three or four wide boards which could be fitted into two rows of depressions found in either side of the cell and thus made

to serve as bench, or table, or sleeping platform at the convenience of the occupant. Hsie Chin had just time to arrange his seat with his back against the wall, and his writing materials placed on a board fixed at a higher level in front of him, when a licitor appeared carrying a bundle of examination papers. He thrust a set of these into Hsie Chin's hand and then unceremoniously locked him into his cell.



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XXII

IN her lodgings in the Lane of Green Beetles, Tung Mei endured another agony of waiting, embittered by the fear which that fateful interview with Hsie Chin had inspired in her breast; while the young man himself sat in his cell adjusting character to character in a *Wen Chang* as precise and melodious as music—as delicate as “a dragon-fly sipping dew”!

The eleven days of his mother's waiting were broken by only two recesses of barely twelve hours each, in which Hsie Chin came to her with a face white and tense and eyes gone black with excitement. They spoke little in those hours; Tung Mei persuaded Hsie Chin to recline on the *kang*, where she brought to him from time to time something to eat or drink, or simply sat by his side and fanned him. Even after the first of the three sessions Tung Mei saw with a sinking of her heart that Hsie Chin had become perceptibly thinner and weaker, and by the second recess his pallor and exhaustion were alarming. Once during this interval, as he lay on the *kang* with his eyes closed, she brooded over his face until she felt her throat contract with a sudden sob. Could he survive this terrible ordeal? she asked herself sharply; and, if he died, would she not have killed him? Yet, though her apprehension was acute, she

knew by the set look of his mouth that it would be useless to counsel him to remain away from the last session of the examinations; and when the time came for his departure, he rose and with faltering steps made his way down the Lane of Green Beetles to his narrow cell in the examination grounds.

Three days later he appeared at the door of his lodgings in a half-fainting condition, but with strength enough to smile wanly at Tung Mei.

“I have not done ill,” he whispered. “I wrote as if I had in my hand the vermillion pencil; * nor did I forget the maxim of Confucius: *Tze ta erhi*. (Enough, if you are clear.) I may yet have a place in the Forest of Pencils.”

Then he added with great pathos, staggering to the *kang*:

“Let me lie down here again, O honourable mother, and deign to bring me a little wine.”

She brought him the wine; she hovered over him like a mother bird over its nestling; and in the intimate care which she lavished upon him all the restraint between them passed away. His face had become the colour of chalk, with the blue veins showing in tracery on the temples and eyelids like those of a sickly child; and again and again he passed his hand across his forehead in the old gesture of pain.

Even now there was little time for him to rest; for he had attained another brilliant success, and scarcely

* I.e., the Imperial pencil.

forty-eight hours had passed before a messenger, wearing the sky-blue tunic of the Imperial Guard, came to summon him to appear before the Emperor with the other successful candidates for the *Chin-shih*.

Presently he found himself in company with two hundred or more of his peers, walking across moats and through gates of Babylonian dimensions, penetrating double and quadruple ramparts, into the sacred precincts of the Forbidden City. He went as in a dream up vast marble-paved avenues and courts; past endless palaces weighed down with ponderous yellow roofs; through parks of venerable trees in which he caught glimpses of ancient pagodas and summer houses of fantastic designs and colours, or crouching marble monsters of fabulous shapes; until, at last, after skirting the edge of the famous Lake of the Lotus, shimmering in the morning sunlight, he halted with the others before a palace and was ushered by eunuchs into a great dimly-lighted hall.

As they entered Hsie Chin saw a slim and pale youth, dressed in long yellow robes girt tightly about the waist, rise from a throne set on a dais and bow gravely towards the band of scholars. Then he was conscious of prostrating himself with his companions on the floor of black marble in front of the dais. For the youth was the Emperor Kwang Hsu, recently ascended to the throne, who had summoned to the Celestial Court the ripest scholarship of the land, that he might by means of a final test—the writing of an essay in the *Wen-li*, or the

classical language of China—select those worthy of a place in the "Forest of Pencils," and from these choose the great Scholar Laureate of the Empire.

When the candidates were all seated at his bidding in orderly rows at tables in front of him, the Emperor, speaking in a low, distinct voice, gave them as text for their essay the heading of a chapter from the Confucian Annals:

"First year, spring, royal first moon."

When Hsie Chin heard these words—meaningless for the ordinary European mind—they acted upon him like a magic formula. Pain and weariness vanished, and his eyes brightened with inspiration and a new energy. Here was a theme worthy of his best talent! Arranging the "four precious things of the library" on the table, he plucked back the long sleeve of his silk tunic and began to cover the paper before him with his exquisite ideographs.

XXIII

IT was dark when Hsie Chin, emerging from the last gigantic gateway of the Forbidden City, found himself released once more in the streets of Peking. He had no longer any feeling of inspiration or energy. The lassitude, from which he had so recently suffered, claimed him again as its victim, accompanied by a troublesome dizziness. He thought of his tender mother and staggered forward to reach her.

He hastened through one street after another, past interminable rows of gaudy little shops lighted by coloured lanterns and reeking with the smell of food and grease, until he reached a narrow passage which, as he supposed, led into the Lane of Green Beetles. But when, stumbling with weariness, he came to the end of the passage, he was surprised to find himself in a strange street. He looked about him wonderingly, when his attention was arrested by strains of music which came from a brightly lighted building in front of him, and through whose open door people were passing in and out.

Hsie Chin approached close to the door and listened, and, as he listened, a strange thrill went through him as on that night when he stood on the Tartar Wall; for the music which he heard was the Christian hymn, "Lead, kindly Light," and though the words were being

sung in Chinese, he found himself humming the English refrain: "*Lead thou me on!*"

And slowly, without conscious intention—forgetting again his promise to Tung Mei, and even his late remorse for such forgetfulness—he went into the street chapel and sat down with the other worshippers. The singing came to an end as he entered, and a tall foreigner, standing on a platform at one end of the long and narrow room, began to speak.

This man, dressed in black cloth, was clean shaven, with fine, clear-cut features, expressive of that charity which suffereth long and is kind. His hair, still abundant, was perfectly white, which at first glance gave him the appearance of an old man, but the firm contours of his face and the vigour of his voice and gesture, modified this impression, proclaiming him rather to be a person scarcely above middle age.

From the moment that his glance first fell on the foreigner, Hsie Chin felt memories tremble within him, and when the preacher commenced to speak—to expound with simple eloquence the parable of the Good Shepherd—these wavering memories assumed the form of a strong conviction; for now he knew—though he could not have stated it to himself—that this white-haired foreigner before him was his father. Now he knew that Lu Jung Kuang, at whose grave he had vainly worshipped through so many years, had not given him life, but that that gift had been bestowed upon him by the man standing before him whose beloved face and voice his soul still

recognised, though the memory of them had so long been eclipsed from his mind.

And gradually, as he gazed at those familiar features, and listened to the rich and vibrant voice, Hsie Chin's strange inward trembling gave place to tears. Slowly, one by one, they welled up into his eyes and ran down his cheeks. An obscure anguish possessed him—a vague feeling of having lost something of inestimable value, of being, through no fault of his own, an alien in the presence of this man upon whom in reality he had the utmost claim. He wept for that lost companionship even before he could name to himself his trouble, and he wept for more besides. Incalculable treasures of affection and thought, large and fine experiences, quite other than the ones he had known—the vast realm of Western knowledge, that science of which he was dimly aware as existing outside of his pedantic learning—these were the things he had missed and for which he now experienced an undefined, a vague yearning.

And under this anguish there grew in him, as he sat on his bench, a more bitter and tragic sense, so that presently he found himself shaking again with new emotion. *Who* had cheated him of these inexpressibly precious things? *Who* had robbed him of his birthright? Ah, and *who* had been the cause of turning his father's hair prematurely white?—for *he*, too, had suffered; *he*, too, had been cheated. The words overheard on the wall came back to him: "Father's white hair dated from the night when my brother was lost." And if his father

had suffered so terribly, his mother—the woman who had borne him—must have suffered no less.

His mother! The sweat burst out in beads on Hsie Chin's forehead as he got on his feet with the others for the closing hymn. He felt himself filled with a strange and dreadful anger under which his overtaxed nerves seemed on the point of collapse. When, at the end of the singing he found himself once more on the street, he had just strength enough to hail a passing cart and to tell the driver to take him quickly to the Lane of Green Beetles. When he had reached the gate of his lodgings he half fell from the cart and, staggering through the court, shook open the door of the room where Tung Mei waited. She rose with a welcoming cry, holding out her hands to him, but without a word of greeting he caught her wrists in an almost savage grip.

"Honourable mother," he said hoarsely, "what is my name?"

By the light of the candles burning in the room Tung Mei saw his face and perceived that he knew all that she had so dreaded he would learn; yet in her despair she lied to him again.

"What has happened to you?" she cried. "You look as if you had been chased by a corpse come to life. If you were not ill or distraught, you would know that your name is Lu Hsie Chin, since you are my son, and since I am the widow of Lu Jung Kuang."

He stooped until his eyes were on a level with her own,

and she could see nothing but their pupils of jet-like brightness.

"You are mistaken," he replied steadily. "My name is not Lu Hsie Chin, nor am I your son, nor yet the son of Lu Jung Kuang. If I have called you mother, it is because you have deceived me, for now I know that you are not my mother, though habit still makes me use that term."

He released her hands, almost flinging them from him, as if he would be done with her.

"You have deceived me! You have deceived me!" he repeated in a tone of great bitterness.

She held up her hands before him in a pitiful gesture, still hoping that he did not know all the truth.

"What is your name?" she whispered.

The young man straightened himself.

"My name is Carl Osborne!" he replied proudly, as if by that title he established forever his superiority over Tung Mei and her race.

"I am Carl Osborne. He repeated again, almost arrogantly, "the son of the foreigners." He took several steps across the room, bearing himself with proud erectness before the cowering Chinese woman.

Then suddenly his nerves gave way and he sank to his knees screaming in childish panic:

"Tung Mei! Tung Mei! Have they got my soul? Oh, hide it, hide it from them, hide it quickly!"

And instantly she bent over him, drawing his head to her breast with soft caressing hands and crooning to him

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"ANOTHER'S CHILD"

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in those same words with which she had soothed his trouble years ago on the house-boat.

"Fear not, little pao-p'ae; I have hidden it safely here in my bosom. It is warm and happy, and all the ugly demons together cannot get it from thy Tung Mei."

XXIV

ALL that night and the next day he was delirious, tossing on the *kang*, where Tung Mei had dragged him. Sometimes it was the angry gods from the temple who were pursuing him, and at other times the Tall White Devil and the Short Black Devil, or one of their animal-headed "Assistants," leapt out from dark street corners and wagged their dripping bloody tongues at him. Or again it was the inert form of the old schoolmaster, outlined under the blue cotton tunic, which caused him to cry out moaningly: "Oh, the wheelbarrow! the wheelbarrow! take it away! I do not want to see it!"

And ever in these childish terrors, Tung Mei soothed him with voice and touch as gentle as the spring's breath which came in at the window. At noon of the second day Hsie Chin's delirium took a new turn. The obsessing hallucinations of his early years suddenly passed from his mind, and he began to call with plaintive insistence for his parents. And in this new distress Tung Mei perceived, with a tragic sense of defeat, that she had no power to calm him. Instead, her presence seemed to irritate him; the resentful anger which he had felt towards her in the chapel revived in him, and he began to stare at her with hostile alien eyes. Heartsick, she

withdrew from his side, but at this his anger increased and he commenced to abuse her in harsh incoherent mutterings.

For several hours she listened with drawn face and clenched hands, hoping that these ravings, too, would pass, and that he would come out of his fever forgetful again of his own people—restored to her forever. But toward evening she saw that he was becoming exhausted and she began to fear that if he could not soon be calmed he would die.

Then Tung Mei, with a burning heart, came to a great decision. She called in her landlord's wife and begged of her to sit in "condescending benevolence" by her son's side for an hour, as she was obliged to go out on an urgent errand. The woman willingly consented, and, during a moment when the sick man's eyes were closed, Tung Mei slipped out of the room and, crossing the court, went into the street. When she had found a cart, she told the driver to take her at once to the foreign mission in the Alley of Illustrious Ancestors.

The white-haired missionary and his wife were seated together by the fireplace, where they were accustomed to spend an hour after their evening meal.

"So you have heard from Ruth again," the clergyman was saying. "I hope she is enjoying herself in Tientsin."

"Very much; Alan's people have asked her to stay two months. They seem already very fond of her."

The missionary smiled.

"I am glad; in that case there will be no fear of our little Ruth ever becoming a persecuted daughter-in-law like so many of the poor native girls."

His wife returned the smile.

"She will be in more danger of being pampered than persecuted, I fancy. Mr. and Mrs. Gordon have already begun to spoil her."

There was a pause; then Mrs. Osborne spoke again:

"Speaking of ill-treated daughters-in-law, do you remember Tung Mei?"

"Tung Mei?" her husband echoed somewhat vaguely.

"Was she the young girl who was here once as nurse?"

"Yes, little Carl's *amah*. It is said that she was shamefully treated by her husband's father and mother—those wicked Lus."

"Oh, yes, I remember; it was they who drove her out into the storm in which she perished, and immediately afterwards her father, the schoolmaster, avenged her death by arousing the villagers against the Lus. They were both killed and their house burned. . . . The story comes back to me."

"It was the same storm in which——" Mrs. Osborne began, but her husband gently interrupted her.

"Ah, yes—yes!"

Another long pause followed. Then the door opened softly and a crouching, trembling woman in native dress crept in.

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XXV

WHEN the fever which had threatened his life left him and his full consciousness was restored, Carl Osborne found himself between cool white sheets in a strange bed. The room in which he lay was marvelously familiar, though at first he could not connect it with any phase of his past life. He began to fancy, as he looked about him curiously at the furniture and at the pictures on the wall, that he had been plunged back again into the existence of some previous incarnation. Then through the open door his father and mother came in and smiled at him. And he understood!

He knew that he was in the room which he had occupied as a little boy, that these who stood by his bed were his newly found parents. They had come, as he vaguely remembered, at his call; they had ministered to him, and finally brought him to their own home—to *his* home! They were his own people, he repeated to himself, his beloved father and his—mother. He tried to smile back at them, but instead of smiling, he shuddered. For suddenly he was aware that Tung Mei was not there.

He sat up in bed, white and gaunt.

"Where is Tung Mei?" he asked weakly in English.

His mother leaned over him, stroking his hair and speaking very gently.

"She went away, my darling."

He looked at her and then at his father with troubled hollow eyes.

"Went away?" he repeated almost stupidly.

"Yes, dear," his mother answered again in the same tone. "She went back to Foochow yesterday. She thought it would be better for her to go now, you were out of danger."

The young man sank back on the pillow with a sense of helplessness.

"Condescend, august parents, to explain in Chinese," he said, lapsing into that language. "I do not understand all your words."

His father repeated in Chinese what his mother had said.

Slowly Carl Osborne's eyes filled with tears.

"And did my honourable mother—I mean Tung Mother," he hastily corrected himself, "depart on her journey without leaving me some message—some token?"

His mother took a spray of blossoming almond from a vase beside his bed and placed it in his hands.

"She left this for you; she said you would understand."

With a sob the young man buried his face in the petals of the bloom.

"It is the flower of her name!" he murmured. . . .

A few days later, when he was a little stronger, his father told him that he had attained the supreme honour coveted by millions, of being named by the Emperor

Chuang-Yuan, or Scholar Laureate of China. An Imperial messenger had come to the lodgings in the Lane of Green Beetles a few days after he had been taken ill to announce the great tidings, and every day since some one had been sent from the Palace to inquire with the utmost solicitude for his health.

The missionary's pride was clearly visible as he communicated this news to his son. He foresaw that the young man's foreign parentage would cause his right to the great title to be disputed, but even though the title were withdrawn, the eminent distinction of having once attained it would forever remain.

"Henceforth your mother and I shall hold a unique position among Europeans as the parents of one elected as *Chuang-Yuan*," he said, speaking in Chinese. "Is there not a legend of a goddess who once descended from heaven that she might give birth to a Scholar Laureate? And was not the daughter of a *Chuang-Yuan* in our own century considered noble enough to be chosen for Empress Consort? You have shed light on your ancestors." The missionary smiled fondly.

For a moment his son's eyes glowed, and a deep flush spread over his face; then his skin resumed its chalk-like whiteness and his eyes lost their lustre, as he turned away his head from his father.

"It matters little now," he said in a tone of profound dejection. "It was for *her* sake I strove for it, and now she has gone away from me."

XXVI

IN the little house in the rice fields, towards noon of a balmy spring day, Chang-Ma, who had been left behind as caretaker, opened the door to her mistress.

"My pretty swallow! My pretty swallow!" the old woman cried with great joy, enfolding Tung Mei in her motherly arms. "A Feast of Lanterns is this day since it brings you home to me."

Then peering about her, her old eyes blinking in the strong sunshine, she cried again anxiously:

"But where is your son? Where is the little Confucius?"

Travel-stained and forlorn, Tung Mei passed into the house and dropped wearily on a bench.

"The gods have taken him from me," she replied in a dead muffled voice.

"The Three Precious Ones forbid!" Chang-Ma ejaculated in awed and shaken tones, for to her simple mind these words meant that Hsie Chin was dead.

Then suddenly the house was filled with the loud blare of trumpets and the triumphant shouts of heralds, followed by a great procession, proclaiming that Lu Hsie Chin, son of the pious and honourable widow of Lu Jung Kuang, had been crowned by the Emperor as the Scholar Laureate of China. The news, received that morning by

the Governor of Foochow, through a messenger sent from Peking, had not yet been denied, and the citizens, wild with joy, had begun at once to celebrate the victory of their literary favourite.

At the sounds, Tung Mei rose from the bench, swaying dizzily.

"Chang-Ma! Chang-Ma!" she cried. "What is this?"

Before the old woman could make any reply, the door was burst open, and two heralds entered, flaunting banners of red and green. At sight of the widow, they dropped to their knees, *kotowing* and crying out before her:

"Hail! O venerable mother of an august and pious son, crowned Laureate of our great Middle Kingdom by the Son of Heaven himself. Forever on the Sea of Light will your barque sail in majesty, admired by ten thousand generations."

And the people crowding around the door of the little house shouted: "Hail! Hail!" and besought the "exalted wearer of a white skirt" to enter a sedan brought hither for her use, and to permit them to take her to the seven gates of the city to scatter before each a handful of rice that the whole population might share in the good fortune of her household.

And Tung Mei, moving like one in a trance, yielded to their will and entered the sedan.

XXVII

WHEN the son of the missionaries rose from his sick bed, he struggled to adjust himself to the new conditions of his life. He said to his father:

"It is necessary, honourable father, for me to read at once your scriptures that I may gain a correct idea of the doctrines of the good Yesu."

The missionary put into his hands the native version of the Four Gospels; the young man read it through in a single day; and in the evening his father found him alone in his unlighted room, silently weeping.

"What has troubled you, my dear boy?" he asked with tenderness.

His son turned towards him in the darkness.

"I knew not that the good Yesu died in that way," he answered with a strange accent of pity and awe.

The next day he asked for more of the scriptures, and his father gave him the Epistles of Saint Paul. He read them all through rapidly as he had done the Gospels.

"The thought is profound and the language exalted," was his comment, but he appeared to be not entirely satisfied, and after some reflection he asked anxiously:

"Did the august sage leave any more writings—something in which he sought to harmonise other great teachings, as, for example, those of the Lord Buddha and the

venerable Lao Tsze and Confucius, with the doctrines of the good Yesu?"

The missionary smiled.

"I wonder if Saint Paul ever heard of those worthies," he said. "I know of no other writings of his except the lost Epistle of the Laodiceans."

His son seemed much struck by the missionary's last clause.

"Then there *was* a lost writing!" he cried eagerly. "Might it not yet be found?"

His father shook his head doubtfully; he was somewhat amused by this idea of his erudite son.

"It is hardly likely," he said.

But on several occasions afterwards the young man brought up the subject of the lost Epistle and the possibility of it being discovered.

Later, however, he appeared to lose interest in these scriptural matters. He grew restless and moody, often starting when he was spoken to, or staring vaguely into space; and many times a day he would pass his hand across his forehead. His mother's heart yearned over him, and she tried all her maternal wiles to win him to her, until she perceived with a bitter pang of jealousy that he was submitting to her caresses only from a sense of duty.

"Ah, Tung Mei! Tung Mei!" she exclaimed within the depths of her soul. "God help me to forgive you!"

At first the young man seemed to find some comfort in his father's society, but as the days passed he appeared

to desire more and more to be left alone. As his strength returned, he would wander about the large mission compound, bowing politely to any of the missionaries whom he met, but showing a marked reluctance to speak with them, though they had welcomed his return with warm affection. He began to go out into the streets, remaining away for hours at a time. When his parents asked him where he had been he answered evasively, but after about a week he confessed to his father that he had been making daily visits to the lodging house in the Lane of Green Beetles.

"Only to sit for awhile in the room where she waited for me," he said dreamily.

The missionary dared not tell this to his wife; a fear was growing in his heart that their son would not stay with them long; and in less than a month this fear became a reality.

One morning in May the young man rose very early and stole out of the old mission where he had been born, leaving behind in his room a note written on a slip of rice paper in his most elegant calligraphy.

"Venerable and august parents," the missionary read to his wife in a shaking voice, "your son, *Carl Osborne* (this name was written in English in a childish hand) and Hsie Chin, the son of the widow of Lu Jung Kuang, have had a fierce and fatal duel in my heart. Hsie Chin has conquered, so I am forced against my will to leave you. Imploring your forgiveness, I commend you to the good Yesu."

The white-haired missionary opened his arms to receive the swaying body of his wife. . . .

When the young man reached the end of his journey, he found only Chang-Ma to welcome him.

"Where is my honourable mother?" he cried, running in panic through the rooms of the little house. "Where is she gone?"

He turned upon the old woman a face blanched by sudden terror. Sobbing, the old servant clutched his hand, and leading him out again through the open door, she pointed towards Great Temple Hill.

"She lies there by your father and by hers," she said in a heart-broken voice. "She could not eat nor sleep, so the gods took her."

The young man bowed his head and groaned. . . .

At dusk that evening he climbed to the old burial ground, and when he had reached the three graves lying side by side, he knelt in the shadows and leaned his cheek against that mound where the earth was still fresh.

"Beloved mother," he murmured, "it is thy son, thy little *pao-p'ae*, who has come back to thee."

Then with great reverence, he lighted incense, and, prostrating himself before each grave in turn, he called aloud upon the souls of his ancestors.

FINALE

THE WANDERER ON A THOUSAND HILLS

I

IT was many years after the missionary's wife, Ruth Gordon, first heard of the Wanderer that she saw him. After the death of her aged parents, the Osbornes, she and her husband had taken possession of the house in the mission compound in Peking where the older missionaries had lived, laboured and died. And it was here that rumours had reached Ruth at long intervals of an almost legendary figure who would emerge once in every ten years from the depths of Central Asia, wander for a few months through the streets of the Chinese capital, or in the temples of the Western Hills, and then vanish for another decade. His quest, as she had once been told, was for the lost Epistle of St. Paul to the Laodiceans, which he claimed to know by special revelation was still extant in a temple of Asia. That the revelation had left vague the name and more exact location of the temple, seemed only to quicken his zeal into indefatigable effort; and so, for the reason that temples in Asia are often built on hillsides, he became known as the Wanderer on a Thousand Hills.

It was upon an afternoon late in May, oppressively warm, with dust as a visual medium and a high wind which rasped the nerves like a file, that Ruth Gordon and her husband saw this strange man. They were mounted

upon small Mongolian horses, which served them on their evangelistic errands about the city, and they had just turned a sharp angle of a street when they caught sight of a rabble before the ancient Temple of the Lamas.

The temper of the people was not at once apparent but something in their attitude made the foreigners draw rein. A repressed guttural of dissent seemed to be the prevailing note—a dissent suspicious rather than violent as if it felt itself weakening under the influence of a voice which rose above it.

The voice and accent were strangely compelling; for a moment they were not localised by the missionary's wife, and if she were startled by the purity of tone and phrase, it was because the old classic language of China—*Wen-li*—now greeted her ears for the first time as a spoken tongue; and, as she was afterwards to reflect, it was like a recitation from Homer in a modern Greek marketplace.

In another moment Ruth recognised its source. A man stood in full sight of the crowd, the centre of a dozen Lamas grouped in a semi-circle on the stone steps leading to the temple; and it was to the priests he was speaking. At first glance he might have been mistaken for a Peking beggar, to whom copper *cash* were matter for whining importunity, for his bare feet were horny from much travel, and his clothing was no more than a medley of rags saturated with the smell of incense. But the nobility of the head, and the sweetness of the voice above the Chinese guttural, were different tokens.

Ruth remembered later that her husband had taken off his hat at sight of the man's face, while she felt her own heart throb with awe. It was no doubt the exalted look in the grey eyes, vague as those of a dreaming prophet, and the long reddish hair, falling unbound over the shoulders, which instantly suggested the Nazarene; these, and the delicate spiritual outline of forehead and chin. But as they drew closer through the crowd, Ruth saw something else which was a part of the wonder of the face—the mouth, with lips scarlet, full and exquisitely curved, as she could fancy the warm mouth of Krishna, beautiful incarnation of Vishnu, when he bent to kiss his darling Radha. The missionary's wife felt her senses thrilled by an incomprehensible emotion.

The appearance of the foreigners created a stir of animosity which reacted with ill effect on the speaker, for he paused at their approach, turning towards them with absent eyes and smiling lips; and at the moment some one in the crowd cried out:

"See! he has recognised his kindred. They are devils together."

The cry seemed to have a singular power, for malignant epithets began to burst from every throat, while a few hands snatched at the bridles of the foreigners' horses. The Wanderer had been pleading for entrance to this most ancient and esoteric of Peking temples; but the *Wen-li* in which he addressed the Lamas was alike incomprehensible to them and to the people; and al-

though the power of his voice had so far held them spellbound, it needed but a mischievous word to cause their suspicion to grow ominous and a thousand hands to stretch threateningly towards him.

Ruth's heart sank with fear; then she found herself gazing again in fascinated wonder; for the Wanderer had dropped from speech into placid meditation as naturally as if he had intentionally ceased speaking, and had translated himself by some occult power into a pleasant garden. Who and what was this singular being, in the dress of an Oriental beggar, with the eyes of Christian vision and the lips of Pagan delight? Who, indeed, that he should wait in smiling leisure while a heathen mob stretched murderous hands towards him?

The missionaries' horses were now pressed forward by the crowd against the steps leading to the temple gate, so that they were within a few feet of the Lamas. The Abbot of the Lamasary stepped out of the semicircle and commanded silence. He was greeted by a fresh uproar, through which a woman's shrill falsetto rose to articulation:

"Give us the red-haired devil! He will make fit carrion for the vultures!"

As if her words were some vile sorcery literally transforming men into birds of prey, a chorus of voices broke out in sharp croaking:

"To the vultures with him!"

The Abbot waved his arms impotently about as his

attempts to silence the crowd became each moment more futile. Self-inflamed, the mob had changed by swift degrees from suspicious quiescence to violence until it was now ready for assault. Ruth saw the heavy features of the Abbot agitated by a cowardly vacillation, and her own heart sank again. But her husband leaned towards her from his saddle with a quick word of reassurance, and then they waited quietly; for with his keener spiritual instinct, he had perceived that the man was to work out his own salvation. Yet the thing that happened was so simple, so entirely artless, that even the missionary was unprepared for it. For the Wanderer, still sublimely unconscious that he was an object of hostility, suddenly waked from his reverie and broke into song!

Then Ruth knew that the man was mad, but there was no horror in the revelation; only a half-awed tenderness took possession of her, as before a spirit too innocent to recognise the mortality to which it was bound; for in the midst of those who were calling for his life he sang as blithely as a child or a holiday. Ruth looked at the people; their hoarse excitement had died in an instant, yielding again to the power of the Wanderer's voice; and it was plain that while he sang or spoke they would not harm him.

His song was no more than a handful of notes thrown into the air, where they tumbled and chased, pirouetted and balanced like a flock of swallows; but the exquisite jubilation of it at that time and in that place took the

senses by surprise. And while he sang, the man's vagrant eyes grew luminous, intimate, and almost as articulate as were his lips. He mothered the people with his compelling glance; soothing, caressing, enfolding them until their hatred vanished and he had again gained a hearing. Then he ceased singing and began to speak to the people in the colloquial, though still with a quaint elegance, as if he were giving voice to an inward reverie.

"For many moons I was in meditation, stumbling in the dark lanes of my soul, when the torch of illumination on a sudden flamed in my hand and a voice said 'In a temple of Asia thou shalt find that which thou seekest. The concord of all religions and the harmony of the Masters was once made plain for the edification of the dwellers in Laodicea. Seek thou for it in the lost Epistle of Paul, the Perfect.' And when I heard this voice I saw a vision of the Feast of Love, whereat our Lord Buddha and our Lord Yesu and our Lord Krishna and the venerable Lao Tsze and Confucius and many other Masters of Life sat and mingled their wine. And their voices as they conversed together on the destiny of the world was like the sound of the waving of wheat on a summer's day.

"And now I have searched many years in far parts and near, going into all the temples on my way, and opening many books and learning ancient scripts, that I might not fail to know this letter if by chance it had been turned into some old tongue. And because so far my search has been vain, I meditated on going into

your temple also and searching among your ancient books. Wherefore I have begged permission of these Fathers to open the gates, and if my words commend themselves to your spirits, I beg that your love also go with me in this, my seeking."

He ceased, and the people's love was indeed with him. Ruth reflected afterwards that he must have made this same speech many scores of times, but it was not the less artless for its repetition, nor a less certain *Open Sesame* to the closed gates of every temple in Asia; for the surliest Oriental will do homage to the mystery of a religious quest.

So from abuse and murderous intent, these strange children of the East turned to pious ejaculation, demanding garrulously of the priests to throw open the gates of the Temple of the Lamas, through whose sacred portals few strangers had ever entered. Some even threw *cash* at the Wanderer's feet to pay for further journeyings if the lost Epistle should not be found in their sanctuary; and all were full of invocation and blessing for this "Holy Sage," this "Seer," this "Searcher for Truth."

But as before, when he had done speaking, he lapsed into profound, though seemingly pleasant meditation; and as Ruth turned her horse's head to follow her husband, she saw that the Wanderer had to be touched on the shoulder by one of the Lamas before he perceived that the gates of the temple were open for him to enter.

