The Reward of a Benevolent Life

by Rev. J. MacGowan

Chinese Folk Lore Tales
Chapter XI.

On the banks of a river flowing through the prefecture of Tingchow, there stood a certain city of about ten thousand inhabitants. Among this mass of people there was a very fair sprinkling of well-to-do men, and perhaps half-a-dozen or so who might have been accounted really wealthy.

Amongst these latter was one particular individual named Chung, who had acquired the reputation of being exceedingly large-hearted and benevolently inclined to all those in distress. Anyone who was in want had but to appeal to Chung, and his immediate necessities would at once be relieved without any tedious investigation into the merits of his case. As may be inferred from this, Chung was an easy-going, good-natured man, who was more inclined to look kindly upon his fellow-men than to criticise them harshly for their follies or their crimes. Such a man has always been popular in this land of China.

Now the whole soul of Chung was centred upon his only son Keng. At the time when our story opens, this young fellow was growing up to manhood, and had proved himself to be possessed of no mean ability, for on the various occasions on which he had sat for examination before the Literary Chancellor, his papers had been of a very high order of merit.

The rumours of Chung's generosity had travelled further than he had ever dreamed of. Several reports of the noble deeds that he was constantly performing had reached the Immortals in the Western Heaven, and as these are profoundly concerned in the doings of mankind, steps were taken that Chung should not go unrewarded.

One day a fairy in the disguise of a bonze called upon him. He had always had a sincere liking for men of this class. He admired their devotion, and he was moved by their self-sacrifice in giving up home and kindred to spend their lives in the service of the gods and for the good of humanity.

No sooner, therefore, had the priest entered within his doors, than he received him with the greatest politeness and cordiality. The same evening he prepared a great dinner, to which a number of distinguished guests were invited, and a time of high festivity and rejoicing was prolonged into the early hours of the morning.

Next day Chung said to his guest, "I presume you have come round collecting for your temple. I need not assure you that I shall be most delighted to subscribe to anything that has to do with the uplifting of my fellow-men. My donation is ready whenever you wish to accept it."

The bonze, with a smile which lit up the whole of his countenance, replied that he had not come for the purpose of collecting subscriptions.

"I have come," he said, "to warn you about a far more important matter which affects you and your family. Before very long a great flood will take place in this district, and will sweep everything before it. It will be so sudden that men will not be able to take measures to preserve either their lives or their property—so instantaneous will be the rush of the mighty streams, like ocean floods, from the mountains you can see in the West. My advice to you is to commence at once the construction of boats to carry you and your most precious effects away. When the news first comes that the waters are rising, have them anchored in the creek that flows close by your doors; and when the crisis arrives, delay not a moment, but hurry on board and fly for your lives."

"But when will that be?" asked Chung anxiously.

"I may not tell you the precise day or hour," replied the bonze; "but when the eyes of the stone lions in the East Street of the city shed tears of blood, betake yourselves with all haste to the boats, and leave this doomed place behind you."

"But may I not tell the people of this approaching calamity?" asked Chung, whose tender heart was deeply wrung with distress at the idea of so many being overwhelmed in the coming flood.

"You can please yourself about that," answered the priest, "but no one will believe you. The people of this region are depraved and wicked, and your belief in my words will only cause them to laugh and jeer at you for your credulity."

"But shall I and my family escape with our lives?" finally enquired Chung.

"Yes, you will all escape," was the reply, "and in due time you will return to your home and your future life will be prosperous. But there is one thing," he continued, "about which I must entreat you to be exceedingly careful. As you are being carried down the stream by the great flood, be sure to rescue every living thing that you meet in distress upon the waters. You will not fail to be rewarded for so doing, as the creatures you save will repay you a thousandfold for any services you may render them. There is one thing more that I would solemnly warn you against. You will come across a man floating helplessly on the swiftly flowing tide. Have nothing to do with him. Leave him to his fate. If you try to save him, you will only bring sorrow upon your home."

As the priest was departing, Chung tried to press into his hand a considerable present of money, but he refused to accept it. He did not want money from him, he said. The gods had heard of his great love for men, and they had sent him to warn him so that he might escape the doom which would overtake his fellow-citizens.

After his departure Chung at once called the boat-builders who had their yards along the bank of the stream, and ordered ten large boats to be built with all possible speed.

The news of this spread through the town, and when the reasons were asked and the reply was given that the boats were in anticipation of a mighty flood that would ere long devastate the entire region, everyone screamed with laughter; but Chung let them laugh.

For weeks and months he sent an old man to East Street to see if the eyes of the stone lions there had overflowed with bloody tears.

One day two pig-butchers enquired of this man how it was that every day he appeared and looked into the eyes of the lions. He explained that Chung had sent him, for a prophecy had come from the gods that when the eyes of the lions shed blood, the flood which was to destroy the city would be already madly rushing on its way.

On hearing this, these two butchers determined to play a practical joke. Next day, in readiness for the coming of the old man, they smeared the stone eyes with pigs' blood. No sooner had Chung's messenger caught sight of this than, with terror in his eyes, he fled along the streets to tell his master the dreadful news. By this time everything had been prepared, and Chung was only waiting for the appointed sign. The most valuable of his goods had already been packed in some of the boats, and now his wife and son and household servants all hurried down to the water's edge and embarked; and remembering the injunction of the priest that there should be no delay, Chung at once ordered the anchors to be raised, and the boatmen, as if for dear life, made for the larger stream outside.

Hardly had the vessels begun to move when the sun, which had been blazing in the sky, became clouded over. Soon a terrific storm of wind tore with the force of a hurricane across the land. By-and-by great drops of rain, the harbingers of the deluge which was to inundate the country, fell in heavy splashes. Ere long it seemed as though the great fountains in the heavens had burst out, for the floods came pouring down in one incessant torrent. The sides of the mountains became covered with ten thousand rills, which joined their forces lower down, and developed into veritable cataracts, rushing with fearful and noisy tumult to the plain below.

Before many hours had passed, the streams everywhere overflowed their banks, and ran riot amongst the villages, and flowed like a sea against the city. There was no resisting this watery foe, and before night fell vast multitudes had been drowned in the seething floods from which there was no escape.

Meanwhile, carried swiftly along by the swollen current, Chung's little fleet sped safely down the stream, drawing further and further away from the doomed city.

The river had risen many feet since they had started on their voyage, and as they were passing by a high peak, which had been undermined by the rush of waters hurling themselves against its base, the boats were put into great danger by the whirl and commotion of the foam-flecked river. Just as they escaped from being submerged, the party noticed a small monkey struggling in the water, and at once picked it up and took it on board.

Further on they passed a large branch of a tree, on which there was a crow's nest, with one young one in it. This, also, remembering the solemn injunction of the priest, they carefully took up and saved.

As they were rushing madly on down the tawny, swollen river, they were all struck with sudden excitement by seeing something struggling in the boiling waters. Looking at this object more attentively as they drew nearer to it, they perceived that it was a man, who seemed to be in great peril of his life.

Chung's tender heart was filled with sympathy, and he at once gave orders for the boatmen to go and rescue him. His wife, however, reminded him of the warning of the priest not to save any man on the river, as he would inevitably turn out to be an enemy, who would in time work his rescuer great wrong.

Chung replied that at such a time, when a human being was in extreme danger of being drowned, personal interests ought not to be considered at all. He had faithfully obeyed the command of the priest in saving animal life, but how much more valuable was a man than any of the lower orders of creation? "Whatever may happen," he said, "I cannot let this man drown before my eyes," and as the boat just then came alongside the swimmer, he was hauled into it and delivered from his peril.

After a few days, when the storm had abated and the river had gone down to its natural flow, Chung returned with his family to his home. To his immense surprise, he found that his house had not been damaged in the least. The gods who had saved his life had used their supernatural powers to preserve even his property from the ruin and devastation that had fallen upon the inhabitants of the city and of the surrounding plain.

Shortly after they had settled down again, Chung enquired of Lo-yung, the man whom he had saved from the flood, whether he would not like to return to his family and his home.

"I have no family left," he answered with a sad look on his face. "All the members of it were drowned in the great flood from which you delivered me. What little property we had was washed away by the wild rush of the streams that overflowed our farm. Let me stay with you," he begged, "and give me the opportunity, by the devoted service of my life, to repay you in some slight degree for what you have done in saving my life."

As he uttered these words his tears began to flow, and his features showed every sign of profound emotion. Always full of tenderness and compassion, Chung was profoundly moved by the tears and sobs of Lo-yung, and hastened to assure him that he need be under no concern with regard to his future. "You have lost all your relatives, it is true, but from to-day I shall recognize you as my son. I adopt you into my family and I give you my name."

Six months after this important matter had been settled, the city was placarded with proclamations from its Chief Mandarin.

In these he informed the people that he had received a most urgent Edict from the Emperor stating that an official seal, which was in constant use in high transactions of the State, had in a most mysterious manner disappeared and could not be found. He was therefore directed to inform the people that whoever informed His Majesty where the seal was, so that it could be recovered, would receive a considerable reward and would also be made a high mandarin in the palace of the Emperor.

That very night, whilst Chung was sleeping, a fairy appeared to him in a dream. "The gods have sent me," he said, "to give you one more proof of the high regard in which they hold you for your devotion to your fellow-men. The Emperor has lost a valuable seal which he is most anxious to recover, and he has promised large and liberal rewards to the man who shows him where it may be found. I want to tell you where the seal is. It lies at the bottom of the crystal well in the grounds behind the palace. It was accidentally dropped in there by the Empress-Dowager, who has forgotten all about the circumstance, but who will recollect it the moment she is reminded of it. I want you to send your own son to the capital to claim the reward by telling where the seal is."

When Chung awoke in the morning, he told his wife the wonderful news of what had happened to him during the night, and began to make preparations for his son to start for the capital without delay, in order to secure the honours promised by the Emperor. His wife, however, was by no means reconciled to the idea of parting with her son, and strongly opposed his going.

"Why are you so set upon the honours of this life that you are willing to be separated from your only child, whom perhaps you may never be able to see again?" she asked her husband, with tears in her eyes. "You are a rich man, you are beloved of the gods, you have everything that money can buy in this flowery kingdom. Why not then be contented and cease to long after the dignities which the State can confer, but which can never give you any real happiness?"

Just at that moment Lo-yung came in, and hearing the wonderful story, and seeing the distress of the mother, he volunteered to take the place of her son and go to the capital in his stead.

"I have never yet had the chance," he said, "of showing my gratitude to my benefactor for having saved my life, and for the many favours he has showered upon me. I shall be glad to undertake this journey. I shall have an audience with His Majesty and will reveal to him the place where the seal lies hidden, and I shall then insist that all the honours he may be prepared to bestow on me shall be transferred to your son, to whom of right they naturally belong."

It was accordingly arranged that Lo-yung should take the place of Chung's son, and preparations were at once made for his journey to the capital. As he was saying good-bye to his benefactor, the latter whispered in his ear: "If you succeed in your enterprise and the Emperor makes you one of his royal officers, do not let ingratitude ever enter your heart, so that you may be tempted to forget us here, who will be thinking about you all the time you are away."

"Nothing of the kind can ever happen," exclaimed Lo-yung impetuously. "My gratitude to you is too firmly embedded within my heart ever to be uprooted from it."

On his arrival at the capital, he at once sought an interview with the Prime Minister, who, on hearing that a man wished to see him about a state matter of urgent importance, immediately admitted him to his presence. Lo-yung at once explained that he had come to reveal the place where the lost seal at that moment lay concealed. "I am perfectly ready to tell all I know about it," he said, "but if possible I should prefer to make it known to the Emperor himself in person."

"That can quickly be arranged," eagerly replied the Prime Minister, "for His Majesty is so anxious to obtain information about the seal, that he is prepared at any hour of the day or night to give an audience to anyone who can ease his mind on the subject."

In a few minutes a eunuch from the palace commanded the Prime Minister to come without delay to the Audience Hall and wait upon the Emperor. He was also to bring with him the person who said that he had an important communication to lay before the Throne.

When they arrived they found there not only the King, but also the Empress-Dowager, waiting to receive them. In obedience to a hasty command, Lo-yung told in a few words where the seal was, and how it happened to be there. As he went on with the story the face of the Empress lit up with wonder, whilst a pleasing smile overspread it, as she recognized the truth of what Lo-yung was saying.

"But tell me," said the Emperor, "how you get all your information and how it is that you have such an intimate acquaintance with what is going on in my palace?"

Lo-yung then described how the Immortals in the Western Heaven, deeply moved by the loving character of Chung, and wishing to reward him and bring honour to his family, had sent a fairy, who appeared to him in a dream and told him the secret of the seal.

"Your home," said the Emperor, "must indeed be celebrated for benevolent and loving deeds to men, since even the fairies come down from the far-off Heaven to express their approbation. In accordance with my royal promise, I now appoint you to a high official position that will enrich you for life, for I consider that it will be for the welfare of my kingdom to have a man from a home, which the gods delight to honour, to assist me in the management of my public affairs."

From the moment when the royal favour was bestowed on Lo-yung, it seemed as though every particle of gratitude and every kindly remembrance of Chung had vanished completely out of his heart. He cut himself off from the home he had left only a few days ago, as completely as though it had never existed.

Weeks and months went by, but no news came from him, and the heart of Chung was wrung with anguish, for he knew that Lo-yung's unnatural conduct would in the end bring retribution upon Lo-yung himself.

At last he determined to send his son, Keng, to the capital to find out what had really become of Lo-yung.

Attended by one of his household servants, the young man reached his journey's end in a few days. On enquiring at his inn about Lo-yung, he was informed that he was a mandarin of great distinction in the city, and was under the special protection of the Emperor, whose favourite he was.

Hearing this joyful news, Keng, followed by his servant, at once hastened to the residence of Lo-yung, and was lucky enough to meet him as he rode out on horseback from his magnificent yamen, attended by a long retinue of officers and attendants.

Running up to the side of his horse, Keng cried out joyfully, "Ah! my brother, what a joy to meet you once more! How glad I am to see you!"

To his astonishment, Lo-yung, with a frown upon his face, angrily exclaimed; "You common fellow, what do you mean by calling me your brother? I have no brother. You are an impostor, and you must be severely punished for daring to claim kinship with me."

Calling some of the lictors in his train, he ordered them to beat Keng, and then cast him into prison, and to give strict injunctions to the jailer to treat him as a dangerous criminal. Wounded and bleeding from the severe scourging he had received, and in a terrible state of exhaustion, poor Keng was dragged to the prison, where he was thrown into the deepest dungeon, and left to recover as best he might from the shock he had sustained.

His condition was indeed a pitiable one. Those who could have helped and comforted him were far away. He could expect no alleviation of his sorrows from the jailer, for the heart of the latter had naturally become hardened by having to deal with the criminal classes. Besides he had received precise orders from the great mandarin, that this particular prisoner was to be treated as a danger to society. Even if he had been inclined to deal mercifully with him, he dared not disobey such definite and stringent commands as he had received from his superior.

The prison fare was only just enough to keep body and soul together. Keng had no money with which to bribe the jailer to give him a more generous diet, and there was no one to guarantee that any extra expenses which might be incurred would ever be refunded to him.

And then a miracle was wrought, and once more the fairies interfered, this time to save the life of the only son of the man whose fame for tenderness and compassion had reached the far-off Western Heaven.

One morning, as Keng lay weary and half-starved on the blackened heap of straw that served him as a bed in the corner of the prison, a monkey climbed up and clung to the narrow gratings through which the light penetrated into his room. In one of its hands it held a piece of pork which it kept offering to Keng. Very much surprised, he got up to take it, when to his delight he discovered that the monkey was the identical one which had been picked up by his father on the day of the great flood.

The same thing was repeated for several days in succession, and when the jailer asked for some explanation of these extraordinary proceedings, Keng gave him a detailed account of their wonderful deliverance by the fairies, the picking up of the monkey, and the rescue of Lo-yung, now the great mandarin, who was keeping him confined in prison. "Ah!" muttered the jailer under his breath, "the lower animals know how to show gratitude, but men do not."

A few days after this another messenger of the gods came to give his aid to Keng. A number of crows gathered on a roof which overlooked the narrow slits through which the prisoner could catch a glimpse of the blue sky. One of them flew on to the ledge outside, and Keng immediately recognized it as the one which had been saved from the floating branch in the turbid river. He was overjoyed to see this bird, and besought the jailer to allow him to write a letter to his father, telling him of his pitiful condition. This request was granted, and the document was tied to the leg of the crow, which flew away on its long flight to Chung with its important news.

Chung was greatly distressed when he read the letter that his son had written in prison, and with all the speed he could command, he travelled post haste to the capital. When he arrived there he made various attempts to obtain an interview with Lo-yung, but all in vain. The mandarin had not sense enough to see that the threads of fate were slowly winding themselves around him, and would soon entangle him to his destruction.

Very unwillingly, therefore, because he still loved Lo-yung and would have saved him if possible, Chung entered an accusation against him before Fau-Kung, the famous criminal judge.

The result of the investigation was the condemnation of Lo-yung, whose execution speedily followed, whilst Keng was promoted to the very position that had been occupied by the man who had tried to work his ruin.

Bamboo and the Turtle
from *A Chinese Wonder Book*

by Norman Hinsdale Pitman

A party of visitors had been seeing the sights at Hsi Ling. They had just passed down the Holy Way between the huge stone animals when Bamboo, a little boy of twelve, son of a keeper, rushed out from his father's house to see the mandarins go by. Such a parade of great men he had never seen before, even on the feast days. There were ten sedan chairs, with bearers dressed in flaming colours, ten long-handled, red umbrellas, each carried far in front of its proud owner, and a long line of horsemen.

When this gay procession had filed past, Bamboo was almost ready to cry because he could not run after the sightseers as they went from temple to temple and from tomb to tomb. But, alas! his father had ordered him never to follow tourists. "If you do, they will take you for a beggar, Bamboo," he had said shrewdly, "and if you're a beggar, then your daddy's one too. Now they don't want any beggars around the royal tombs." So Bamboo had never known the pleasure of pursuing the rich. Many times he had turned back to the little mud house, almost broken-hearted at seeing his playmates running, full of glee, after the great men's chairs.

On the day when this story opens, just as the last horseman had passed out of sight among the cedars, Bamboo chanced to look up toward one of the smaller temple buildings of which his father was the keeper. It was the house through which the visitors had just been shown. Could his eyes be deceiving him? No, the great iron doors had been forgotten in the hurry of the moment, and there they stood wide open, as if inviting him to enter.

In great excitement he scurried toward the temple. How often he had pressed his head against the bars and looked into the dark room, wishing and hoping that some day he might go in. And yet, not once had he been granted this favour. Almost every day since babyhood he had gazed at the high stone shaft, or tablet, covered with Chinese writing, that stood in the centre of the lofty room, reaching almost to the roof. But with still greater surprise his eyes had feasted on the giant turtle underneath, on whose back the column rested. There are many such tablets to be seen in China, many such turtles patiently bearing their loads of stone, but this was the only sight of the kind that Bamboo had seen. He had never been outside the Hsi Ling forest, and, of course, knew very little of the great world beyond.

It is no wonder then that the turtle and the tablet had always astonished him. He had asked his father to explain the mystery. "Why do they have a turtle? Why not a lion or an elephant?"

For he had seen stone figures of these animals in the park and had thought them much better able than his friend, the turtle, to carry loads on their backs. "Why it's just the custom," his father had replied—the answer always given when Bamboo asked a question, "just the custom." The boy had tried to imagine it all for himself, but had never been quite sure that he was right, and now, joy of all joys, he was about to enter the very turtle-room itself. Surely, once inside, he could find some answer to this puzzle of his childhood.

Breathless, he dashed through the doorway, fearing every minute that some one would notice the open gates and close them before he could enter. Just in front of the giant turtle he fell in a little heap on the floor, which was covered inch-deep with dust. His face was streaked, his clothes were a sight to behold; but Bamboo cared nothing for such trifles. He lay there for a few moments, not daring to move. Then, hearing a noise outside, he crawled under the ugly stone beast and crouched in his narrow hiding-place, as still as a mouse.

"There, there!" said a deep voice. "See what you are doing, stirring up such a dust! Why, you will strangle me if you are not careful."

It was the turtle speaking, and yet Bamboo's father had often told him that it was not alive. The boy lay trembling for a minute, too much frightened to get up and run.

"No use in shaking so, my lad," the voice continued, a little more kindly. "I suppose all boys are alike—good for nothing but kicking up a dust." He finished this sentence with a hoarse chuckle, and the boy, seeing that he was laughing, looked up with wonder at the strange creature.

"I meant no harm in coming," said the child finally. "I only wanted to look at you more closely."

"Oh, that was it, hey? Well, that is strange. All the others come and stare at the tablet on my back. Sometimes they read aloud the nonsense written there about dead emperors and their titles, but they never so much as look at me, at me whose father was one of the great four who made the world."

Bamboo's eyes shone with wonder. "What! your father helped make the world?" he gasped.

"Well, not my father exactly, but one of my grandfathers, and it amounts to the same thing, doesn't it. But, hark! I hear a voice. The keeper is coming back. Run up and close those doors, so he won't notice that they have not been locked. Then you may hide in the corner there until he has passed. I have something more to tell you."

Bamboo did as he was told. It took all his strength to swing the heavy doors into place. He felt very important to think that he was doing something for the grandson of a maker of the world, and it would have broken his heart if this visit had been ended just as it was beginning.

Sure enough, his father and the other keepers passed on, never dreaming that the heavy locks were not fastened as usual. They were talking about the great men who had just gone. They seemed very happy and were jingling some coins in their hands.

"Now, my boy," said the stone turtle when the sound of voices had died away and Bamboo had come out from his corner, "maybe you think I'm proud of my job. Here I've been holding up this chunk for a hundred years, I who am fond of travel. During all this time night and day, I have been trying to think of some way to give up my position. Perhaps it's honourable, but, you may well imagine, it's not very pleasant."

"I should think you would have the backache," ventured Bamboo timidly.

"Backache! well, I think so; back, neck, legs, eyes, everything I have is aching, aching for freedom. But, you see, even if I had kicked up my heels and overthrown this monument, I had no way of getting through those iron bars," and he nodded toward the gate.

"Yes, I understand," agreed Bamboo, beginning to feel sorry for his old friend.

"But, now that you are here, I have a plan, and a good one it is, too, I think. The watchmen have forgotten to lock the gate. What is to prevent my getting my freedom this very night? You open the gate, I walk out, and no one the wiser."

"But my father will lose his head if they find that he has failed to do his duty and you have escaped."
"Oh, no; not at all. You can slip his keys to-night, lock the gates after I am gone, and no one will know just what has happened. Why it will make this building famous. It won't hurt your father, but will do him good. So many travellers will be anxious to see the spot from which I vanished. I am too heavy for a thief to carry off, and they will be sure that it is another miracle of the gods. Oh, I shall have a good time out in the big world."

Just here Bamboo began to cry.

"Now what is the silly boy blubbering about?" sneered the turtle. "Is he nothing but a cry-baby?"

"No, but I don't want you to go."

"Don't want me to go, eh? Just like all the others. You're a fine fellow! What reason have you for wanting to see me weighed down here all the rest of my life with a mountain on my back? Why, I thought you were sorry for me, and it turns out that you are as mean as anybody else."

"It is so lonely here, and I have no playmates. You are the only friend I have."

The tortoise laughed loudly. "Ho, ho! so it's because I make you a good playmate, eh? Now, if that's your reason, that's another story altogether. What do you say to going with me then? I, too, need a friend, and if you help me to escape, why, you are the very friend for me."

"But how shall you get the tablet off your back?" questioned Bamboo doubtfully. "It's very heavy."

"That's easy, just walk out of the door. The tablet is too tall to go through. It will slide off and sit on the floor instead of on my shell."

Bamboo, wild with delight at the thought of going on a journey with the turtle, promised to obey the other's commands. After supper, when all were asleep in the little house of the keeper, he slipped from his bed, took down the heavy key from its peg, and ran pell-mell to the temple.

"Well, you didn't forget me, did you?" asked the turtle when Bamboo swung the iron gates open.

"Oh, no, I would not break a promise. Are you ready?"

"Yes, quite ready." So saying, the turtle took a step. The tablet swayed backward and forward, but did not fall. On walked the turtle until finally he stuck his ugly head through the doorway. "Oh, how good it looks outside," he said. "How pleasant the fresh air feels! Is that the moon rising over yonder? It's the first time I've seen it for an age. My word! just look at the trees! How they have grown since they set that tombstone on my back! There's a regular forest outside now."

Bamboo was delighted when he saw the turtle's glee at escaping.

"Be careful," he cried, "not to let the tablet fall hard enough to break it."

Even as he spoke, the awkward beast waddled through the door. The upper end of the monument struck against the wall, toppled off, and fell with a great crash to the floor. Bamboo shivered with fear. Would his father come and find out what had happened?

"Don't be afraid, my boy. No one will come at this hour of the night to spy on us."

Bamboo quickly locked the gates, ran back to the house, and hung the key on its peg. He took a long look at his sleeping parents, and then returned to his friend. After all, he would not be gone long and his father would surely forgive him.

Soon the comrades were walking down the broad road, very slowly, for the tortoise is not swift of foot and Bamboo's legs were none too long.

"Where are you going?" said the boy at last, after he had begun to feel more at home with the turtle.

"Going? Where should you think I would want to go after my century in prison? Why, back to the first home of my father, back to the very spot where the great god, P'anku, and his three helpers hewed out the world."

"And is it far?" faltered the boy, beginning to feel just the least bit tired.

"At this rate, yes, but, bless my life, you didn't think we could travel all the way at this snail's pace, I hope. Jump on my back, and I'll show you how to go. Before morning we shall be at the end of the world, or rather, the beginning."

"Where is the beginning of the world?" asked Bamboo. "I have never studied geography."

"We must cross China, then Thibet, and at last in the mountains just beyond we shall reach the spot which P'anku made the centre of his labour."

At that moment Bamboo felt himself being lifted from the ground. At first he thought he would slip off the turtle's rounded shell, and he cried out in fright.

"Never fear," said his friend. "Only sit quietly, and there will be no danger."

They had now risen far into the air, and Bamboo could look down over the great forest of Hsi Ling all bathed in moonlight. There were the broad white roads leading up to the royal tombs, the beautiful temples, the buildings where oxen and sheep were prepared for sacrifice, the lofty towers, and the high tree-covered hills [98]under which the emperors were buried. Until that night Bamboo had not known the size of this royal graveyard. Could it be that the turtle would carry him beyond the forest? Even as he asked himself this question he saw that they had reached a mountain, and the turtle was ascending higher, still higher, to cross the mighty wall of stone.

Bamboo grew dizzy as the turtle rose farther into the sky. He felt as he sometimes did when he played whirling games with his little friends, and got so dizzy that he tumbled over upon the ground. However, this time he knew that he must keep his head and not fall, for it must have been almost a mile to the ground below him. At last they had passed over the mountain and were flying above a great plain. Far below Bamboo could see sleeping villages and little streams of water that looked like silver in the moonlight. Now, directly beneath them was a city. A few feeble lights could be seen in the dark narrow streets, and Bamboo thought he could hear the faint cries of peddlers crying their midnight wares.

"That's the capital of Shan-shi just below us," said the turtle, breaking his long silence. "It is almost two hundred miles from here to your father's house, and we have taken less than half an hour. Beyond that is the Province of the Western Valleys. In one hour we shall be above Thibet."

On they whizzed at lightning speed. If it had not been hot summer time Bamboo would have been almost frozen. As it was, his hands and feet were cold and stiff.

The turtle, as if knowing how chilly he was, flew nearer to the ground where it was warmer. How pleasant for Bamboo! He was so tired that he could keep his eyes open no longer and he was soon soaring in the land of dreams.

When he waked up it was morning. He was lying on the ground in a wild, rocky region. Not far away burned a great wood fire, and the turtle was watching some food that was cooking in a pot.

"Ho, ho, my lad! so you have at last waked up after your long ride. You see we are a little early. No matter if the dragon does think he can fly faster, I beat him, didn't I? Why, even the phoenix laughs at me and says I am slow, but the phoenix has not come yet either. Yes, I have clearly broken the record for speed, and I had a load to carry too, which neither of the others had, I am sure."

"Where are we?" questioned Bamboo.

"In the land of the beginning," said the other wisely. "We flew over Thibet, and then went northwest for two hours. If you haven't studied geography you won't know the name of the country. But, here we are, and that is enough, isn't it, enough for any one? And to-day is the yearly feast-day in honour of the making of the world. It was very fortunate for me that the gates were left open yesterday. I am afraid my old friends, the dragon and the phoenix, have almost forgotten what I look like. It is so long since they saw me. Lucky beasts they are, not to be loaded down under an emperor's tablet. Hello! I hear the dragon coming now, if I am not mistaken. Yes, here he is. How glad I am to see him!"

Bamboo heard a great noise like the whirr of enormous wings, and then, looking up, saw a huge dragon just in front of him. He knew it was a dragon from the pictures he had seen and the carvings in the temples.

The dragon and the turtle had no sooner greeted each other, both very happy at the meeting, than they were joined by a queer-looking bird, unlike any that Bamboo had ever seen, but which he knew was the phœnix. This phœnix looked somewhat like a wild swan, but it had the bill of a cock, the neck of a snake, the tail of a fish and the stripes of a dragon. Its feathers were of five colours.
When the three friends had chatted merrily for a few minutes, the turtle told them how Bamboo had helped him to escape from the temple.

"A clever boy," said the dragon, patting Bamboo gently on the back.

"Yes, yes, a clever boy indeed," echoed the phœnix.

"Ah," sighed the turtle, "if only the good god, P'anku, were here, shouldn't we be happy! But, I fear he will never come to this meeting-place. No doubt he is off in some distant spot, cutting out another world. If I could only see him once more, I feel that I should die in peace."

"Just listen!" laughed the dragon. "As if one of us could die! Why, you talk like a mere mortal."

All day long the three friends chatted, feasted, and had a good time looking round at the places where they had lived so happily when P'anku had been cutting out the world. They were good to Bamboo also and showed him many wonderful things of which he had never dreamed.

"You are not half so mean-looking and so fierce as they paint you on the flags," said Bamboo in a friendly voice to the dragon just as they were about to separate.

The three friends laughed heartily.

"Oh, no, he's a very decent sort of fellow, even if he is covered with fish-scales," joked the phœnix.

Just before they bade each other good-bye, the phœnix gave Bamboo a long scarlet tail-feather for a keepsake, and the dragon gave him a large scale which turned to gold as soon as the boy took it into his hand.

"Come, come, we must hurry," said the turtle. "I am afraid your father will think you are lost." So Bamboo, after having spent the happiest day of his life, mounted the turtle's back, and they rose once more above the clouds. Back they flew even faster than they had come. Bamboo had so many things to talk about that he did not once think of going to sleep, for he had really seen the dragon and the phœnix, and if he never were to see anything else in his life, he would always be happy.

Suddenly the turtle stopped short in his swift flight, and Bamboo felt himself slipping. Too late he screamed for help, too late he tried to save himself. Down, down from that dizzy height he tumbled, turning, twisting, thinking of the awful death that was surely coming. Swish! he shot through the tree tops trying vainly to clutch the friendly branches. Then with a loud scream he struck the ground, and his long journey was ended.

"Come out from under that turtle, boy! What are you doing inside the temple in the dirt? Don't you know this is not the proper place for you?"

Bamboo rubbed his eyes. Though only half awake, he knew it was his father's voice.

"But didn't it kill me?" he said as his father pulled him out by the heel from under the great stone turtle.

"What killed you, foolish boy? What can you be talking about? But I'll half-kill you if you don't hurry out of this and come to your supper. Really I believe you are getting too lazy to eat. The idea of sleeping the whole afternoon under that turtle's belly!"

Bamboo, not yet fully awake, stumbled out of the tablet room, and his father locked the iron doors.

The Dragon After His Winter Sleep

by Dr. Richard Wilhelm

The Chinese Fairy Book
Chapter XLIII

ONCE there was a scholar who was reading in the upper story of his house. It was a rainy, cloudy day and the weather was gloomy. Suddenly he saw a little thing which shone like a fire-fly. It crawled upon the table, and wherever it went it left traces of burns, curved like the tracks of a rainworm. Gradually it wound itself about the scholar's book and the book, too, grew black. Then it occurred to him that it might be a dragon. So he carried it out of doors on the book. There he stood for quite some time; but it sat uncurled, without moving in the least.

Then the scholar said: "It shall not be said of me that I was lacking in respect." With these words he carried back the book and once more laid it on the table. Then he put on his robes of ceremony, made a deep bow and escorted the dragon out on it again.

No sooner had he left the door, than he noticed that the dragon raised his head and stretched himself. Then he flew up from the book with a hissing sound, like a radiant streak. Once more he turned around toward the scholar, and his head had already grown to the size of a barrel, while his body must have been a full fathom in length. He gave one more snaky twist, and then there was a terrible crash of thunder and the dragon went sailing through the air.

The scholar then returned and looked to see which way the little creature had come. And he could follow his tracks hither and thither, to his chest of books.

Note: This tale is also from the "Strange Stories." The dragon, head of all scaled creatures and insects, hibernates during the winter according to the Chinese belief. At the time he is quite small. When the first spring storm comes he flies up to the clouds on the lightning. Here the dragon's nature as an atmospheric apparition is expressed.

The Fox and the Raven

by Dr. Richard Wilhelm

The Chinese Fairy Book
Chapter XIII

THE fox knows how to flatter, and how to play many cunning tricks. Once upon a time he saw a raven, who alighted on a tree with a piece of meat in his beak. The fox seated himself beneath the tree, looked up at him, and began to praise him.

"Your color," he began, "is pure black. This proves to me that you possess all the wisdom of Laotzse, who knows how to shroud his learning in darkness. The manner in which you manage to feed your mother shows that your filial affection equals that which the Master Dsong had for his parents. Your voice is rough and strong. It proves that you have the courage with which King Hiang once drove his foes to flight by the mere sound of his voice. In truth, you are the king of birds!"

The raven, hearing this, was filled with joy and said: "I thank you! I thank you!"

And before he knew it, the meat fell to earth from his opened beak.

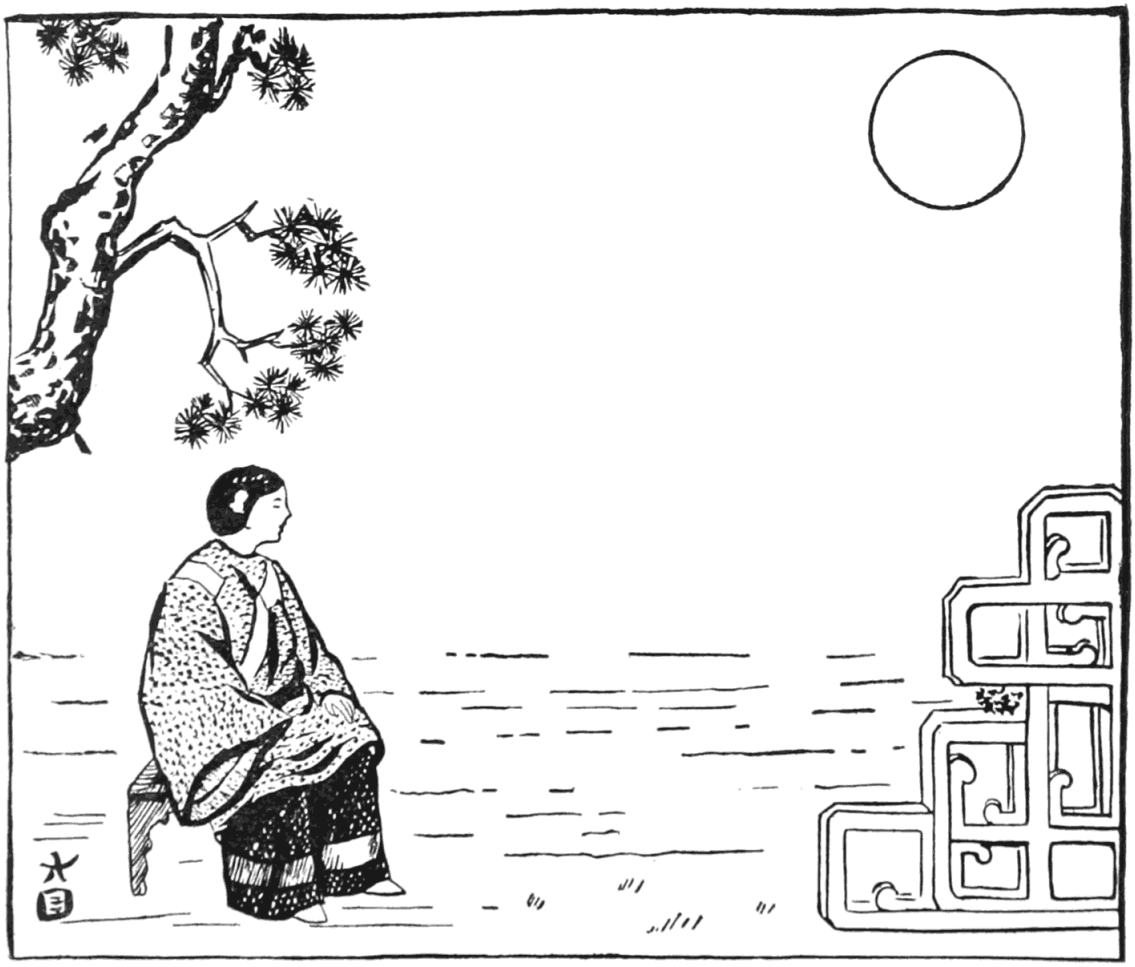
The fox caught it up, devoured it and then said, laughing: "Make note of this, my dear sir: if some one praises you without occasion, he is sure to have a reason for doing so."

Note: Traditionally narrated, it may be taken for granted that this is simply Æsop's fable in Chinese dress. The manner of presentation is characteristically Chinese. Master Dsong was King Dsi's most faithful pupil, renowned for his piety. The raven is known in China as "the bird of filial love," for it is said that the young ravens bring forth the food they have eaten from their beaks again, in order to feed the old birds.

How the Moon Became Beautiful

by Mary Hayes Davis and Chow-Leung

from *Chinese Fables and Folk Stories*



The Moon is very beautiful with his round, bright face which shines with soft and gentle light on all the world of man. But once there was a time when he was not so beautiful as he is now. Six thousand years ago the face of the Moon became changed in a single night. Before that time his face had been so dark and gloomy that no one liked to look at him, and for this reason he was always very sad.

One day he complained to the flowers and to the stars—for they were the only things that would ever look in his face.

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One day he complained to the flowers and to the stars—for they were the only things that would ever look in his face.

He said, "I do not like to be the Moon. I wish I were a star or a flower. If I were a star, even the smallest one, some great general would care for me; but alas! I am only the Moon and no one likes me. If I could only be a flower and grow in a garden where the beautiful earth women come, they would place me in their hair and praise my fragrance and beauty. Or, if I could even grow in the wilderness where no one could see, the birds would surely come and sing sweet songs for me. But I am only the Moon and no one honors me."

The stars answered and said, "We can not help you. We were born here and we can not leave our places. We never had any one to help us. We do our duty, we work all the day and twinkle in the dark night to make the skies more beautiful.—But that is all we can do," they added, as they smiled coldly at the sorrowful Moon.

Then the flowers smiled sweetly and said, "We do not know how we can help you. We live always in one place—in a garden near the most beautiful maiden in all the world. As she is kind to every one in trouble we will tell her about you. We love her very much and she loves us. Her name is Tseh-N'io."

Still the Moon was sad. So one evening he went to see the beautiful maiden Tseh-N'io. And when he saw her he loved her at once. He said, "Your face is very beautiful. I wish that you would come to me, and that my face would be as your face. Your motions are gentle and full of grace. Come with me and we will be as one—and perfect. I know that even the worst people in all the world would have only to look at you and they would love you. Tell me, how did you come to be so beautiful?"

"I have always lived with those who were gentle and happy, and I believe that is the cause of beauty and goodness," answered Tseh-N'io.

And so the Moon went every night to see the maiden. He knocked on her window, and she came. And when he saw how gentle and beautiful she was, his love grew stronger, and he wished more and more to be with her always.

One day Tseh-N'io said to her mother, "I should like to go to the Moon and live always with him. Will you allow me to go?"

Her mother thought so little of the question that she made no reply, and Tseh-N'io told her friends that she was going to be the Moon's bride.

In a few days she was gone. Her mother searched everywhere but could not find her. And one of Tseh-N'io's friends said,—"She has gone with the Moon, for he asked her many times."

A year and a year passed by and Tseh-N'io, the gentle and beautiful earth maiden, did not return. Then the people said, "She has gone forever. She is with the Moon."

The face of the Moon is very beautiful now. It is happy and bright and gives a soft, gentle light to all the world. And there are those who say that the Moon is now like Tseh-N'io, who was once the most beautiful of all earth maidens.

The Clever Wife

Han Dynasty (202 BC – AD 220)

A very long time ago there lived, in a far corner of China, in Sinkiang, a good and simple man named Fu-hsing who had an unusually clever wife. All the day long he would run to her with questions about thus-and-such, or about such-and-thus, as the case might fall out; and no matter how difficult the problem he took to her, she always thought of a solution. Thanks to her wondrous acumen, the house of Fu-hsing prospered mightily.

Fu-hsing was remarkably proud of his wife and often spoke of her as his "Incomparable Wisdom," his "Matchless Wit," or his "Dearest Capability." He only wished that all who passed his house could know it was her cleverness that had brought him such great prosperity. For months he puzzled his head over a suitable way of declaring his gratitude, and at last conceived of a couplet that delicately conveyed his feeling. He inscribed the lines on twin scrolls and posted them on the gate before his house:

"A Matchless Wit like Fu-hsing's
Does with ease a million things."

All who passed the house saw the scrolls, and those who knew Fu-hsing thought what a scrupulous and honest husband he was to thus praise his wife. One day, however, the district magistrate happened to pass that way. On reading the scrolls, he drew his mouth down and his eyebrows together in a terrible frown.

"What a boastful, conceited fellow lives there!" he thought. "What appalling arrogance! Such windbaggery should not go unpunished!" When he returned to his quarters, he sent a clerk with a stern summons for Fu-hsing to appear before him forthwith.

The summons so frightened Fu-hsing that he could scarcely speak enough words to tell his wife of it. "I can't understand... I'm law-abiding... a good citizen... I pay taxes and tariffs without cheating..." He pulled frantically at his hair, sprinkling strands of it on the floor. "My dear Capability, what can I have done to bring upon me this summons?"

His wife laid a calming hand on him before he could tear out the last of his sparse hair. "It must be," she said after a moment's thought, "that the scrolls on the gate have given offense. Really, it is not worth worrying about! Go with the clerk to see the magistrate and have no fear. If you run into difficulty, we can talk it over when you return."

Much relieved, Fu-hsing went off with the clerk and soon was standing before the magistrate, whose eyebrows by now had nudged so close together that they were quite entangled with each other. He sat glowering behind an immense table, his arms folded magisterially into his sleeves.

"So!" he exclaimed. "This is the braggart who posts scrolls on his gate to boast of his extraordinary cleverness!" He leaned forward to glare into Fu-hsing's face, the terrible eyebrows bristling like angry hedgehogs. "You would have the world believe you can do anything at all, would you? No matter how difficult?"

"Very well!" Loosing his arms from his sleeves, he struck an angry fist on the table. "I have three small tasks for you to perform. At once! For a fellow of your prodigious talents, they should provide no difficulty. No difficulty whatsoever."

"First, then,"—pound went the fist—"you shall weave a cloth as long as a road."

"Second,"—pound, pound—"you shall make as much wine as there is water in the ocean."

"Third,"—pound, pound, pound—"you shall raise a pig as big as a mountain."

With an awful smile, the magistrate uncurled his fist to waggle a long finger under poor Fu-hsing's nose. "Of course, if you do not accomplish these tasks for me—one, two, three—you will soon learn how this court deals with swollen heads!"

Wretched and anxious, Fu-hsing hastened home to his wife and stammered out the three impossible demands made by the magistrate.

His wife threw back her head and laughed. "Foolish husband!" she said. "The hardest problems are those with the simplest answers!"

Fu-hsing continued to wring his hands. "But what shall I do? I know that you can accomplish anything, but this is beyond all reason..."

Madame Fu-hsing's smile stopped him. "It is really quite simple. Rest well tonight. Tomorrow you must go back to the magistrate and present to him three quite ordinary implements which I shall make ready for you. I will give you certain words to take along with these devices, and you must say them to the magistrate just as I tell them to you."

Fu-hsing attended well to his wife's instructions, and the next morning, carrying a ruler, a large measuring bowl, and a balancing scale, he presented himself to the magistrate once again. When he started speaking, the eyebrows were as tightly knotted as before, but as Fu-hsing continued—and laid, in turn, the three measuring devices before the magistrate—the brows gradually lifted up and away from his eyes until they became like flying birds of astonishment.

"This morning, as I was setting out to do the tasks you gave me," Fu-hsing began, "I realized that I needed further instruction from you before I could finish. Therefore, Your Honor, I have taken the liberty of bringing these three measures to facilitate your task.

I must respectfully ask you, first, to measure the road with this ruler that I may know the length of the cloth I must weave; second, measure the ocean's water with this bowl that I may know how much wine I must make; and third, weigh the mountain with this balance that I may know how big a pig I must raise."

Fu-hsing made a deferential bow. "Just as soon as you have set the standards, Your Honor, I shall be pleased to finish the tasks."

So confounded was the magistrate at the cunning solution to his three problems that he allowed Fu-hsing to go without punishment, and never ventured to bother him again. Truly, the magistrate believed Fu-hsing's Matchless Wit could do a million things.