

THE TEACHINGS OF
LI WANG HO

J. Michaud, PH.D.

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The Jewelled Casket of Everlasting Flowers

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DEDICATION

*This Book is dedicated
to the Ever-Fragrant Attributes of the*

ADORABLE LADY

SILVER LOTUS.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PRINCIPAL MALE CHARACTERS

<i>The Divine Emperor</i>	SHI HWANG-TI—T' IEN TSZE (SON OF HEAVEN)
<i>The Sage</i>	LI WANG HO
<i>The Mandarin</i>	YING PO CHING
<i>The Magistrate</i>	SHU TONG
<i>The Rich Merchant</i>	LI HO-LU
<i>The Doctor</i>	CHU SHI-NIEN
<i>The Son of the General</i>	LAI PAO
<i>The New Disciple</i>	LU-SHUN
<i>The "Master" of the Yin Yang</i>	WANG CH'UNG
<i>The Lad of Genius</i>	SINGING NIGHTINGALE

* * * * *

PRINCIPAL FEMALE CHARACTERS

<i>Silver Lotus</i>	THE ADOPTED DAUGHTER OF LI WANG HO
<i>Glowing Rose</i>	SISTER OF SILVER LOTUS
<i>Celestial Melody</i>	
<i>Hibiscus</i>	
<i>Moonbeam</i>	
<i>Heart's Delight</i>	
<i>Wisteria</i>	

PRIESTS • OFFICIALS • OFFICERS • DISCIPLES
VISITORS • SINGERS • ACTORS • DANCERS • ETC., ETC.

* * * * *

THE SCENES ARE LAID IN—

THE VILLAGE OF APRICOT BLOSSOM
THE TOWN OF PING-LIANG FU, ON THE BANKS OF THE KING-HO RIVER
THE EMPEROR'S CAPITAL
THE GARDEN OF DELIGHT
THE EMPEROR'S PALACE
THE HOUSE OF LI WANG HO

PLACE AND TIME OF ACTION: CHINA, ABOUT 2,160 YEARS AGO

THE WISDOM OF THE INSECTS

“Who has the greatest Wisdom?” asked the Disciple.

“The beings who could have the greatest Wisdom are the ant, the bee, the moth and the fly.”

“Why, dear Master?”

“Because the ant is blind, and sees no evil; the bee is deaf, and hears no evil; and the moth is dumb, and speaks no evil.”

“And the fly?”

“The fly has a thousand-fold eye where-with he may behold all the good and beautiful in Nature; for to see goodness and beauty in everything is the greatest Wisdom of all!”

ONE OF THE SAYINGS OF LI WANG HO

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The translation of this work has been a labour of love. Nothing has been changed, and it has been my aim to present the reader with a translation as *verbatim* as possible.

The Poems have been most difficult to render into English, but fortunately they were composed in the free and wild dithyrambic measure, irregular in style, introduced in China at the end of the fourth century B.C., and immensely popular there from the beginning, even more so than the compact style of Chinese poetry with which we are all familiar, and which is even more difficult to translate into another language.

In Chinese poetry there is no such thing as blank verse; but poetical licence is tolerated. If it be remembered that the *P'ei Wên Yün Fu Chi*, a rhyming Dictionary, contains about 15,000,000 words in the most subtle and ingenious rhyming combinations, some idea may be formed of the trials which confront the translator of Chinese verse. This is not intended as an apology. The best possible has been done under the circumstances and the verdict lies with the esteemed reader.

The songs or poems in question are entirely individual in manner and bear no resemblance to the *Shih-King*—the Odes—of which there were originally over 3,000. Confucius collected and edited these and reduced the number to 311 (called the 300), and they treat of war, love, eating, drinking, dances, virtues, vices of rulers, misery and happiness.

But the Songs in this Book deal mainly with the love of the “Son of Heaven” for his Favourite—“Silver Lotus”—and it is hoped that they will find favour in the minds of Western readers.

A liberty has been taken in this story in connection with the chronological order of events, but this was done only to give compactness to the tale. Thus it was thought necessary to restrict the time in which the events occurred to six consecutive days, and to achieve this the trips to and from the Capital had to be accomplished within the space of one day—which is of course impossible as the discerning reader will observe. It is to be hoped, therefore, that this lack of verity will be overlooked.

The Introduction, without which no Chinese Book is ever complete, by the Keeper of the ancient Archives, T'sai Ching, is somewhat outspoken; but I am certain from my own knowledge of that peppery but learned gentleman that his Address to the “Foreign White Devils”

is inspired solely by the extreme love and reverence he bears towards Li Wang Ho's Wisdom and his veneration for that great Philosopher, and not by actual hatred of the White Race.

In this connection I am reminded of a sentence in the preface of a Chinese play where it says: "If anyone ventures to call this Book indecent, he will certainly have his tongue torn out in Hell!"

I. CUSUR

INTRODUCTION

A WARNING TO THE FOREIGN WHITE DEVILS WHO READ THIS BOOK

It has pleased the Inheritors of the Sublime Teachings of the happy and great Sage Li Wang Ho—upon whom may rest the Eternal Blessings of all the Gods Above and Within—to make public for the first time to Western students of Occult Lore, these wondrous Gems of mental power and beauty of the Blesséd Teacher.

But know, ye ignorant Barbarians who have the inestimable felicity to peruse these jewelled words of Wisdom and golden Flowers of inspired Wit, that it has been decreed by the Celestial Sons of Light, who dwell in the Eternal Radiance of the All-Seeing Eye of Heaven, that all who fail to read and study with reverence these Pearls of Super-Intelligence shall be sealed in Seven Curses for ever and for ever; Yea, until the Day when the Green Dragons of the Deep rise up and destroy this low abode of Sin, Treachery and Ignorance!

In connection with this, the utterly wise and brilliant Son of the Gods Li Wang Ho—the Sublime Teacher and Master—has himself laid down Seven Rules of Conduct, or Seven Holy Commandments in regard to the Seven Cardinal Sins, which can never be overlooked or forgiven; and all those who shall have the immeasurable Honour to sit at the Master's feet and imbibe his great Wisdom, should first cleanse their lowly minds by making a deep study of these great Rules, so that they may make self-enlightenment and self-revelation and purification before dwelling in Spirit on that which is to follow here; for without this necessary preparation the Teachings will be unto them but as a dark screen in an unlit cave of the inner part of the great Mountains, upon which they will gaze with blind eyes filled with dust and a bemused brain full of bats.

THE SEVEN CARDINAL SINS TO AVOID THEN ARE:

1. *Ignorance.* This is the greatest Sin of all, for it implies an utter lack of the Wisdom of the Universal Laws, immutably fixed and Holy. It shows the failure of the mastery of all the inner and outer Principles laid down by the Creators of all under the direct supervision of God. It prevents the acquisition of a Memory of all sublime and elevated States of Being; and it presents the mind with a Gate

which is closed for ever—as if it had been once the passageway of an Emperor, no longer fit to be trodden by the unworthy feet of those of the lower grades.

2. *Materialism.* These who dwell in the material only can never enter into communion with the Sublime Spiritual Worlds. They are like pigs that wallow in mud, which gives them an illusion of that cleanliness to which they are entitled by reason of their low state of evolution—which is no evolution but degradation. At the end of time they will be submerged into the primeval ooze and remain there for ever; until they become mud themselves.
3. *Envy.* This dreadful state of mind is the characteristic of the meanly ones. They are even lower than the materialists, for they have added a more deadly attribute to that state by reason of their envious predisposition. They lack harmony, which is an essential part of evolution, on account of their spiteful jealousies of other people's possessions, wits, and happiness; they have no freedom within themselves, as they are fettered down by their lack of goodwill and understanding. They are without confidence in their own powers to achieve the same elevation as those upon whom they look with green and squinting eyes; and they are utterly unbalanced and treacherous in their natures and unworthy to mix with their fellow-beings.
4. *Pride.* This is an altogether unpardonable Sin and shows an utter absence of Intelligence and Appreciation of the Benevolence of the Gods. For it is only They who can bestow that of which man, in his stupidity, is so proud. And not only that; but they do not realize that their unworthy pride is as much an illusion as the things on which they pride themselves. For this reason the Gods make sometimes a last effort to guide this erring type of person, by taking away and completely destroying that of which he is so pompously proud; and all he has been given dominion over will be as a blast of icy wind from the North which will freeze him with terror at his loss.
5. *Hatred.* This is a condition of mind on an even lower scale than envy and pride. He who hates will lose Life, Peace and Happiness. When he has lost these blessings he will be as a fish in a nearly dried-up river—panting for the life-giving waters of Love, and slowly suffocating for lack of the rays of that kindly Inner Sun of Goodwill that should shine from the hearts of all men. Until he

has learned to forego hatred—no matter what the cause—and has learned the virtue of Non-Resistance, he will be burning amidst the fierce flames of an everlasting fire, which sears without consuming the victim.

6. *Judgement of others.* This is another terrible Sin, for who are we, standing so much in need of Tolerance ourselves on account of our many errors, that we should *dare* to judge another?

Justice, Law and Order are necessary in this world of inexperienced beings, but that is a different thing. Judging, and condemning, the faults—as we *think* we see them—of other men, is the prerogative of the Great Recorders in the Celestial Realms only.

We can only bow our heads in shame at our own faults and pray that Mercy shall be meted out to us at the final Accounting, and we must never attempt to pass judgement on others ourselves, but strive for that great Poise which will enable us to find a right Balance in our conduct, so that others shall not judge *us* unduly and harshly.

7. *Blindness.* This is a refusal on man's part to look up to the Light that shines from the Upper Heavens, penetrating the Middle Zones and reaching Earth, the low abode of lowly beings called men. If we look up and see with the inner eye of the adoring Spirit, there shall be given unto us Faith, Youth, Purpose, Vitality, Concentration, Activity and Achievement, so that we shall be enabled to fulfil the Purpose for which we were placed within our Shells of Clay, moulded by the Heavenly Potters in their Creative Ingenuity and Wisdom. If we do not look to the Light, we shall dwell in darkness for ever and cry unceasingly for a Ray of Comfort—but then the Gods will be as blind and deaf as we were in our wilfulness and Sin.

These, then, are the Seven Holy Commandments of the Benefactor Li Wang Ho. To those who follow the Rules there will be opened out a Vision of Wisdom and Beauty such as the average man cannot conceive, nor can he imagine it without due preparation and meditation and subjugation to the Serene and Divine Precepts laid down by our beloved Teacher and Brother.

So take heed and obey—for this is one of the ways to true enlightenment and bliss.

T'SAI CHING,
Keeper of the ancient Archives

ON ACTING

We should always act the rôles the Gods assigned to us with all our might, in all seriousness and dignity: whether our parts be great or small.

And when our audiences gape upon the distorted mirror of our being, let them behold our deeds and hearken to our words as if our fictions were realities and our passions but a dream.

Let the taste of our discourse be like unto a nectared wine that flatters the palate—leaving a delightful aftertaste; and let those who prefer the flavour of vinegar indulge their whim for that sour relish.

ONE OF THE SAYINGS OF LI WANG HO

CHAPTER 1
AT THE THEATRE

At the Peach-Flower Inn, in the village of Apricot Blossom, there was great rejoicing and festivity. People clad in red and green, yellow and blue silken dresses mixed in a happy throng like so many brilliantly coloured flowers and butterflies.

In the distance could be seen a beautiful Temple, named "The Temple of Everlasting Delight," and on approaching it one would see that it stood beneath the shade of a huge locust tree and that it was a magnificent structure.

It was full of holy Shrines, containing the various images of the Lord Buddha, whose name be for ever blest.

Numerous monks were pleasantly engaged in burning precious incense before the Buddhas, thus acquiring everlasting merit; and novices served vegetarian dishes and cakes that melted as soon as they were placed within the mouth, to the people who came to look, worship and meditate.

Some of the monks rang bells and beat huge bronze gongs or great drums to welcome the visitors at the main gate.

Some of the visitors were attending the various graves beneath the trees surrounding the Temple, and burned paper money for the use of the departed, or they presented other offerings with many reverences, kneeling and kowtowing.

There were several beautiful Tombs surrounded with large pine-trees which again were encircled by stone walls, pierced with decorated gateways, leading to centres where were seen the Oratory and the Way of the Spirits.

There were all sorts of utensils for the worship of the Ancestral Ghosts, and candle-sticks and perfume-burners—all made of pure white alabaster—stood around.

Tablets over the gates described the virtues of the Ancestors, and beneath the interlaced branches of the trees various kinds

of food were placed for the worship of the deceased. First came the gentlemen to offer their respects to the dead, to be followed by the ladies, whilst musicians played divine airs.

Orations were read after the Service and more paper money and paper treasure chests were burnt. Meanwhile, some actors performed beneath the awning to the ladies, and others entertained the gentlemen elsewhere with playing and singing.

There were swings on which some of the ladies amused themselves, and there were several other forms of amusement.

Under one of the trees sat a noble looking priest, rhythmically beating a wooden fish whilst reciting the sacred texts in a loud voice. A number of men and women knelt around him beseeching Heaven and Earth and the Three Glorious Ones for their favour and protection; and they were certainly heard, for the heavens resound even to the cry of the lone dog.

Within the Temple there were present several novices and wandering priests from beyond the frozen mountains, and one was lying upon the Bench of Contemplation while others were chanting from their sacred books; and all were under the supervision of the Abbot in the Great Hall.

The floor of the Hall was covered with precious rugs in which were woven the figures of lions and tigers playing with balls. A magnificent table stood in the centre; it was covered with engravings of all kinds of insects, and heavy cedar chairs stood around decorated with the sculptured heads of eels and fishes.

In high-stemmed cups, shaped like the inverted lotus, a snow-white wine was served to the worshippers and various dishes were handed round containing preserved duck, sea fish, fruits and tasty pastries. The venerable Abbot was engaged in deep conversation with the Mandarin Ying Po Ching, who had come to worship at the Ancestral Tomb, and he told the Mandarin that after the sacred books containing the Holy

Teachings of the Lord Buddha had been brought by the White Horse from India, the glorious words had been promulgated in the Temple, whence they spread all over the Empire of the Son of Heaven; and the Three Thousand Worlds had been sanctified.

Parts of the Temple were paved with gold and the staircases were of exquisitely carved white jade, making a treasure-house of gold and colour of the Holy Structure.

Blessings upon all good people were sent forth daily, and they responded by generously giving contributions of gold, silver, food, and rolls of silk; and their names were inscribed upon the Roll of Benefactors.

The Mandarin thereupon called one of his secretaries and told him to hand over to the Abbot a thousand taels of silver and a basket full of precious stones.

The Abbot thanked him and said that the Sacred Scriptures tell that goodwill alone is already the best form of Charity; how much greater then must be the Charity of him who gives generously in concrete form from his substance. Such is Charity of the First Order!

Ying Po Ching then told the Abbot that he was in need of some charms to chase malicious devils from his home, as one of his ladies had been ailing for a long time and none of the doctors' remedies seemed to be of any use.

The Abbot replied that he would send one of his priests who had power over the Five Thunders and could exorcise any and every devil, no matter how powerful. He was famous for his charms and marvellous philtres, which invariably assisted to overcome any form of evil or illness.

In the village of Apricot Blossom itself many visitors entered or left the Peach-Flower Inn where a troupe of singers, musicians and dancers endeavoured to turn the hostel into a home of eternal felicity by means of their truly wonderful art.

Sedan-chairs stood everywhere around the Inn or were in the act of arriving or departing, depositing or carrying away their precious loads of delightful ladies or martial men in splendid attire.

It was the day of the Feast of the Ancestral Tombs, and sweet lotus wine was served in golden cups to the visitors who sat on porcelain stools in front of a stage, admiring the performers. Bowls of ice with plums and melons in them were served to the guests, and tea with rose-petals, whilst the strong odour of chrysanthemum wine perfumed the air.

After Ying Po Ching had taken leave of the Abbot he strolled slowly towards the Inn, and upon entering found that several of the guests were personal friends.

There was Lai Pao, the son of a famous general; Doctor Chu Shi-Nien; Shu Tong the Magistrate, and Li Ho-Lu, a rich Merchant. They were accompanied by several delightful young ladies, the most beautiful of whom was Silver Lotus, beloved by the Emperor himself, and she was sitting beside her sister, Glowing Rose, and her friends Celestial Melody, Moonbeam, Wisteria, Heart's Delight and Hibiscus. All were lovely to behold, but Silver Lotus outshone them all.

Her face was like a flower and glowed like the jasmine's sheen; her sweet body smelt of spice and nard and myrrh; music sprang from the gentle touch of her hands; and one glance from her was sufficient for the recipient to be drowned within the deep wells of her glorious eyes. She was perfect as the moon and graceful as a lily. Her beauty was such that even a blind man went into raptures when he came within the aura of her divine vibrations. Her complexion was like the white camellia on which a magic dust from rosy clouds had softly descended and nestled there in heavenly bliss. Her bewitching and lovely eyes were alight with the radiance of her soul, as if a Divine Messenger looked out of them, sparkling with youth

and health. When she moved about she was stately as a floating swan, lovely as a rose, slender like the bamboo cane and softly curved and graceful as a young deer. When she opened her fragrant mouth, words streamed out like dulcet melodies from her coralline lips.

Such, then, was the glory of Silver Lotus, and the beauty of all other maidens became like a dull shadow when compared with hers.

The friends formed an animated group, and the laughter which rose up from it scented the air with happiness.

There was between them a strong bond of true affection, for they were all disciples of the great Sage, Li Wang Ho, and were often to be found at his delectable home, where they listened with reverence as well as pleasure to his elevated teachings, warming themselves in the rays of the Sun of his Wisdom. But now they gave all their attention to the singers, dancers and musicians as they performed to their delight.

Two girl singers, beautifully attired, came forward, and, after kowtowing four times to the distinguished audience, sang the following song, accompanying themselves upon their guitars.

THE SONG OF THE THREE SPIRITS

DEATH

*I strode along the silent highway
With head bowed down to Winter's blast.
Three faded leaves in wind astray
Met me; and rustling fluttered past.*

* * * *

SOUL

*I wandered in the Autumn night
Amid the dew on gleaming fields;*

*When shining Moon shed argent light,
In which three downy moths did wield
Their powdery wings, and wheeled in swift delight.*

* * * *

LIFE

*I dreamed of Silver Lotus, sweet,
As in the meadow's balm I lay
Beneath the Golden Sun whose summer heat
Drew out the scents of blooms and hay.*

*Three lovely butterflies in play
On whispering southern breeze, so gay
Above my head did sway
In od'rous air, and swiftly flew away.*

*O Lady of the Silver Bloom:
Three Spirits, three times three,
From Death, to Soul, to Life
Came forth from out the Womb
Of Time and Space and set us free,
And pointed out the Golden Way.*

* * * *

After the Song, Silver Lotus said: "This is indeed too kind of you, how can this lowly person thank you?"

But Doctor Chu Shi-Nien called loudly for writing paper and brushes, and one of the attendants bringing the ink-slab, he ground some thick ink and inscribed the Song in beautiful and strong characters, which sprang up like dragons upon the flower-patterned paper under his masterly hand.

The Mandarin Ying Po Ching gave orders that the completed poem should be placed upon the wall in memory of the

occasion. Silver Lotus asked by what names the girls were familiarly known and they replied that they were called Treasure of Gold and Flower Fairy. She told them that the Emperor should hear of their accomplishments.

Peach-blossom pies were served and Silver Lotus presented the girls with embroidered handkerchiefs, five taels of silver and two boxes of melon-seeds each.

Now a group of graceful dancers rushed in and began to perform a series of intricate and delightful steps, portraying the four seasons in symbolical manner, according to the precepts of the Divine festivals; and they also performed the Tiger and Dragon dances, which are dedicated to the forces of Nature and the power of the Spirit.

Then came an actor in the guise of P' An-Ku, the first human being, who lived millions of years ago; and he was followed by the Heavenly Emperors, the terrestrial Emperors, and the human Emperors, magnificently dressed in ceremonial robes.

Then followed an apotheose in which all the previous actors formed a wonderful group around Sui-Jön, the Fire Producer, who borrowed fire from the stars for the benefit of mankind; and those who know the meaning of this tale are wise indeed.

Now, delicious soup of chickens' brains was served, and rose-flower biscuits with southern Bean wine, followed by tea made of the precious golden tea-leaves, as tiny as the tongues of orioles, and brewed in crystal-clear water.

Then followed a mimic play describing how Chien Ti, the ancestress of the Yin, saw a swallow descend from heaven whilst she was making sacrifice to the Intermediary. Accompanied by her sister she was bathing in the river by the rising ground of Yüan, when the bird dropped an egg in five different colours from its mouth, these colours showing how perfect man's five senses could be—if he tried to become truly worthy of his divine inheritance. She and her sister struggled fiercely

for its possession, but Chien Ti won and swallowed the egg, whereupon she became pregnant.

Finally, a young lad sang a number of songs to the strains of a lute, and the audience listened to him, enraptured by his voice and the lovely melodies.

Shu Tong, the Magistrate, asked Li Ho-Lu, the rich merchant, when he had last seen the Master Li Wang Ho.

"I saw him two days ago at his house in the City," Li Ho-Lu replied. "He was surrounded by a large group of new disciples, gathered from the far corners of the Empire, and Wisdom flowed from him in an uninterrupted stream of felicity."

Moonbeam and Heart's Delight said that they had not been to see the Master for several days on account of the preparations for the Festival of the Ancestral Tombs; and Celestial Melody and Hibiscus had intended to visit Li Wang Ho but were prevented from doing so on account of their duties at home. Lai Pao stated that he had been to see him that morning and that the Sage had made enquiries about them all.

"Was he well?" asked Chu Shi-Nien.

"Well," was the reply, "and in his most brilliant vein."

"What was happening?" asked Wisteria.

"He was very amused about a new disciple from a distant province who had come all the way to ask a series of involved questions; but, not having had the privilege of prolonged and deep study of the Master's pronouncements before, he was utterly bewildered by the enigmatic answers the Sage had given him in reply to his queries."

"What did he want to know?" asked Glowing Rose.

"His first question was in reference to a bitter enemy of the newcomer, who tried in every way to malign him and damage his reputation, calling him all sorts of vile names in the most insulting manner."

"What did the Master say?" asked Wisteria.

"He replied: 'Keep silent, and let each man call you what

he will. Thus you will know him; for what he sees in you is but a reflection of that part of himself he wishes to conceal from others. The real you is invisible to him, and so he will know you not—if you keep silent.”

They all smiled and Ying Po Ching said: “What did the newcomer think of this?”

“He just gaped at the Master,” replied Lai Pao, “as if he were a frog whose yawn had petrified in the act.”

“But,” said Silver Lotus, “the Master’s answer was really a very simple one; it is a very well known proverb and quite straight-forward.”

“A straight path or a straight answer cannot be pursued or understood by a man with a warped mind,” replied Shu Tong; “such a one always sees a different meaning from what was intended. Being twisted in their nature, all people of this kind must necessarily twist all they hear or read in such a way that it synchronizes with their own unbalanced reasonings. Therefore they can never have any true realization of true facts.”

“The Master added,” continued Lai Pao, “Your prayer should always be that the Lords of Wisdom lead all your enemies to the great Light’ . . . (‘and burn them in the everlasting flames,’ the new disciple muttered to himself).”

All the friends burst out in merry laughter at this, and Shu Tong said: “He was too slow to catch the fox and only caught the smell.”

This sally brought forth a new outburst of mirth, and Silver Lotus said: “We learn more from the failures of fools than from the successes of the wise, as the Master once said.”

“But we should also remember,” said Doctor Chu Shi-Nien, “that K’ung Fu-tze, he whom the Barbarians know as Confucius, has said: ‘When I have presented one corner of a subject, and the pupil cannot himself make out the other three, I do not repeat my lesson.’”

“Master Li Wang Ho has more patience than that,” replied

Celestial Melody, "and in the kindness of his heart he will often repeat a Truth in many different ways, so that the disciple may understand in the end."

"Yes," said Magistrate Shu Tong, "He makes that clear in his axiom which states that: 'In verbosity lies no credit. The only excuse for it is that if a Sage uses *many* words, *some* may be picked up by the fool to *his* credit."

"In that case, if anyone should read the *Erh Ya* Dictionary from end to end he should have a chance of becoming very wise indeed," rejoindered Lai Pao laughingly, "for not only would he be 'Nearing the Standard,' but become a standard of erudition himself."*

"It is not the *number* of words which counts," said Li Ho-Lu, "but the manner in which we combine them."

"And only a great Sage like our Master, or one like Lao Tzú, can combine them in such a manner that they lead to enlightenment and wisdom," said Wisteria.

Once again the musicians began to play and they performed on the lute, the flute, the cithern and the double flute, and accompanied the singers who plucked the guitar and clicked red ivory castanets. The dancers joined in, and twenty girls danced the Dance of Kuan Yin, followed by the Dance of the Evil One, and the Rainbow Skirt Dance.

The visitors were enchanted and all complimented the performers and gave them presents of jewelled hairpins, silver tael, kerchiefs and necklaces. The performers said that they did not deserve these gifts and really did not see how they could accept them. The guests answered that these things were only trifles which perhaps they would like to pass on to the servants of the Inn. With many polite bows on both sides the guests now left the Inn and went outside to enjoy the spectacle of the

* This Dictionary is called "Nearing the Standard."

performers with the crossbows, bells, blow-pipes, quarterstaves, and the contests with spears and staves, during which all sorts of clever tricks were performed.

There were also performing horses, and men flying fantastically shaped kites, and couples playing shuttle-cock, and many other games.

All classes of people were represented amongst the multitude.

There were members of the literary class, the agricultural, the artisans and the traders. There were members of the hereditary class of the nobility, sunning themselves as it were in the distant glory of their illustrious forbears, though they themselves possessed no special privileges. There were many officials, whose position is esteemed much higher than the hereditary nobles, for bureaucracy takes the same place in China as the aristocracy of the West. There were those who were entitled to wear the yellow jacket, and there was even one who wore the yellow girdle, which is worn by descendants of the Manchu Dynasty in modern times; and there was also one who wore the red girdle, proving him to be a collateral relative of the Imperial House.

Old friends met again after long separation, and there was much kowtowing and the salute of joined hands, and congratulations. Some of the ladies and gentlemen were smoking, and fragrant clouds of delicious tobacco smoke mixed with the other delightful odours coming from the perfumed dresses of the ladies. Their costumes harmonized in colour and were richly embroidered with mystical designs. The women wore elaborate head ornaments, such as golden butterflies, artificial flowers, pearl nets over their hair and jewels. Their sweet faces were artistically rouged and eyebrows delicately painted in graceful arcs. Both men and women of the better classes had fine strings of shimmering pearl necklaces. It was a splendid scene of unalloyed happiness and beauty, as yet unspoiled by

the ghastly innovations from the Western savages, who have the unspeakable audacity to claim to be "civilized" nowadays! For at the time of these happy events these same barbarians were still living in a state of naked savagery in thick woods or rocky caves in their domains of mist and fog and ignorance; hunting and killing helpless small animals, and being chased in turn by wolf and bear.

The scene we are discussing was laid in the Province of Central China named Kiang Su, and the village of Apricot Blossom was situated but a short distance away from the town of Ping Liang Fu, on the King-Ho River.

It was the custom to celebrate all notable holidays and festivals, such as New Year's Day, the Festival of the First Full Moon, the Feast of Lanterns, and the Feast of the Dragon Boat at this village or in the nearby capital of the Emperor. It was the time of the reign of the first Universal Emperor of China, Shi Hwang-ti, whose Capital was Hien-Yang, where he had a magnificent Palace; and to make the period clear to the ignorant white Strangers, this was about 220 B.C.

His Palace was the wonder and admiration of his people, and he was the first to abolish the feudal system and bring greater individual freedom to the masses. He constructed many roads throughout the Empire, formed great canals, and erected numerous handsome public buildings. He was also a mighty warrior and commenced the Great Wall. The upper classes did not like his many innovations but were helpless under the might of his will; but most of the Scholars and the educated classes did admire his great statesmanship. The Scholars who did *not* like him were those who objected to his order to burn all books that had reference to past history, and 460 of them were put to death for disobedience. Many of them hid their historical and other books between double walls and in various other ingenious ways. He was determined, however, that

the History of China should commence with his own reign, and the many great works he did gave him some claim to this distinction.

One of the innovations of his period was the invention of the hair-brush used for painting and writing. Painting was done on woven silk, on wood panels and on paper made of silk floss, for paper as we know it was not invented until A.D. 105 by Ts'ai Lun. It was at that time that the Teachings of the Lord Buddha were first introduced in China and taught or practised in some of the Temples, such as the one near the village of Apricot Blossom. But it was not officially adopted throughout the Empire until the Emperor Ming-Ti, who reigned from A.D. 58–76, saw in a dream a golden man—who was the Lord Buddha himself. The Teachings of K'ung Fu-tze and Lao Tzú were of course widely known, but before their times the Chinese people believed in a Divine Ruler of the Universe who was not the Creator of the human race but a Great Being who disliked evil—which He always punished—just as He always rewarded virtue. He did not lay any claim to love or reverence from man, but He could be propitiated by sacrifice and prayer if one wished to obtain some desired favour. There was no devil to tempt man, nor was it believed that righteousness during life would lead to absorption in the Deity after death. This Divine God or Ruler was named T'ien, which had colloquially the same meaning as the sky. Later he was called Shang Ti, or Supreme Ruler, synonymous with T'ien. But Shang Ti was regarded as a more personal God, whilst T'ien was an abstract Being. Shang Ti is a God who walks and talks, enjoys the flavour of sacrifices and music and dancing in his honour; and he even takes sides in warfare. T'ien holds aloof and He is wrapped in an impenetrable Majesty; but actually these Gods represented two distinct principles.

In later times was added the worship of the Sun, Moon

and Constellations, as well as of the five planets. They also worshipped some of the larger stars, such as Canopus, which is considered to be the dwelling-place of the God of Longevity.

The Earth itself was also worshipped in the form of the God of the Soil, the rivers and hills, whilst wind, rain, heat, cold, thunder and lightning were all invested with the attributes of the Gods. Various parts of the house, such as doors, stones, courtyards and so on were conceived as sheltering spirits with good or bad influences.

These, then, were some of the beliefs of the people in general, but there were wise Sages, apart from K'ung Fu-tze, and Lao Tzú, who knew the great Truths, and one of those was the Philosopher or Master Li Wang Ho. He and others worked more or less in secret, and the outer world—apart from his fame amongst his own disciples and some of their friends—knew little or nothing about him or his Wisdom.

As a matter of fact even the great and well known Teachers, such as K'ung Fu-tze and Lao Tzú, knew very little about each other. Lao Tzú made very little of K'ung Fu-tze, although they had several conversations. On the other hand K'ung Fu-tze, a practical Philosopher, was profoundly impressed with the Mysticism of Lao Tzú. And this is as it should be, for practical or worldly wisdom is but foolishness when compared with the inspired Messages of those who contact the real and Occult Wisdom from the Higher Spheres.

This does not mean that we want to belittle the true greatness of K'ung Fu-tze. Many of his ideas and sayings were truly inspired, and his rules of conduct show real worldly wisdom. None can find fault with such rules as: "The supreme duty is that of the child to its parent." He states correctly that all virtues have their source in etiquette. He says: "The superior man may have to endure want, but he is still the superior man. The small man in the same circumstances loses his self-command."

And further: "The great mountain must crumble."

"The strong beam must break."

"The wise man must wither away like a plant."

(But in the last case the true soul or spirit of man rises superior to the material body and survives eternally, as Li Wang Ho said).

He has also said, when being asked to write down his teachings: "I do not think it necessary for I am but a transmitter, and not a maker."

At the same time he never laid claim to receiving divine revelations which proved his great *intelligence*. This last sentence has a double meaning, and the wise will see its hidden teaching.

One of his best sayings was: "What the superior man seeks is in himself; what the small man seeks is in others."

He further stated that: "Man is greater than any system of [human] thought." (For man has within himself the Wisdom of all the Gods—if he but knows how to contact it, as Li Wang Ho adds.)

K'ung Fu-tze remarked also: "While you do not know life—what can you know about death?"

Here we have the key to his inferiority to the great Mystics: for they know both life *and* death for what they are.

For this reason Li Wang Ho said that: "The true Sage is always happy; for he knows the Laws and sees Divine Justice in everything." And he adds: "Value no things—they are but shadows. Value no worldly teachings—they are but foolishness, and have no substance. Value no ranks or riches—they are food for the empty-minded. But *do* listen to the Voice of Wisdom that rings within your own Soul. Only *that* has value."

Ying Po Ching and his friends had strolled slowly towards the Temple and they now met the Abbot, who told the Mandarin that he had himself read a number of sacred texts at the altar for the benefit of Ying and his household. He added that

this was the third dawn and the ninth revolution, and that therefore he had performed all the necessary exercises for the worship of the Jade Priest, which would bring every blessing, continual prosperity and health and strength. He had also made a sacrifice of twenty-four degrees to Heaven and Earth, twelve for the glory of the Gods, and yet another twenty-four for the Ancestors of Ying.

Now a loud clangour of drums broke out, and the Abbot asked Ying and his friends to go with him to the altar.

He dressed himself in a scarlet ceremonial robe with a five-coloured insignia of rank, and girt himself with a girdle of rhinoceros horn, inlaid with gold and jewelled jade.

When they arrived at the altar a purple-robed lector began to read out the sacred texts of dedication, and prayers for blessings and peace upon the members of Ying's household and upon the ailing lady in especial. Then the rector read out a prayer on behalf of Ying Po Ching in which he spoke of his devotion to Heaven, his thanks for past favours and of the various sacrifices he wanted to offer, hoping that he might be blest by the Five Fortunes and that the gifts of Heaven might descend upon him. He finished up by saying: "I offer sacrifices to the number of a hundred and eighty degrees so that the omnipotent Tao may set all my Ancestors upon the Way of Life. Look graciously upon my petition and grant these blessings. I invoke the Glory of the Three Worlds and welcome the Chariot of the Lord of Ten thousand Heavens. May he grant an everlasting and serene Peace to all my household and grant that the Four Seasons shall be harmonious and fruitful. This in the name of the Tao—the Glorious Way."

In this manner the Teachings of the Lord Buddha and those of Lao Tzú were combined in those early days.

Now a large number of petitions, talismans, charms and papers were brought, the latter of which Ying Po Ching signed,

offering incense also. Again the thunder of the drums rolled forth with the roar of a thousand great lions, and sacred music sounded whilst the Abbot dressed himself in another scarlet robe, embroidered in five colours, and placed red shoes on his feet. Then he took his ivory sceptre and awaited the coming of the Gods at the altar, whilst a bell was tolled at either side of it.

After a while a large table was prepared and loaded with the finest food and wine. A talisman of yellow silk with red characters, to drive away devils, was handed to Ying. It bore the inscriptions: "God has spoken," and "Long Life, Health and Strength." Then the Abbot and his guests set to and enjoyed their splendid repast. To Ying Po Ching the Abbot said: "This is but the first preparation; to-morrow the priest will visit you as promised, and cleanse your house of all evil."

Ying thanked him, and presently they all left the Temple, and Ying Po Ching remarked: "This Abbot is a very learned and holy man. He studied the Laws and Teachings of the Lord Buddha in India for many years, after which he crossed the River of Shifting Sands and the Sea of the Zodiac on his return to this Country. There are not many priests like him here, but the Precepts are bound to spread in time, and the new Religion will find fruitful soil in the Empire of the Son of Heaven."

"Our Master Li Wang Ho says so too," said Glowing Rose, "and many of his sayings are developments of the Buddhist texts and tenets, although our great Sage brings the light of his own wisdom to bear upon Buddha's words, as reported by his Disciples."

"But we should not forget our own compatriot, the divine Lao Tzú," said Moonbeam. "His teachings of the Tao—the Way—are as sublime as any others."

"Yet," interjected Li Ho-Lu, "I always appreciate the wise and quaint manner in which Li Wang Ho helps the pupils

onwards towards the Light of proper understanding; he is so very human, and has not the austerity of K'ung Fu-tze, for instance."

"He has more patience with the ignorant," observed Lai Pao. "K'ung Fu-tze has said that 'He who was not acquainted with the *Shih-King*, the Book of Ancient Poems, was not worth conversing with and that the study of it would produce a mind without a single depraved thought.' Li Wang Ho mentions the last part of this sentence only, and we all know that he considers the first part as a species of intolerance unworthy of a true Mystic, although he would never say so himself."

"This is true," replied Doctor Chu Shih-Nien, "and he also recommends the study of the *Shûh-King*, the Book of Historical Documents; and the *Yî-King*, or Book of Changes; also the *Lî Kî*, or Book of Rites, which is part of the Canon of K'ung Fu-tze. It is a pity that the Ancient Books of Music were destroyed at the order of our Emperor, for I fear that the old style will soon be forgotten."

"The Annals of the Bamboo Books, on History, should ever be studied deeply and with the reverence due for the achievements of our Ancestors," said Magistrate Shu Tong.

"I suggest humbly that, as the day is still separated from the evening by a couple of hours, we take this opportunity to pay a visit to the Master," said Celestial Melody.

All agreed to this, and the whole party went to the place where their sedan-chairs were standing under the guardianship of the attendants and the escorts of soldiers. All entered their chairs and the soldiers, armed with sticks, ran shouting before the procession in order to clear the light and the way for the travellers, whilst the attendants marched on each side.

The rear was composed of attendants and soldiers on horses, and the whole troupe looked as beautiful as a bouquet of glorious flowers in all colours.

Some of the population, recognising the banners of the Magistrate, Silver Lotus and the others, knelt down by the sides of the road in utter silence. And so they proceeded to the City where Li Wang Ho had his residence.

THE WISDOM OF BENEVOLENCE

A benevolent man is the representative of God on Earth. To give out Wisdom is to acquire it and dwell in Peace; for there is a luxury in benefiting others that takes visible shape in the surroundings of the truly wise.

And who did ever hear of a truculent Benefactor? Instead he cheers with kindness the weary earthly pilgrims and his name is engraved upon their hearts for evermore.

Nor is there ever a time when we cannot do a kindness to some one; and every good deed, every kind word, every wise Teaching, is a libation to the Gods and an act of worship to the Deity.

ONE OF THE SAYINGS OF LI WANG HO

CHAPTER 2
THE BENEFACTOR

Within a short time the procession reached the walled town or city of Ping-Liang Fu and entered through one of its Gates, flanked with towers painted in brilliant red and greens and blues.

They had to slow down as the streets were full of various traders. There were the barbers with their portable shops, attending their customers. There were girls selling hot water to wash your face for a few cash, and supplying soap and towels. Numerous sedan-chair carriers ran on their busy errands; there were also fortune-tellers—who can tell from your face and other characteristics in which hour you were born and what fate has in store for you; your ability to pay much or little having no small influence on the good or bad influences they predict! There were letter-writers, who paint the most beautiful epistles “for those who have not the necessary leisure to demean themselves by doing these lowly tasks!” Also cooks, shouting out the names of their delicacies in humorous or other ways and extolling the virtues of their soups, lovely golden noodles, hot chestnuts, grain porridge, toffee apples, pork dumplings with sour-sweet sauces, buns of all sorts and delicious soft pastries; rice prepared in all sorts of quaint and original ways; bean curds; stuffed dates and a variety of other delights. There were street singers and musicians, singing songs melodious or shrill, dolorous or merry, about love and war and other varieties of human activity, according to the immortal texts or of their own invention; and also many people hurrying to and fro on their own business of life.

At intervals the procession had to pass through vermilion painted gates, which shut off the various districts; and so, winding their way through the narrow streets and alleyways, they arrived at last at the home of Li Wang Ho.

They entered the Hall of the Yellow Rose and found the venerable Master in deep meditation in his appointed place as host, floating in spirit in the Middle Zones, and they waited respectfully until he should once again descend to the lower levels and become conscious of their unworthy selves. So they sat down in their places as guests, together with a number of disciples who were regarding the Master with respectful awe and in deep silence. Meanwhile the visitors had leisure to admire, as they had done often before, the furnishings of the magnificent apartment in which they were all foregathered.

There were lovely bronzes on golden tripods, Imperial Seals in glass cabinets, jade incense-burners, and a variety of rare antiquities. The walls were adorned with the stuffed bodies of exotic beasts and birds, so life-like that one expected them to walk or fly away at any moment. There were pictures of the phoenix, bird of happy omen, and of the unicorn, the animal which is always a symbol of Wisdom, and is to be found wherever a Sage dwells or is expected. There was furniture of deeply carved rosewood, and ornaments of clear green jade abounded, whilst the roof rose up in easy grace and was painted with fairy scenes and fabulous animals in gay colours. In a golden shrine stood an exquisite statue of Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy. The porcelain tiles and inlaid floor shone with cleanliness, and a most majestic green and red dragon was seen on the gleaming tiles, writhing across a wild ocean in pursuit of the golden ball of Life. Carved screens of wood, bronze and porcelain stood about and divided the Hall of the Yellow Rose into sections. The rest of the house was divided in the usual apartments according to the generally adopted Chinese plan, so that a stranger on a visit always knows exactly which apartment is the one he should enter on different occasions.

Amongst those present when our group of friends arrived, was the new disciple we have heard of before. He was known

as Lu-shun, and it cannot be truthfully averred that he was of a dignified and prepossessing countenance. He had the facial expression of one who often becomes the prey of very inelegant thoughts, or who becomes lost in deep reveries of a most uninviting order. He seemed restless and impatient at the dignified and respectful silence of all the other worthy disciples, and he was continually shuffling one of his limbs, or giving way to his unpolished thoughts by windy sniffs and sandpaper-like rasps within himself. He tried to hold a whispering conversation with his neighbours on either side, but they replied with a deep sense of no-enthusiasm and remained silent.

At last the Master stirred slightly and gradually he came forth out of His exalted meditations and gazed in silence at the group surrounding him.

All kowtowed the required number of times, and the Sage replied suitably.

Then he spoke, and his voice was sonorous as a golden gong.

"Peace be upon you all, for the mind that dwelleth in Peace liveth for ever," he said.

Like a bursting dam, which cannot contain the swollen spate of angry waters within its boundaries any longer, Lu-shun, in an attitude of no-respect exploded: "When one is pursued by the malignant and incredible effrontery of an enemy who exaggerates all things in the most unendurable manner—like one who says that the one-foot-deep pond has waves fifteen feet high—how shall one suitably exterminate such a gasp-taking liar, Master Li Wang Ho?"

"One should be of humble demeanour in the presence of such a one," replied the Master; "for humility is a rare Wisdom, and only the few who have it understand it. Those who do not understand it are perplexed by it in a most agreeable manner; and the humble one goes away smiling."

"Ha, Ha, Ha," laughed the divertingly ignorant Lu-shun

most unbecomingly and with an entire absence of graceful mirth, his laughter sounding like the cracking of a reluctant nut, "humility indeed, and to an enemy?"

"Yes," replied the Sage, "He who remains humble under all circumstances governs not only himself, but also those of less wit; for the highest form of government is self-control."

Lu-shun was as reckless as a dry twig that walks into the fire and argued again: "Do you mean, then, that one should let an enemy do as he likes, and meet all his insults with undignified humility? This seems like cowardice to me; unworthy of a man of action."

"The truly wise achieve all by non-action," replied the Master.

"How can that be?" asked Lu-shun, greatly astonished.

"Because action destroys that which *is*. Non-action is building with Spirit. Every act committed by any being changes something that was before—or was not. This change, due to action, therefore alters a previous condition. It is no longer the same. Something has been destroyed by action. Or it may have called something into being that was not visible before; in such case it destroys—by filling it up—an open space, which is now occupied by something, and its spaciousness is lost, or gone elsewhere. By non-action we can build spiritual conditions with the aid of the Spirit; Spirit being the true actuality to which nothing can be added, nor can anything be taken away from it. Yet can we use this same Spirit to create in spirit without destroying anything that *was* before. But we can build only with Spirit by non-action, as Spirit is that which cannot act, or be actuated in a material sense."

This should have silenced the inefficient Lu-shun; but that frozen-brained person was still so wrapped up in the imaginary wrongs done to him by his enemy, that with inspiring vehemence he said: "May the Hounds of Hell rise up and bite him from behind; may the Demon Tigers descend from the

Snow Mountains and scratch him in front; and may the great Guardian Dragons of the Empire's Borders surround him and burn him with their fiery breath!"

The other chaste disciples were becoming profoundly deflated of all pleasurable and lofty feelings on account of the inelegant habits and sayings of the non-eminent Lu-shun; things that were completely at variance with their own usually impassive contemplations of the well-bred and graceful contents of their well-ordered inner beings.

One of them said: "No refined person could find intelligent gratification in such a ferocious and indiscriminating appetite for uncultivated language!"

"His lack of courteous polish makes of him a person of unendurable deficiency," added another.

"His attainments are altogether too feeble to tolerate his offensive and indiscreet presence," said a third newcomer.

"Yes," exclaimed a fourth, "and all this in front of the Master!"

"May the Great Comet fall down from heaven and lash you all with his poisonous tail!" added Lu-shun with accomplished perseverance.

"Some unresourceful individuals are so deficient in tact that they cannot converse with an unsuspecting rabbit without mentioning that a venomous and starving serpent is waiting behind to devour it," said another of the disciples.

Silver Lotus and her friends had been a silent but amused audience at this interplay of non-intelligent repartee, whilst the Sage had listened with his eyes half closed, looking deep within the personalities of the speakers.

He now said quietly: "He who displays his virtues possesses none; and he who claims to be superior in wit, polish, manners and understanding when comparing himself with others not so refined is less than the hog, who is *entirely* devoid of wit, polish, or good manners."

The new disciples hung their heads; for although Lu-shun

had behaved like one descended from a race of unmannerly ape-worshippers, they knew that they too had been lacking in dignity and tolerance by permitting their feelings to obtain the mastery.

Lu-shun, on the other hand, was overwhelmed with gratified confusion at what he thought was a great compliment to himself when Li Wang Ho rebuked the others. His countenance wore an expression of dignified satisfaction, for he presumed that the Sage had upheld him in his raging at the enemy.

The Master—however—observed the condition of his mind, and turning to Lu-shun he said pointedly: “Self-righteousness is but moral and spiritual flatulence, my Son; just as hypocrisy is the sanctimonious mask of pious perfidy.”

But the undaunted and completely obtuse Lu-shun replied with a complete absence of highly refined understanding: “As I provide food for my own mouth, I expect it to say only that which pleases ME!!” At this the whole gathering burst out in loud laughter, but Li Wang Ho answered: “This proves that you believe that there is such a thing as Free-Will. But I want you to understand that Free-Will is an illusion of the senses. The Great Laws hold everything in thrall, my Son. This is not Fatalism, but Fact. Therefore: obey the Laws of the Gods. In your own case you are continually offending against the Law which prohibits Hatred, also against the Laws of Love, Humility and Etiquette, which are man-made laws—it is true—but inspired by the refined feelings of the more sensitive and kind sorts of human beings. As such they also have their origin in the Laws of the Gods, and every one should strive to attain to a certain amount of polite behaviour. You should open your mind to the *good* influences instead of the violent ones as you seem to be doing now. And when you open your mind thus, it will have the same effect as that which occurs in some of our Temples, where the doors are opened on the first and fifteenth days of each month, so that the little ghosts can run

away. In your case these little ghosts are wicked little demons to whom you have offered a dwelling-place within yourself on account of your intemperate thoughts. Remember that the Realms of Light and Darkness are so far apart that each has its own sun and moon. But the sun and the moon of the dark regions shed lurid lights which destroy, whilst those of the Light—or the Celestial Realms—give Life. Remember too how the owl—the Symbol of Night—calls to his mate in the dark. At that dread call all the little creatures shiver with fright, for they know it as the voice of silent death which comes on soundless wings. Is it your ambition to attune to the realms of Death and Night—or with Life and Light?"

This time Lu-shun was silent and shuffled about in unease. And not only that, but the dignified and kindly manner of the Sage illuminated the minds of all, whilst some of the newer disciples exhibited an engaging display of the most polished bewilderment.

"It is a distinguished privilege to be allowed to follow in your elegant footsteps, O learned one," said one of the new Pupils. They were now all under the magnetic influence of Li Wang Ho, who found himself surrounded by a discriminating and intelligent assembly of students who followed his intellectual accomplishments with dignified emotions, and he was paid many estimable compliments which he accepted with tolerant good humour.

"We should always be charitable in our thoughts and actions towards all beings," continued Li Wang Ho; "acts of charity are the repayments of old debts—or else insurance premiums for the future."

"Do we acquire true merit, dear Master, when we are charitable?" asked a new disciple.

"The acquisition of merit is as useless a dream as everything else," replied the Sage; "for who shall estimate merit except the wise? who know that it is but a dream!"

“Is it then impossible to know Truth?” asked Silver Lotus.

“Nature is the Great Veil that conceals Truth, my child. In Nature all things are good and all things bad. Therefore to be good or bad is to be natural. This is one Truth. The Great Truths are so simple that no *earthly* intellect can fully understand them.”

“Then,” exclaimed Lu-shun triumphantly, “there was no reason to be ashamed of *my* bad attitude—for I was but natural!”

“No, my Son,” replied the Sage, “you have again mislaid the high-minded intentions I could read within your inner thoughts a few moments ago. Hatred is a form of mental suicide; for he who hates expends his Vital Essences and weakens his intellect. A wise man never hates, but only pities the doer of evil. Thus he gathers strength in his wisdom from the forces expended by his opponents in their evil acts and thoughts, and his mental and vital powers increase according to the strength of his forbearance. Remember also that he who gives way to spite ensures for himself an everlasting Dwelling-Place in the Nether Regions amongst his own kin. *Then* he will learn what true Spite really is.”

But Lu-shun, resplendent in his tiger-like tenacity of will and purpose rejoindered: “Is it not better to be a hammer than an anvil?”

“This is a truly owlish saying,” replied the Sage; “and he who follows the call of the owl dwelleth in the darkness of ignorance—as I hinted at before.”

“Yet,” replied the pugnacious Lu-shun, “One should never be too humble, for he who turns himself into bran will be eaten by the rabbits.”

Li Wang Ho smiled at this and said: “All men are Fools, and fools only have wisdom if they know they *are* fools. The rest are still fools—only more so: for they do not know it. On the other hand when a fool in his foolishness is happy it is cruel

to make him wise before the appointed time. Better a happy Fool than a miserable Sage."

Lu-shun struggled painfully to revive the little intellect he had, in order to find a telling answer to this, but he failed to qualify in a most discreditable manner, to the utmost amusement of all those assembled.

Is it not true that he who expects a mud-hovel to be the home of a great noble betrays the greatest insincerity? For the same reason one could not expect a noble intellect to dwell within the poor shell of clay in which dwelt the mind of the insignificant Lu-shun!

Glowing Rose asked teasingly: "What is true happiness, dear Teacher?"

"A vain man resembles a blind peacock who has lost all his feathers but still struts about proudly in the nakedness of his ugliness and the lack of decent covering for his ineptitude . . . which, being blind, he cannot discern. The stupid regard him with scorn; the wise behold him with a smile.

"But he knows neither scorn nor smile in the blindness of his vanity—and stalks along with vapid mien.

"This is true happiness," replied the Sage with a merry twinkle in his eye.

"And Ambition?" asked Celestial Melody.

"Ambition is the straw which sinks the drowning swimmer in the Ocean of Life," replied Li Wang Ho.

"Furthermore: Moderation in all things is the keynote of true Happiness."

"What is the use of worrying about all these things?" said Lu-shun, who had found his voice again at last. "When a person dies all is over and done with; it is the same as if a light were blown out; no one knows where he has gone to and all speculation about him is useless and has come to an end, as has the dead one himself."

The Sage replied: "He who knows the profundities of true Wisdom is truly enlightened and will endure for ever in that Darkness of Death which is the true Light."

"In that case he would be equal to the Gods themselves," said Lu-shun sneeringly.

"Whatsoever is said of Supreme Deity—that it is not. Whatsoever is said of the Creators—that is in Man," replied Li Wang Ho.

"There is a total and utterly inelegant absence of all refined thought in this person's incapable make-up," said Hibiscus indignantly.

"Yes," cried Wisteria, "and he is possessed of a sublime and quite unnatural ineptitude indeed, dear Master."

"It is difficult, my dear disciples, to gauge the secrets of the Within—whether of Man or anything else. An artist may portray the body of a fierce Dragon; but we do not see its bones or sinews. Likewise it is not easy to discern what the worthy and entertaining Lu-shun contains within himself; nor is he to be blamed for his words of no-wisdom: they do not matter; being like the pallid shapes and wavering flowers we see in the mist; they do not endure."

"Perhaps his head is filled with honourable sawdust, so that his wooden thoughts can neither leave nor enter it," said one of the new pupils, forgetting the Master's previous admonishment.

"The wise hide their tongues within their hearts," said Li Wang Ho, "and the stupid carry their hearts upon their tongues. To upbraid a foolish person is greater foolishness still, for it is like the Buddha of clay preaching to the Buddha of mud. It is as much waste of time as battering in an open door, and so it is waste of time if those not yet rich in diligent wisdom try to improve those who have an abundance of indifferent sense."

The new pupil stood rebuked, and a sense of shame weighed him down like a dragon-dream.

Lu-shun looked sneeringly at the circle of thoughtful and

accomplished countenances with an entire absence of distinguished consideration and respect.

"It is said that the Planets are the eyes of the Heavenly Lords," said the Sage; "no wonder they twinkle when beholding the follies of Man."

"Can it be true, dear Master," asked Heart's Delight, "that the Gods are sometimes too indulgent with persons who have an abundance of self-importance?"

"Perhaps the reason for that one's deficiency in respect-aiding qualities is," observed Moonbeam, eyeing Lu-shun with an entire absence of goodwill—in spite of the Master's words—"that his spirit is wandering in the Middle Air in a condition of no-wit; for he seems to be as full of the most contemptible malignity as Hell is full of Foreign White Devils."

Ying Po Ching, coming to a conclusion which was not repulsive to his inner feelings, said: "If the unworthy Lu-shun were present in any other refined and polished company but this one in which he has now the gratifying honour to represent a non-intelligent particle, and if the person who now speaks were of a disposition of erudite ferocity—which unfortunately he is not on account of the Wisdom-creating Precepts of our Master—I would have him slowly introduced into the thousand-portalled dwelling-place of eternal delight by means of a blunt and saw-like dagger."

It was a very engaging, though tentative, offer, but full of unpropitious omens so far as Lu-shun was concerned, so with many unexpected and highly polished excuses he hastily declined the inestimable honour of having the lingering felicity of being slowly cut into a thousand quivering pieces in this most agreeable manner. His hitherto obtuse mind now became filled with the most un-obtuse and refined gladness in enjoying the Teachings of the Master and the elegant company of the others, to which his nimble tongue—driven by a wholesome fear—gave adequate expression. In some such manner

it is often possible to instil belated Wisdom into a seemingly slow-thinking mental instrument—such as Lu-shun’s—by the delicate and gentle touch of suggestive authority. The conversation ran on smoother lines from now on, and no more undignified and indecorous errors were committed, whilst all were filled with the sunshine of intellectual joy of Li Wang Ho’s Wisdom.

Li Ho-Lu now asked the following question for the benefit of the new disciples.

“What is the Principle, dear Master, that brings the greatest Freedom?”

“It is the mind without desires that has found the greatest Freedom,” replied the Sage. “The mind that fears and worries brings on its own destruction. Only the mind without fear, strife and desire—the mind that has no wish for possessions, and the owner of which possesses nothing—can give freely; for, being without such flaws and blemishes, it is so clear and transparent that all the *good* gifts of the Gods can flow through it in an uninterrupted stream to those who have need of such things. All possessions, such as wealth and honour (though very agreeable to the weak and earthly understanding of most—and *who* is without weaknesses whilst in the flesh?), are impediments to the Higher Mind. The only possession of any real value is courage—for in this is both Faith and Wisdom. He who adds to riches will truly lose them. He who gives freely is truly rich. And he who is satisfied is the most wealthy.

“Further—knowing that all realizations of the material senses are but illusions which have no actual existence, and that we can only interpret conditions according to our own wisdom and attunement with them—why not attune only to Light, Life and Love . . . and forget the rest? Thus we shall have complete freedom from all material complexities.”

“But is it not also advisable to study the Book of Rites—the *Li Kî*—so that we shall never clash with the material Precepts

of ancient Ceremonies and Institutions, and live peacefully and honoured by all?" asked Shu Tong, the Magistrate.

"Of course," replied the Sage, "for so long as we belong to the Community of Shadows in this lower region, it is wise to act our parts in the shadow-drama without creating unnecessary friction with the other shadows, who seem to be as substantial as we seem to be ourselves, if friction between shadows be not a barren play of meaningless words.

"But always remember too that Kingship, Wealth and High Positions are for the young souls only. To them those shadowy things are valuable, as by the right use they make of them they will be elevated to non-possession in their next lives, or degraded to still higher positions . . . until the lesson is learnt properly and they become free of all such dreams."

"And what about Science?" asked Lai Pao.

"All sciences are the Shovels with which inquisitive men turn over the mud of materialism, my Son."

"And are the Arts to be classified in the same manner?" asked Chu Shi-Nien.

"All great Arts are the Voices of the Gods," the Sage replied.

"And how do we approach the Gods?" asked Silver Lotus.

"When a man kneels down to worship he worships the lower, inferior Spirits. If he wishes to adore the Higher he must stand upright and look up."

"Is this the reason why we kneel and kowtow to the Great Ones on this earth?" asked Moonbeam.

"Precisely," replied the Sage drily.

"How can we know our best friends?" asked Lu-shun.

"The three friends of Winter are the Bamboo, the Plum and the Pine. The three friends of Man are Love, Wisdom and Forgiveness," replied Li Wang Ho.

"This is a Truth which even *this* lowly person can now appreciate," said Lu-shun.

All smiled at this, for they had not yet forgotten how

Lu-shun had suddenly acquired this more chastened state of perception. But Li Wang Ho gave Lu-shun a look of benevolent encouragement and said: "Bend to the storm, and you shall be made straight, my Son."

Lu-shun knelt at the feet of the Master, which, remembering what the Sage had just said about the act of kneeling down, raised intelligent looks of refined amusement on the faces of all the others, and, after the Master had told him kindly to resume his place amongst the rest, Lu-shun said: "If all things on earth are but shadows, dreams and illusions, how shall we cope with these puzzling conditions?"

To this the Master answered:

"Happiness is an Illusion.

"Sorrow is an Illusion.

"Better be deluded by the *first* in this and the next Spheres."

"Are all these illusions really needed?" asked a disciple.

"Nature is the Mirror of Creative Will," said the Sage; "it reflects the successes as well as the failures of our Makers under God."

"This is a very complicated saying," replied the disciple; "How shall we interpret it intelligently?"

"To the simple of mind all things are great; and all true greatness lies in simplicity. Therefore the real Sage ignores the great things of earth and finds most virtue in the simple," answered Li Wang Ho, stretching out a hand in blessing.

And now the Master clapped his hands, and serving maidens entered with refreshments for the guests. They brought in fragrant cups of tea, made with boiling water out of snow—and this makes tea in the greatest perfection—and cool olive wine in jade goblets, candied fruit, rosy-faced apples—the symbol of Peace, and white eggs—the symbol of long life, and also red eggs—the symbol of happiness; and all were charitably and agreeably occupied for a while, until the time of parting arrived.

Night was falling; and underneath the turquoise bowl of heaven the guests entered their sedan-chairs in order to be carried to their elegant and distinguished homes.

Time had passed with engaging speed and celerity, and after the many farewells and expressions of gratitude had been spoken, they all departed in the silence of the night, a silence which was broken only by the watchman's rattles, which resound from dusk to dawn and say: "Beware, Robbers! I am Here!"

TRUE LOVE

See how the happy rosebud of early love unfolds its petals and comes to bloom in Heaven!

For is not Love as endless as Eternity, whose Emblem it is?

It is the only religion which never changes; and those who love are surrounded by riches.

Love falls like a golden star into the new-awakened Soul; and love loves because it must.

There is no greater Poesy than Love!

And why resist Love, the Conqueror? Let us yield gracefully, for defeat by Love is sweet.

True love is like the scent of jasmine from an unseen garden in the morn.

It is like honey, sipped by browsing bees on a summer afternoon. And like the song of nightingales at eve when shines the Lover's Moon.

And when the Star of Love is radiant within the sky of night, all other stars are dimmed.

THE DIVINE EMPEROR'S SONNET

CHAPTER 3
THE IMPERIAL MESSENGER

The next day some of his disciples were gathered together at the home of the Venerable Sage Li Wang Ho, namely: Silver Lotus, her sister Glowing Rose, the Mandarin Ying Po Ching, and Shu Tong the Magistrate. They were engaged in animated and amiable conversation, illuminated from time to time by flashes of Wisdom from the incomparable Master.

Silver Lotus wore a magnificent costume, and her glorious hair was embellished with beautiful artificial flowers, made of the shining feathers of the Kingfisher and of softly radiant pearls. Her waist was like the graceful willow, supple, and full of the promise of delight.

Through the open windows the light breezes entered refreshingly and played with her lustrous tresses. Every time she moved there sounded the sweet tinkling of precious jade, and a delightful fragrance of orchid and musk issued from her. She looked like an Angel from the Wu Mountain. Her crimson skirt was trimmed with gold, and she wore a blue coat, embroidered with artistic figures of birds and butterflies.

It was the hour of the dragon, and Nature's fresh and invigorating scents drifted in delicious clouds of soft perfumes through all the rooms; a time of youth and gladness.

Outside the house the Time Stick, made of clay and sawdust afresh each day, burned before a porcelain Bird of Dawn, counting the happy hours.

In the distance could be seen busy labourers digging up the mounds of earth to gather the daily supply of ice, stored away in winter when it is cut out in blocks from the King-Ho River.

From afar came the sounds of melodious little bells sewn in the scarlet collars of the donkeys who were carrying men and women, perched upon wooden saddles, across the country as they were going to and fro on their errands; other folk were

carried in colourful litters, swung between shaggy ponies. There was also heard the creaking of the high wooden wheels of mule carts, studded with glittering polished brass nails, the carts having each a blue cloth-covered cabin in which the travellers sit in cross-legged comfort on sheepskin rugs with which the floor is covered.

Li Wang Ho's delightful home being situated on the outskirts of the town in full view of the river and country, was thus happily placed in such a way that the comfort and protection of the town were combined with the pleasures of the fresh countryside.

Suddenly there was heard the musical sound of a Moon-Guitar, and the pure crystal voice of a young lad intoned the following Aubade:

MORNING SONG

*The wind of dawn played with the violet and rose
When in the perfumed-laden breeze my 'lovéd chose
To welcome with a smile the glowing rays of rising Sun
(Who in a thousand tufts of mist a myriad fancies spun)
Whilst she was leaning from her flower-covered window.*

*And I, who spent the night in blissful dreams of Her
Beneath that very window; dear to me for what it hid,
Looked up at that sweet frame that framed
a sweeter frame, as't were,
Than all the world of imagery could ever image if it came
A million times to the Great Well of all Imagination 'mid
Shining fields and woods and flowers:
But none so sweet as Silver Lotus . . .
As She leant from her window.*

*The Wind of Dawn did hold its breath as soon
As it beheld my Love—pure like the Moon—*

*In that sweet frame;
As She leant from her window.*

*And every singing bird with joy cried out, and rose
In jubilant frenzy to the sky, and chose
A lovely tune—directed to those
Shining eyes
As She leant from her window.*

“O, Lovely!” cried the two ladies; “may we invite the singer to come inside, dear Master?”

Li Wang Ho willingly gave permission, and soon there entered with many bows the young lad who had sung at the Theatre on the previous day to the accompaniment of the Lute.

Kowtowing many times he knelt before Silver Lotus and handed over to her the manuscript of his Song, which she accepted with graceful pleasure.

“Who is the author of this lovely Song, my Son?” asked Li Wang Ho.

“This unworthy person composed it early this morning in honour of the gracious lady Silver Lotus,” the lad replied.

“By what name are you known?” asked the Master.

“I am known as ‘Singing Nightingale,’” said the lad.

“You have a pretty gift of elegant sounding verse and should become an accomplished Poet soon, if you are not such a one already,” replied the Sage kindly. “Where did you learn to write such nice themes, and who taught you to play the Lute and Moon-Guitar?”

“Nobody taught me, noble Master, except the floating birds on their errands in the Middle Heavens; and the Moon’s soft sheen when it rides the silvery clouds; a pair of butterflies at play; the swaying sprays of Blue Wisteria, a-tremble in the wind; or the mysterious orchids, like coloured insects amid the trees. All have a message for the seeing eye of him who dreams of all that’s delicate and beautiful; and these messages

I humbly try to inscribe on satin paper of silken floss . . . but ever do I fail to do justice to their inspiration: for the Gods are strong and Man is weak.”

All were enchanted with the young lad, who had the dark and lustrous eyes of him who sees great visions of glory in Nature’s wonderful creations and dwells apart amongst the coarser kinds of men; the tender soul whose fragrance fills the air with happiness: but who is seldom understood.

“Would you like to visit me sometimes and talk to me of this and that, so that we both may learn to understand the glorious lessons of Nature’s Wisdom?” asked Li Wang Ho.

The lad knelt before him and would not rise till with a loving gesture the Master drew him to his bosom.

The eyes of all shone with emotion, and Glowing Rose remarked:

“How shall the world appreciate such delicacy of feeling as shown by this dear boy? I fear he will be hurt beyond redemption when once he has to tread the human path of non-comprehension in this uncouth realm of being.”

“He will be famous,” said the Master; “and the famous man liveth for ever. He is humble in spirit, like all great artists, and thus he will be crowned: for Humility is the Crown of Virtue. This lad is possessed of preternatural wisdom and intelligence, and his versatile mind is filled with beauty. He is one of those who worship the stars at midnight, and they, as the all-seeing eyes of the Upper-Lords, will cause the Gods to settle with him in full at the end; and lead him into the Palace of the Jade Spirits and the Hall of the Immortals.”

Silver Lotus took from her dress a golden ornament, inset with jewels, and gave it to the lad, saying: “This is a gift from our holy Emperor himself, the Ever-Shining Son of Heaven; I should like you to accept this token of my gratitude; may it bring you everlasting happiness, and may it ever inspire you to stay on the Path of Glory that leads straight to the Celestial

Realms; that Path upon which you have already placed your by no means faltering steps. And always listen to the wise words of our Master and follow his kind advice." And with a delicate caress she accepted him into the inner Circle of favourite disciples.

Utterly overcome, the lad kowtowed before the sweet Silver Maiden and her companions, and made reverences to the great and noble Sage.

The Mandarin Ying Po Ching and Magistrate Shu Tong had been silent but interested spectators during the foregoing little scene, and Ying Po Ching now remarked: "If this lad is going to be a famous Poet, as no doubt he will be, since the Master says so, he should always remember that the greatest honour lies in honest endeavour, no matter what our undertakings be."

"Yes," added Shu Tong, "and those who are famous gain a lease for all future lives, provided that their fame is founded on probity."

"The true poet," said Silver Lotus, "bases his poetry on love, whatever the subject of his Art may be; for if he has no love for his theme himself, the ears and eyes of his audience or readers will be like closed gates or shuttered windows, and the way to the heart and mind be barred by impassable obstacles; for only that which is inspired by love can find its way to man's inner being. The heart ever echoes the melody of love, and without that boon of the Gods, no rhetoric can stir the pulse of true Life in the highest sense."

"Some wise barbarian once said," added Li Wang Ho, "that a wise man's heart is at his right hand; but a fool's heart is at his left."

"What did he mean by that?" asked Ling Po Ching.

"He referred," replied the Sage, "in a concealed manner to the higher and lower principles of Man, the higher of which is the Right Use of the divine heritage which Man derives from on high, while the lower is that foolish animal part of

his being, which rises up from the Deeps (where it resides at the left hand of the Evil One), as soon as a child is quickened within the womb, and clings to him tenaciously for as long as he lives on earth; ever trying to capture his higher part and drag it down to Hell in the end."

And now was heard a tumult without of many men and the clip-clop of horses' hoofs, and Silver Lotus, running towards one of the Moonlattices that opened upon the street beheld a glorious throng of courtiers, soldiers, and hundreds of attendants, carrying Chairs of State and coming to rest before the house of Li Wang Ho.

"Oh, Master," cried Silver Lotus, "it is the Imperial Messenger and his retinue of diligent attendants; they are preparing to enter!"

Li Wang Ho hastily donned his Ceremonial Robes, in order to receive the important visitor, and went to the outer Gate to welcome him; in the meantime sending out his own servants in order to engage bands of musicians, actors, and other performers to entertain the Imperial Messenger and his most important officers.

When Li Wang Ho arrived at the Gate, there was a large procession halting outside. Numerous decorative sedan-chairs, soldiers with pennants fluttering in the wind, men with huge and magnificent umbrellas, military officers, both horse and foot, and other soldiers who had taken up their posts at the corners of the street—isolating the road completely.

Li Wang Ho, who wore his black robes, held together by his ceremonial girdle, went forward to meet the unexpected guests.

The musicians, who had arrived in great haste, began to play and the sedan-chairs containing the principal visitors moved forward so that their occupants might descend at the main Gate.

The Imperial Messenger and his officers wore scarlet embroidered clothes, ceremonial hats and boots and red girdles. They were followed by bearers.

Li Wang Ho's attendants now rolled up the bamboo lattices

and placed screens, decorated with good-fortune-bringing designs, within the Hall of the Yellow Rose. Tables were quickly prepared carrying sweetmeats and all sorts of delicacies in splendid and palate-engaging varieties.

The officers bowed to each other and to the Imperial Messenger and made reverence before Li Wang Ho, who replied and stepped forward again in order to pay his respects to the principal guest, who graciously accepted the greetings. The servants were then called in and they presented Li Wang Ho in the name of the Imperial Messenger with various gifts, such as large cases of important literature setting forth the splendours of the Son of Heaven; heavy rolls of shimmering silks; parcels of specially selected tea-tips of golden colour; precious ink-slabs, such as were used at the Court of the Emperor only; and a variety of other delectable things.

The Imperial Messenger then presented to Li Wang Ho a red visiting card on which was written a graceful message to the Sage.

“We have known for a long time the fragrance of your precious name,” said the Messenger, “and I am very ashamed to bring you such lowly gifts, which you will distribute perhaps among the poor ones of this town. I have yearned long to have the pleasure of meeting you personally, and am entirely distressed that it was not possible to inform you in good time of the honour I would soon have in making your renowned acquaintance. But the Illustrious Son of Heaven sent me upon this very agreeable errand without previous warning, and he was determined to have me present a Golden Message from His Delectable Person to the eternally delightful and perfect Lady, the Silver Lotus, whom He knew I should find at your magnificent Residence.”

Again both made the prescribed number of reverences and salutations, and then Li Wang Ho remarked: “This one is completely shattered by this great and unforeseen—and therefore all the more happy—Honour. But your elegant and marvellous

presents, which this altogether vulgar and lowly person does not deserve in the least, place him under an insurmountable obligation."

"Please do not mention them any further," said the Imperial Messenger. "This person is only too well aware of their insignificance."

"And now," he continued, "may I have the inestimable honour to place the Golden Decree of our Sublime Emperor in the hands of the sweet Lady Silver Lotus?"

Silver Lotus, who had modestly remained hidden behind one of the screens, now came forward when requested to do so by the Sage, and made the graceful bow called "Sapling swayed by the wind."

The Imperial Messenger made due acknowledgements and handed over to her a present of a thousand taels worth of gold-leaf, and then the Emperor's Message.

Trembling with excitement she carefully unrolled the Golden Scroll and found painted within:

THE SONG OF THE SON OF HEAVEN

*Amidst the flowers upon the lea
On top of cliff I gazed
At distant rim of azure sea
Where sky and main
In splendour reign
And, clinging, kissed and blazed:
WITHIN THE LIGHT OF SUN.*

*The pearly cloudlets drifted high
And their reflections from the sky
Shone in the mirror of the Deep
O'er which the sea-mews sailed,
And dipped, and soared, and wailed,*

*And cried, and wheeled in widening sweep
And dizzy curve in circling ring:*

ON SPREADING WING.

*Like Royal Swan my Silver Maid
Did float within the ken
Of inner Bliss; and then
I dreamt of Love's delight
In starry shine of dulcet Night,
When on her breast my head she laid:*

HER LORD AND KING.

*Amidst the flowers upon the lea
Which grace the cliff-top by the sea
Swished soft frou-frou of silken dress;
And, like a Heavenly Caress
Of Angels' Wings, our eyes did meet
In glance of Happiness—so sweet*

LIKE FLOWERS OF SPRING.

*And so my Silver Lotus came
With gliding steps, so daintily;
Her hair a flame, a coronet
To crown her graceful, slender frame,
And, like the sky and azure sea,
In clinging kiss we met:*

AND ALL THE HEAVENS SHONE!

“Oh,” cried Silver Lotus, “this is too much of beauty in one day. What has this humble maiden ever done to be honoured with words so utterly sweet?”

The Imperial Messenger now handed over to her a letter, sealed with the Imperial Seal of Shi Hwang-ti, Son of Heaven.

After asking permission, she opened it and read:

SWEET SILVER MAIDEN,

Come to me in the Garden of Delight on the third day from now, before the day of the Feast of Lanterns.

Your Lover waits impatiently for you. The stars shed benedictions; the Heavens smile; the Gates of Happiness stand open the shining God does beckon from within; enter then with Me.

Come, and fail not, Belovéd.

Entwined like lovers do the vines within the harbour cling their slender tendrils in delight. A happy Omen!

T' IEN T'SZE.

Silver Lotus folded up the precious document and hid it in her dress. With downcast eyes she stood before the Master, who said:

“The Imperial Summons must be obeyed, my child. Go and give happiness.”

And now the guests took their appointed places; and as course followed course the Singers and the Actors and Musicians sang and acted and played and added lustre to that assembly of fortunate beings.

Forgotten by all the Singing Nightingale was left alone behind a screen, and with his blazing eyes beheld the Silver Lotus in her happiness and splendour. Never before had he seen such a display of wealth and festivity. The Musicians had their appointed posts close to the tables. Silver Lotus and Glowing Rose had the task of serving wine to the guests. At various intervals the Actors came forward and performed different short scenes based on the Classic Festivals; such as the Spring Festival of Chêng, when youths and girls gathered flowers at the junction of the Chên and Wei Rivers, and challenged each other in antiphonal Songs, after which they crossed the Wei. As soon as the loving pairs met, they gave each other love-tokens in the form of beautiful flowers—the symbol of

betrothal. This was accompanied by quaint groupings signifying the awakening of Spring in Nature, and Love in the human breast. Then came the ceremony of driving away evil influences, ill fortune and sickness, and the invitation to the superior ghosts to join the inferior.

There was also a representation of the Festival of the Silkworms, and the Actors wore magnificent silk dresses, which each had a name embroidered upon it in red characters. There were such names as "Sheen of the Bird of Heaven"; "Red Sunset over the Green Ocean"; "Summer-morning Glory"; "Dust of the Butterfly"; "The Tiger Fairy"; "Dragon's Fiery Breath"; "The copper-coloured design underneath the leaves when the evening-sun's rays strike upward"; and so on.

Then followed dances in which the performers executed intricate steps and seemed to be as light as thistledown floating on a waft of air.

Delicious dishes circulated all the time in unending varieties, relieved by plates of different kinds of soups in order to aid the digestion in an honourable manner.

The cooks also brought in small slices of roast goose and five different courses of meat. Costly wines, such as Chin Hua, Ma Ku, and Rose wine gave added pleasure and heightened the colour of the guests' faces with rosy, joyous tints.

Hot towels were handed round from time to time, so that the guests might wipe their faces and hands.

The dresses they wore were magnificent. The Imperial Messenger had a scarlet robe, embroidered with a gorgeous peacock; and he wore a girdle with a buckle of pure gold. Others wore scarlet robes embroidered with gold cloud designs, and the tiger and dragon design appeared on some silk robes, held together with costly girdles inset with precious stones.

Each guest had been given flowers and most of the dishes were garnished with flowers too. Precious incense was burned and its clouds drifted about in vision-inviting sublimity.

After the banquet the guests took off their ceremonial robes and rested at ease when they had rewarded the cooks and servants with handsome donations of silver taels.

Singing Nightingale took it all in as if he were dreaming of a Celestial Feast of the Lords of Light and Life in the Upper Heavens, and his heart was filled with astonishment.

Our friends Ying Po Ching and Shu Tong were in animated conversation with two of the officers, and the latter said to his own companion: "I often wish that I could live in the Capital, which really is the only place for people of high standing; there are so many beautiful and interesting things to be seen there, and so many wonderful people one can meet."

"Yes," replied the officer, "since our Sublime Emperor has taken command and made of our Empire the most glorious State of all climes, the life in the Capital is wonderful and full of breath-taking interest. His Golden Palace is the greatest wonder in the whole world, and none could have created its equal before. He directs everything and is the greatest Ruler ever known. He is also a great warrior, and his conquest of the Hsuing-nu tribes* alone will make him immortal."

All this was said with extreme affability, and his dignified accomplishments and graceful manners would have betrayed him as one of the Imperial Palace, even if one had not known his rank.

"May I invite you to my very inconsiderable home next time you visit the Capital? I should be so happy," he added.

"This is too much of a distinction," replied Shu Tong; "but I shall be eternally in your debt, and accept your kind invitation with the greatest pleasure."

"Then let it be when the Lady Silver Lotus comes to the Capital in three days time; perhaps you and your friend over there could be part of her escort?"

* The Huns.

"Only too delighted," replied Shu Tong for both. "It will be an auspicious event."

"I will inform His Highness, the Imperial Messenger," said the officer. "Will that beautiful Lady, the Glowing Rose, travel with her sister?"

"I am sure she will," replied the other.

"Then I should be still further honoured if she would be my guest also," said the officer.

"I will inform her of your wishes, and thank you now for your hospitality on behalf of us all," said Shu Tong.

Ying Po Ching was equally profitably engaged in conversation with the other officer, who occupied a most distinguished position at Court and was utterly competent in all he did. He had spent a considerable time in the service of his Master, and employed many years of honourable toil and assiduous obedience to the rules of courtesy and etiquette in order to fit himself for his great position. He was high-minded, distinguished and disinterested in all things.

"The Sublime Emperor, Son of Heaven and Brother of the Sun and Moon, He who upholds the Four Corners of the World," he said, "has made many improvements in his Realm, such as no one in his position has ever been able to achieve before. All the millions of our new huge Country have benefited materially by his efforts and found greater happiness than they ever dared dream of; but he himself is a lonely man. His House is empty of the Divine completion of himself in the form of a gracious Lady with whom to share his many burdens of State in the secret intimacy of a Royal Spouse, and we hope—being well aware of the intellectual fame, purity and beauty of the accomplished Lady Silver Lotus—that his House may be blest now that he has sent the Imperial Summons."

"I hope so too," replied Ying Po Ching; "in fact we all do, especially the benevolent Master Li Wang Ho, without whose consent she would not act, as she has been his spiritual daughter

ever since she was a small baby, when her parents left for the Upper Regions. She is the apple of his eye, the fortune-bringing phoenix-bird, she who is attended by the Blessings of all the Lords of Heaven wherever she goes. And she has all the necessary qualifications and will bring greater Glory to whomsoever may be her future Lord.”

“When the Master Li Wang Ho was last at the Capital, accompanied by the Silver Maiden, the holy Emperor saw her several times and made diligent enquiries about her,” said the officer.

“The Golden Decree he sent to her, including the Summons, can have only one meaning. I hope she will consent.”

“I know she will,” replied Ying Po Ching; “the Master has already spoken, as you may have heard.”

“We have all heard, and rejoice,” answered the officer; “but, knowing that the final word rests with her, we still felt a little anxious; you have put my mind at rest.”

The Imperial Messenger had been in deep conversation with the Sage for some time, and now he rose and said: “I am happy that we are in full concord, venerable Sir; I will give the Holy Emperor your benevolent message. I must now thank you for your most wonderful hospitality and the marvellous entertainment; I will make full report of our auspicious meeting to my Imperial Master.”

The rest of the guests had also risen and knew that this was the moment of return to the Capital. Ceremonious thanks and farewells followed, and the Sage and his friends accompanied the visitors to the Gate, in order to see them enter their Chairs.

The soldiers and attendants, who had all been lavishly provided for by order of Li Wang Ho, now set in motion and the whole procession commenced on its journey back.

The Hall of the Yellow Rose was again restored to its accustomed air of serenity and peace, whilst Ying Po Ching and Shu Tong also took leave and returned to their respective homes.

Only the Master, Silver Lotus, and Glowing Rose—who had been informed of the officer's invitation—remained.

Behind the screen Singing Nightingale still abode in solitude, expecting to be called forth. It was Glowing Rose who discovered him, patiently waiting, and she took him at once to the Master and Silver Lotus.

"Oh, you poor boy," cried the latter, "I thought that you had left long ago." Turning to the Sage she added: "Can I order a meal for him, revered?"

"Certainly," replied Li Wang Ho, "I too thought you had left, or else I should have asked you to perform before the guests; you would have outshone all the other artists. If you like you may stay here for good; if your parents and other relatives do not object."

"I am quite alone in the world, dear Master," replied the waif. "I have neither parents nor relatives, and dwell wherever the Heavenly Spirits lead me."

"That is settled, then," said the Sage; and he gave orders at once to install Singing Nightingale in one of the guest rooms.

Thus the talented lad had found a haven of protection at last; and in later years, when the fame of his genius had spread from the Imperial Court to every corner of the Empire and beyond (for Silver Lotus soon found an appointment for him when once she was installed as the First Lady of the Land), he often thought with tears of gratitude of the auspicious moment when he had been inspired to compose his first Song in honour of the Silver Maiden.

WORMS AND MEN

What is good fortune . . . or bad fortune?

Both are the effects of previous causes, set in operation by Man himself; or by other men!

But Man is but a tool in the hands of the Gods, and all his works are under the supervision of the Angels of the Gods—the High Gods or the low.

Some men are excited by good or bad fortune; others are calmed. Some are weakened; others acquire fresh strength from good or bad fortune. Either brings out the best and the worst in men . . . if they ARE men!

But the good fortune of a worm resides in the depths of his tunnel; and the bad in the early bird.

But the worm's decision to climb up and be devoured, or go down and be safe, rests with itself: for the gods are not concerned with worms! Therefore a man is the opposite of a worm; for to find REAL good fortune, he must rise upwards and so contact his good Angel; and to find bad fortune he must plumb the Deeps and get in touch with the Devil.

This is the difference between the fortunes of worms and men.

ONE OF THE SAYINGS OF LI WANG HO

CHAPTER 4
THE FORTUNE TELLER

On the day following the visit of the Imperial Messenger, there was a large gathering of disciples at the house of the Sage. All our friends were present, including the inimitable firebrand Lu-shun, as well as other old and new disciples and visitors.

The news of the Imperial Messenger's visit had spread like a sudden inundation of the Hoang Ho, which in later years was to become known as "China's Sorrow," when less masterly hands than those of the T'ien Tsze "Shi Hwang-ti," the present Emperor, directed the Helm of State and neglected the important supervision and repairs of various canal and river banks.

Questions by the disciples were followed by answers from the Sage with the dexterity of the rapid motions of two sword-fighters.

Many oblique allusions were made by some of the newcomers to the visit Silver Lotus would soon make to the Capital, but all direct replies to these sly hints were evaded by an unobtrusive display of dexterous versatility and graceful wit.

The ubiquitous Lu-shun made a more direct attack by saying: "A wife is like a window curtain; when it is faded it is replaced by a new one."

Lai Pao took objection to this and replied: "He who obeys his tongue too often will rue it in the end, as the Master has said."

"When a fool commences to argue, it is better to be silent," said Wisteria, reproving both the last two speakers subtly.

"And to keep a secret, tell neither your friend nor your enemy," added Celestial Melody.

"Spoken like stilted Students of the Imperial Academy of Learning," said the unsquashable Lu-shun with a knowing leer; "or like scribblers from the Forest of Pencils, to give that Institute its more colloquial name," he sniggered.

"It is better to be rich in ignorance in this case than poor

in wisdom," warned Ying Po Ching with a meaning look at the culprit. And he continued: "No one is safe from a storm when sheltering under a trellis; and I cannot perceive even *that* feeble form of protection about the rash personality of the inelegant Lu-shun."

"The fox that has but one hiding place is soon captured," the latter replied with a look of vulpine cunning. "Perhaps," he continued, "this one has more adequate means of self-protection than the ill contrived example of that would-be clever Mandarin's insignificant trellis!"

"That may be so," replied Ying Po Ching once more with suppressed but unmistakable ferocity, "but remember that as death sends his first warning with the first wrinkle, ill-fortune may strike in this instance without any warning at all!"

Lu-shun thought this over and was judiciously silent for awhile, but his feelings became pleasantly savage when—with the eye of his imagination—he saw Ying Po Ching beset by a band of unattractive and torture-intending robbers; or vainly struggling in the hands of the "Four Wicked Ones"—who were once upon a time banished to distant territories by the ancient Emperor Shun. Especially would he have liked to see our worthy and well-meaning Mandarin in the clutches of T'au-t'ié (the Glutton, also called San-miau), the ferocious forefather of the Tribe of the same name, known later as the Tibetans.

Lost in these mind-elevating and spiritually profitable dreams, he failed to notice the entrance of a new character in our story; and not until that person was bowing elaborately before Li Wang Ho did Lu-shun become aware of his presence—taking an entirely unjustified dislike to him on the spur of the moment.

It may well be that the harmless and estimable Lu-shun had been unfortunate that day in the selection of his rice-providing Emporium, and that the ponderous quality of his last meal lay upon his digestive organs like a rock upon an unfortunate imp

of the nether worlds who had misjudged the speed with which this mountain-missile had descended from a higher situation, thus preventing the unhappy elemental from pleasantly torturing a number of merit-deserving humans and so interfering in an unjust manner with his and their amusing destinies. At any rate: Lu-shun was not in the best of amiable forbearance of temper that day, and the newcomer aroused within him all the frolicsome tendencies of one who is afflicted with a malignant devil, suffering from an unendurable demerit.

But for the time being he stilled his surging emotions with the cloak of dignified unconcern and patiently awaited a propitious moment when he could safely make an attack upon the stranger, which would certainly take place after some fortunate omen should announce itself in some entirely unforeseen manner.

The Master, in the meantime, received the well-selected compliments of the stranger with becoming grace and at last he asked him for his name and quality.

It appeared that his name was Wang Ch'ung, and he added that he was the Master of the Yin Yang of a Temple in a faraway City.

Upon hearing this Li Wang Ho turned to Ying Po Ching and asked him if the Priest from the Temple of Everlasting Delight, of whom he had been told, had yet visited Ying Po Ching's household in order to cure the ailing lady.

"Oh, yes," replied the Mandarin; "he came as promised but failed to effect a complete and immediate cure."

"What did he do?" asked the Sage.

"He told us to burn some special incense, and, when it had been alight for some time, he came in and waited for a moment outside the door of the lady's apartment. Then he stepped back two paces and murmured some mystic incantations, after which he entered the room. He then seated himself beside her bed and began to summon all his powers of spiritual vision. His eyes commenced to glow like live coals, and in his hand he

held a naked sword, whilst his fingers were twisted in strange and significant positions.

“Again he murmured an incantation, but we could not distinguish the exact words, and we observed that he had the look of one who can see beyond this world into the realms of mystery and enchantment. Then he took some very special incense out of an ivory box and set it alight in a jade vessel of great beauty, carved with necromantic characters and recondite symbols. When it was burning well and great clouds of strongly scented smoke filled the room he shouted in a loud voice: ‘To me, ye spirits of the second lower Region; come quickly and serve me well!’

“He sprinkled some earth towards the four corners of the world and, filling his mouth with specially prepared water which he drank out of a bottle inside his sleeve, squirted water all over the room. At the same moment a whirlwind of terrific strength and intensity set up, and within this wind we could see the dreadful figures of fearsome monsters, controlled by divine beings.

“He then addressed them and said: ‘I have been summoned to minister to the sick lady you see here before you on the bed. Appeal has been made to my powers of Wisdom and Hidden Knowledge. I command you to bring to me the guardian of the soil and all the tutelaries of this household. Bring them to me, so that I may make examination and learn the reason of this prolonged illness. Hence, and fail me not, nor delay!’

“He then closed his eyes and sat upright upon one of the chairs. Gradually his colour began to change to an earthy greyish blue, as if he were attuning with the domains of the lesser demons. He placed his hands upon the table, and hammered upon it from time to time with a wooden mallet in the manner of a Magistrate who is trying a case. He continued this for quite a while, after which he came back to his normal self and left the room, taking me with him in order to inform me of what he had discovered in the exercise of his great Art. He

told me that the lady was suffering on account of her misdeeds in a previous existence, when she was a famous courtesan.

“‘In those days,’ he said, ‘her experiences of love were only for gain; when one singing bird had sang his sweet serenade another songster came and continued the melody of love; and so it went from year to year until the end.’

“‘What can I do in the way of sacrifice to alleviate her present condition?’ I asked.

“‘Neither you nor I can do anything,’ he replied; ‘for once the mind has taken its pleasures through the body, the body must pay the account in one life or another. It is all a question of what we attune with, and the bonds—once woven—will last until the predestined purpose is fulfilled—and the Gods untie them.’”

Li Wang Ho nodded at this with appreciation, but the Master of the Yin Yang jumped up excitedly and said: “The whole process of the exorcism, as well as the verdict, was completely wrong, my friends.” And turning to Ying Po Ching he said: “On all important undertakings, in sickness or perplexity, you should consult the Master of the Yin Yang. Those ignorant Priests know *nothing*.”

All were silent with astonishment at this rude and unceremonious behaviour, except Lu-shun, who gave a loud snort of derision, provoking mirth in all, even in his polished adversary Ying Po Ching.

“If the person who made the inelegant noise is ill I can burn some very efficient spells and written charms for him, the ashes of which he has only to put in water and drink to be fully cured,” cried Wang Ch’ung insolently. “Or,” he added, looking Lu-shun straight in the face, “if he wants a love-philtre—which is the only remedy for his unbenign facial mishaps—in order to persuade all the reluctant maidens at last, whom surely he has courted in vain till now, I am even willing to be persuaded, *after* receiving my just dues, to assist him in that way also.”

This was Lu-shun's chance. All the omens were set fair; and he felt that the rest of the audience was with him, and that any disapproval-indications in the form of over-ripe lychee and other mirth-provoking articles—if used in the right manner and in connection with the right person—would not pursue their elegant orbits in *his* direction.

“Oh, ill-shapen dayspring of non-intelligence,” he commenced mildly, “have the great philosophers Mo-ti and Mêng-zî not said truly that ‘one lighted candle on a storm-swept plain is better than a City being destroyed by fire?’ Therefore your effete display of surfeit-creating eloquence could be much improved by the use of an occasional yea or nay instead—even if unheard by the rest of this erudite gathering.”

“A person who has the facial characteristics of a bald-seated and mangy gorilla,” replied the polished Wang Ch'ung, becoming somewhat personal in his remarks, “should himself practise the laudable rules of respectful silence, especially when addressing his betters.”

“On the contrary,” answered Lu-shun suavely, “when face to face with a collector's specimen of spiritually bedridden befuddlement, such as is expressed by your own uncongenial presence, one should always endeavour in a gentle and forbearing manner to unfuddle that person's addled wits.”

“That apparition in the shape of a man who once upon a time must have been tall and slender, but who now bulges out on all sides, having lost his height on account of a heavy weight descending upon him in an unforeseen manner, and squashing the very little amount of brain with which he entered this world originally: that man, I repeat (if it *is* a man and not a bad dream), seems to be talking through the soles of his poverty-stricken and worn-down sandals,” suggested the Master of the Yin Yang with an entire absence of clear-headed appreciation.

“Please, listen to me, ladies and gentlemen,” he said disdainfully, turning to the others, “and let me explain to you

the great powers and learning of a Master of the Yin Yang such as I am myself.

“Each person has eight characters of his destiny, and these are explained in all their various modifications and combinations in the Black Book of the Master of the Yin Yang, so that he—in his complete knowledge of all the lore of the Magical Arts—can foretell not only the destiny, fate or lot of any person in his present life, but also can he go back into the past incarnations and read the full story of all that has ever happened during his millions of previous lives. Not only that, but he can forecast the honours, dishonours, ranks, riches or poverty of all the coming incarnations as far ahead of the present time as his client is able and willing to pay for. But he does *not* run accounts to be paid to him in future lives of splendour, when in *this* instance his would-be client is devoid of the necessary taels!! We expect cash on the spot and in advance.

“He knows every auspicious and inauspicious moment, hour and gong-stroke during the twelve hours of each day, and advises on the happy times when all the Gods smile on him who has been initiated by the Master of the Yin Yang on all that should be done or not done at all times, or when the Spirits frown with the displeasure of Heaven on those who have not consulted him, or not paid their just fees to him in advance.

“Of Masters of the Yin Yang there are different grades; and of the lowest grade is he who hangs outside his dwelling-place a sign upon which is written: ‘Here by the aid of the divine and blessed Book of Changes, are interpreted the Holy Decrees of Destiny. The fee is ten cash.’

“Such so-called ‘Masters of the Yin Yang’ are but *low* poltroons and charlatans, whilst the Great Initiates, such as *I*, belong to the *High* ones!!”

“Hear, hear,” murmured Lu-shun, rousing a subdued titter, caused by gravity-removing thoughts, from those who understood his meaning.

Turning his uninviting front away from the interrupter, and

presenting his tempting back to him, which produced an almost intolerable itch in Lu-shun's lower extremities, the "Master" of the *High* poltroons and charlatans of the Yin Yang continued: "We can prescribe the most wonderful cures for any illness coming, staying, or going; especially for the ladies, and I have a miracle-producing pill here, made of honey, rice-spirit, spurge, liquorice, kang-sha, coriander-flowers, pinella and powdered almonds, which will cure any vapours, hot or cold, attacks made by little demons chasing each other within the middle frame, cold feet or hot heads, dragons biting you in the sides, discomposing spasms in the lower or cranium-cleaving pains in the upper regions. Only ten ch'iens a *box*, but worth ten tael each! Take one every night and morning in hot camels' milk till cured or otherwise." Putting his hand in his capacious sleeve he produced as by magic a number of boxes and held them out invitingly to the disciples—but there were no offers.

"Appropriate presents will be made to the Master of the House according to well-omened sales," he added persuasively; but still without effect.

"I can plainly discern that all those who are so fortunate as to dwell within the shadow of such a benevolent Sage as the Master Li Wang Ho," he said adroitly, "are not in need of cures, as the Master's lassitude-dispelling radiations provide for all emergencies, at least as far as the ladies are concerned."

Turning round he continued: "A dosage of efficiently prepared white cockscombs, mixed with powdered charcoal and Kola Nuts, and taken with copious draughts of strong hot wine, is one of my special medicaments for faltering gentlemen when in the discriminating presence of persuasive, highly accomplished and beautiful ladies.

"It is the favourite nightcap of the famous ascetics of Thelema. Only five ch'iens a large container."

Again there were no offers, but instead a deadly silence. Everyone looked expectantly towards Lu-shun, who did nothing, except grin in a very knowing and amused manner; as if

he read more in the allusion to the "ascetics of Thelema" than any one else present!

"As it seems far from non-evident that everyone here is in the full possession of good health and all his powers, we will now tell you a little more about our methods of forecasting the future to clients worthy in every way of our intelligent trust in their benevolent integrity. For this we use the calculations upon the abacus, the spinning spirit-tortoise, the Black Book already mentioned, the mystic knuckle-bones, the omens from the entrails of birds and other animals, and a host of others. But my own favourite method, showing the highest mastery of our Art possible, is reading your hours of birth and death from your moles, shape of nails, your face, eyes, ears, brow, hair, lips, and the manner in which they are all placed in various positions upon you. I tell you from your height, your size, your gait and your speech what you can do, have done and should do to bring you success and happiness; and also how to destroy your enemies."

Lu-shun twitched all over at this, but regained his composure immediately by a truly masterly effort.

"For instance," said the "Master" of the Yin Yang, looking at Wisteria, "this lady's animal is the hare, in whose hour she was born; she likes novel things and beautiful garments and is a great eater when things are to her liking. She will have three husbands, eight children, and die at the age of ninety-five in the hour of the tiger.

"This lady," he continued, looking at Heart's Delight, "is of a loving disposition. Her animal being the snake she will have two lovers at the same time and wind herself around their hearts in the true serpent-like manner, and crush them with her devotion in the end. She will die at the age of forty in the hour of the monkey, revered by all."

Turning to Glowing Rose he said: "This lady was born in the hour of the sheep. She will become the ewe-lamb of a man in high position at Court and dwell in splendour for the rest

of her life. She will join her ancestors at the age of eighty-six, leaving behind her a multitude of Sons, Sons of Sons, and Sons of Sons of Sons, and they will make merry at her Tomb, and she will enjoy listening to the echo of their happy talk and the joyous music of their laughter during the Feasts of the Ancestors and on many other occasions; for the dead like to hear such things—reminding them of happy times in their previous lives.

“The next three ladies,” he said, looking at Moonbeam, Hibiscus, and Celestial Melody, “will all make happy marriages and will be the Great Ladies of their husbands who will all have many concubines over whom these three ladies will rule in strict benevolence. Their animals are the Rat, the Horse, and the Dog; and they will all live to a great age.”

Directing his gaze now to the Silver Lotus he said: “But this lady has the most glorious Destiny of all; for her animal being the Ox she will mate with the mighty Tiger, whose Shield is the Dragon, holding down the Sun and Moon, lashing the Heavens with his powerful Tail, and snarling at the Four Corners of the Earth. At each snarl the Barbarians flee in awe-struck hordes, and his Dominions will be free from invaders for as long as he lives by her side.”

The intelligent gathering realized by this time that the wily Wang Ch'ung had come to the meeting-place well prepared with all the necessary facts needed to make an impression of well-omened omniscience, leading perchance to large rewards from those to whom he had disclosed such agreeable futures, or even to an appointment as Court Magician—should the gratified Silver Lotus, for whom he had predicted such wonderful things (or even Glowing Rose), wish to reward him in this way if all came to pass as he had foretold.

The Magistrate Shu Tong now asked him: “Why do you seem to hold in such small respect the Divine Book of Changes and give your predictions without consulting this infallible

source of knowing what the past, present and future hold for us? Please give us your reasons and tell us what you actually know about the Book itself."

The "Master" of the Yin Yang looked utterly nonplussed and was at a loss for a suitable and dignified reply, for when he had described himself unwittingly as a *High* poltroon and charlatan he had but spoken the truth—although by accident—with this reservation: that he did not even belong to the High ones of that ilk, who have expensively furnished establishments in the most luxurious part of the Capital, and spread their "fame" by means of costly "Make knowns" in the most aristocratically painted sheets, which they distribute at all the homes of the wealthy, where likely tael-producing clients may lurk. And before they thus inform the gullible rich of their existence, they lubricate in the most dignified manner the ever ready palms of their engaging myrmidons. (Thus they proved that they had nothing to learn from their modern successors in roguery, and that in order to reach the ever suspicious ear of the affluent, one must first satisfy the voracity of his flunkey's maw, gorge, or pouch.)

The Master Li Wang Ho—ever kind and considerate, even if he should discover a thief in the act of stealing his most treasured and precious pieces of jade—(for, after all, what is the use of such purely material things, except for their associations with dear friends, or past history?), now came to the rescue of poor Wang Ch'ung and said: "The *Yi-King*, or Book of Changes, is used for many different kinds of divinations. It gives a theory of the phenomena of the physical Universe, and of moral and political principles, by the trigrams and the different lines and numbers of the hexagrams of Fu-hi. Almost every sentence in it is enigmatic. No Chinese critic or other student of our literature has ever been able to give a satisfactory account of the Book. The last literary work of the divine K'ung Fu-tze was to base upon it his Annals of Lu; the title of which is the

Ch'un Ch'in, or Spring and Autumn, in which the events of every year are digested under the heads of the Four Seasons; and it deals with the events of 242 years."

Doctor Chu Shih-Nien added: "The Book of Changes is the only part of Chinese Science which has ever been equalled by the White Barbarians; for there was a Philosopher and Sage with the heathenish name of Pythagoras who taught the Science of Numbers to his pupils at about the same time as our Book of Changes came into being."

"Perhaps," observed Li Ho-Lu, the Merchant, "this white Philosopher was a pupil of our own Sage who constructed the Book of Changes?"

"Or," conjectured Lai Pao, "they may have studied in China under the same Teacher? No wonder that but few of the White Devils have ever been able to understand, or believe in, Pythagoras' teachings for the last few centuries."

The Master Li Wang Ho, in his benevolence towards all—even Barbarians!—now said: "The Wisdom inspired by the Heavenly Ones is not restricted to one clime only. But it is true that there is a remarkable analogy between the fragments about the elements of Numbers, which are the Elements of Realities to Pythagoras, and much of the Teachings of the *Yi-King*."

"But," he continued, "do not consult the Gods about the Future, for if it were good for you to know it you would already know—and the need for asking be past. There are many persons who are in the habit of consulting well-disposed Witches and tolerant Wizards, but the unintelligent person is he who daily consults the stars for good fortune but fails to notice that his house is collapsing on top of him. Such a one deserves to be called obtuse. And when a person has been burned to death, it is useless to consult the Master of the Yin Yang as to the meaning of this omen."

Wang Ch'ung, being really a person with a surplus of inefficient wit, had listened to all this with a perplexed air. His labyrinthine mind contained a heterogeneous mass of elevating

misinformation, but of real knowledge he had little, and his head was full of misshapen ideas, upsetting—apart from a certain amount of native cunning—the inelegant balance of his misdirected efforts at thinking. So now he was wavering between two utterly uncongenial states of uncertainty and he did not know what to do or to say to save the rather mirth-deflecting situation, as far as he himself was concerned.

Lu-shun, who had been looking with unmistakable gloating at the unfortunate "Master" of the Yin Yang, now remarked suavely: "This can only be grasped by those who carry high-crested domes beneath their ceremonial hats."

Wang Ch'ung spun round, and facing the last speaker, proclaimed bitterly: "Only one sprung from a long line of ancestors who were all he-mules could make such an uncouth suggestion!"

Lu-shun retorted in the most amiable manner: "You should use the upper part of your head more instead of the lower; but as it evidently contains a moss-grown brain—if any at all—it would be useless, I suppose."

"Oh, you, bankrupt of truth," shouted the now completely exasperated Wang Ch'ung, "if you raise your unmelodious voice again it will be as awkward for you as the opening of a wrong door in the dark." And he added maliciously: "I am surprised that you, as a disciple of the wise and forbearing Sage, Li Wang Ho, should have profited so little from his Wisdom."

Lu-shun replied calmly: "I note first that you threaten me; but though you may be a menace, you will never become a danger to this person. Secondly, you are surprised! But remember that after fifteen minutes of continued surprise, the mind refuses to be surprised any longer and takes everything for granted. And if you think that this person who now does you the honour of speaking to you has not benefited from the great Wisdom of our benign Master, remember too that there is no end to the road of scepticism if one has such an argumentative mind as you. But as you are only a man, and

not the great magician you would have this refined gathering believe, it is obvious that your mind is not interested in either the recondite or the obvious."

Meanwhile Lu-shun had kept a wary eye on the Mandarin Yin Po Ching, in case that capable and very determined Official should take exception to his wordy opinions again and make further temperature-raising suggestions of exquisitely thought out punishments, as he had done twice already. But as a fair wind seemed to blow from that quarter he took a chance to continue the pleasurable and dignified conversation with his opponent—perhaps thinking at the back of his mind that he was dealing with his original enemy.

Wang Ch'ung, on the other hand, having already forgotten what the Sage had said a few moments before, tried a new form of tactics, and with ingratiating persistence he offered Lu-shun to discover to *him* what the future had in store as far as Lu-shun was concerned; for he could see—he said—that Lu-shun was born in the Hour of the Pig—which might lead to all sorts of diverting possibilities. But that wily individual was just as agreeably pugnacious in his verbose refusals to learn the great secret.

"Nay, O reconstructor of misfortunes," he said at last, "I do not wish to benefit from the trivial froth that arises out of your obsolete understanding; I am not interested in a forecast of the future by a concave-brained individual. If the mother-toad thinks her young beautiful, what must *your* mother—if you ever had one—have been thinking of you?"

Wang Ch'ung replied sneeringly: "Your unnecessary lips, oh, inadequate Lu-shun, are running over with the wisdom-destroying iniquity of your superfluous mouth."

"And the light of your erudite lack of comprehension is like that of a burnt-out joss-stick, lying in a wet gutter on a pitch-black night," replied Lu-shun tolerantly.

Inspontaneous glimmers of a slow-burning and smoky intellect smouldered in Wang Ch'ung's incapable brain, and in

acrimonious confusion he groped anxiously within the globigerinous ooze of his dull imagination for a suitable rejoinder, with which to crush as with an irresistible hammer-stroke his equanimity-diverting and tantalizing opponent once and for all.

"May your goat swallow your pig-tail," he exploded at last in hopeless confusion; swallowing immoderately several times himself.

All had been listening to the elegant dialogue with the greatest amusement, and one of the disciples said to Lai Pao, with reference to the "Master" of the Yin Yang: "His education might be described as unpruned to a small extent."

"Why to a *small* extent?" enquired Lai Pao.

"Because there is so little of it," replied the other with aristocratic abandon.

This short pause gave Wang Ch'ung a chance to make a last effort to collect his shattered wits, and with absent-minded ferocity he said to the others with reference to Lu-shun: "His elastic morals are so overheated with wrong conduct that they could grow toad-stools on an iceberg!"

"And I," replied Lu-shun, "should like to initiate our worthy 'Master' of the Yin Yang as painfully as possible into the, to him, unfathomable mysteries of inelastic and strict morals; and that with the utmost of dignified malice. It is evident that the rat-infested region, which the 'Master' Wang Ch'ung thinks is his brain, is so full of the well-digested remains of those rodents' meals that it could be usefully employed for the benefit of large tracts of land under cultivation, which might otherwise be non-productive. This is the only use *I* can see for the doubtful matter now stored between his eyes and his pig-tail."

All that poor Wang could do after this last sally was to gulp noisily and often, whilst Lu-shun settled down more comfortably and with a feeling of great well-being in the cushions on his chair.

"If the two fiery opponents would only direct their inventive

faculties and imaginations to higher things they could be of great assistance in improving the worlds where fine thoughts are appreciated," said the Master Li Wang Ho at last. And he continued: "They do not seem to know that if you have an opponent you should honour him, so that he shall be satisfied . . . and degraded."

"Master," said one disciple, "how is it that you welcome all, even the unworthy? Is this wise, for might not an unworthy one do you an injury at some time?"

"No, my Son," replied the Sage; "as no wise person ever injures another, so are the others unable to hurt him. Therefore the truly wise are able to welcome all men."

"Then," asked the disciple again, "may an unworthy person freely misbehave in front of a wise man without let or hindrance?"

"Certainly not," replied Li Wang Ho; "the laws of etiquette should be observed by all, and those who know the rules may rebuke and instruct those who offend; for it is their duty to do so."

"And if one repeatedly breaks all the rules of good behaviour, what then, dear Master?"

"In such a case he is unworthy to remain in the presence of the wise, and he should be sent away. Kindness and good behaviour make for joy; bad manners for sadness. But no one can prevent either joy or sadness from coming when they will: for life is made up of both."

"What is the difference between a wise man and a stupid one, dear Master?" asked another disciple.

Li Wang Ho replied: "If you are wise enough to know how to blow into a flute in the proper manner, you produce a beautiful sound. But if you are stupid enough to try the same with the hilt of a sword, you produce nothing but a wheeze.

"This is the difference between the Beauty of Wisdom and the windiness of Stupidity."

Silver Lotus asked now: "How can one best put into words the beauty of wisdom so that all men may benefit?"

To this the Sage replied: "The raven croaks, the ass brays; mice squeak and tigers roar. It is the only way they have of making themselves heard, and we all know which animal is speaking, for no one could mistake the bark of a dog for the singing of a bird. But we seldom know what they are actually trying to express.

"To be able to hear the Beauty of Wisdom in a wise man's utterance needs greater wisdom still; so how shall one who has little wisdom know the full significance of the beautiful words of the Wise? For behind the words of the wise man lies a greater Wisdom than can be put into words.

"Words are employed to convey ideas; but when the ideas are apprehended, men forget the words. Therefore the wise man does not concern himself with the beauty of wise words—but with the Wisdom which resides in perfect ideas only."

"Would you please, dear Master," asked Lai Pao, "explain to us once more the difference between the generous man and the miser? This disciple believes that it might interest our new friends."

To this the Sage replied: "The truly generous person needs lofty genius controlled by stern wisdom, softened by clemency and sweetened by amiability always give with a wise smile!

"A mean person is the embodiment of prideful arrogance, base craftiness and low cunning, which, on account of his spiritual pauperism he mistakes for caution."

"And what," asked another disciple, "are the main principles of human life and death, dear Master?"

Li Wang Ho answered: "As the shadow is dependent upon the light and the substance, so is man dependent upon the Light of the Soul and the substance of the human body: each having their own part to play.

"And when the shadow of a man—which is his body—fades

away in the Night of Death, it descends to the lower regions; while the Light of the Soul ascends to the Higher: and the Light is Eternal, whilst the Shadow is not.

“And though there can be no shadow without a light, the Light is not dependent upon the Shadow.”

“How different,” remarked one of the disciples, “are the Master’s words from those of the two windbags who quarrelled so unseemly. It seems to me that these two have been wasting our time.”

“No, my Son,” replied the Sage, “Time is like a gigantic and unknown Element, just as Space. These *may* be the great mysterious sixth and seventh Elements, which for untold millions of years will remain beyond the understanding of mankind, which, so far, knows only four, with a fifth—called Æther—just looming on the horizon of human thought; but whether humanity will ever fully grasp its deep significance is another matter.

“Time stands fixed for ever; immovable from all Eternity to all Eternity! To think that Time moves forward or backward, or can be ‘wasted,’ is just as great an error as thinking that Space has Dimensions. All material things move within Space and Time, both for ever invisible to mortal eyes. Thus I repeat: Space has no dimensions and Time does not move. Even the thought which connects the term ‘Eternity’ with Time is wrong; for it implies another Principle in connection with *moving* Time; and a ‘principle’ implies a beginning and an end. There must have been—according to this thought—a moment when Eternity commenced as a Principle; but, as nothing that humans can conceive endures, the Principle must wear out and cease to exist in the end. Time and Space in order to *BE*—cannot exist in the manner imagined by mankind any more than what they imagine Water, Earth, Fire and Air to be. If mankind could truly know—in its human and earthly form, and with the use of its earthly intellect—the true nature of Time and Space (which do not *exist*, although they may be

elements), mankind would be the equal of the One Supreme Deity, the One Life, the Divine Source of all that is and is not but *seems* to be; and as such it would be immeasurably wiser than the Lords of Heaven—the Creators—themselves.

“Let us ask ourselves a few questions:

“Does Form exist? No, it is an illusion.

“Does Light exist? No, not as *we* know it; nor darkness.

“Does Deity exist? No, not as Man can conceive Him; for He—or IT—is unknowable. Therefore HE has no Being to Man; for Being implies a Personality, a beginning and an end. There is neither of these to Deity, Light, Darkness, Space or Time.”

“What, then, *does* exist, beloved Master?” asked Silver Lotus.

“Nothing that exists, IS, my child; only THAT which has no existence in Man’s ideas of God, Time, Space, and so on, is real and actual.”

“Then,” said Silver Lotus, “that which has existence *outside* Man’s thoughts: does *that* exist, dear Master?”

“No, it does not, for the fact of its existence would make of it too an Illusion.”

“How are we to understand this, dear Sage?”

“It cannot be understood; for the moment it IS understood, it ceases to BE.”

“Does it cease to BE because we bring our thoughts to bear upon it, dear Master?”

“Yes.”

“Is Man equal to God, though on an infinitely lower scale of perfection?”

“Yes.”

“Does God think?”

“Yes, the Creators think.”

“Therefore: Man being in a sense equal to the Gods, or the Creators, does Man also think?”

“Yes.”

“Then—if both God, or the Gods and men think (they

being of the same affinity), why does Man's thinking negative all, and not the Thoughts of the Gods?"

"Both the thoughts of Gods and men are Illusions: and as soon as they seem to take form they *must* fade out at last and can have no further Being."

"Yet, dear Master, the Universe under God *is* called Eternal; and we are also taught that Man's Soul, being part of God, is Eternal too."

"This is perfectly true, my child, but it brings us back to the beginning of our argument. Neither Eternity, God, Space or Time (and therefore the Soul of Man) *can* exist as conceived by Man; as Existence, Time, Space, God and Eternity must have had a beginning in order to manifest—and therefore they will and must have an end. For this reason, none of these are what Man thinks they are; and so they *are* not! Thus I repeat: the moment Man thinks, images, or imagines these States of Unfathomable Mystery, he creates and destroys them at one and the same time; just as the Gods do when they use their imagination or their creative faculties."

"Then," asked Silver Lotus, "*what* are we to believe in—if God, Eternity, Existence, Space and Time do not exist?"

"We must believe, and know, dear daughter, that there is One Source, One Life, or One Hidden and Unknowable Supreme Deity; although IT has no existence. From IT all springs, without diminishing IT, and to IT all returns, without adding to IT, when it has done with the Illusions of Being and having *Existence*. This is the One Truth, and there is none other. Yet, in that inconceivable non-existence and non-being lies hidden such an Ineffable Glory that Man would be truly equal to the One Deity, or the One Life, if his mind could attune with that Divine State and fully understand.

"The amusing but futile arguments of the two whom the disciple over yonder said were 'wasting our time,' illustrate to some extent my meaning; and for that reason alone did I permit them to argue as they did. Each has built up in his

mind a picture of the other's state of mind and being. Both are wrong, for persons such as they conceived each other to be do not even 'exist.' Therefore: what they imagined about each other has no existence any more than any other beings they imagine or see with the eyes of their earthly minds, or with their physical eyes, have any actual existence. The moment they created the attributes, mental and physical, of their opponents, these attributes were doomed to fade out and cease to be; for they *existed* only in their imaginations. It is the same with the Grand Imaginations of the Holy Creators, reflected in the mind of man by the medium of the Great Mirror of Nature. It is the same imagination, but on an infinitely higher scale, and seemingly eternal in its effects; still, it *is* imagination or creative imaging from the Mind of the Hidden Logos, which is the First Emanation of the Supreme and unknowable Deity, and of the Sons of Light: the Self-born Progeny of the Hidden Logos. They are His Viceroy, called the Creators, and the imaginative imaging of these Lords of Life is based upon the prototypes of all material things and beings 'existing' in the Light of the Higher Worlds or Planes of 'Being.' These creations are given imaginary existence by that faculty of Man (and to an extent of all sentient beings) which enables Man to reflect back to Nature, from his own mind, that which he believes he observes *in* Nature. By giving it this imaginary existence he *adds*, as it were, to the predestinations of these *phantoms* (for—being pure imaginations of the Gods—they are such, and they *must* inevitably be dissolved into nothing that is perceptible under *any* conditions at some time or another), and Man thus helps to doom them to fade out like a mirage in the end—as he is meant to do.

“It is taught in physics that nothing exists which is not according to Nature; you will now have a better understanding of what this saying really means, though its author was not aware himself of what he was saying when making this statement. Such persons never do!

“Remember also that Man, or any other being, can only reflect those Thoughts of the Gods with which his state of inner evolution allows and enables him to attune. The lowest evolved can only reflect as in a dream the images and imagings of their own kind. Those a little higher evolved may reflect some of the material aspects of Nature which attract their animal instincts and necessities; and so on . . . until we find the highest evolved Man who can reflect the Thoughts of the Gods themselves in almost all their Sublimity.

“When such a man meditates on the Elements, for instance, which the average man knows, or seems to know to a small extent, he may come to the following conclusions:

“Water is the incarnating, negative Spirit of the Higher Mind and the higher Emotions.

“Earth is the incarnating and evolving shadowy Matter of the lower mind and bodily senses.

“Fire is the Life-giving, positive Principle of both the first two.

“Air is the sustaining Principle of the previous three.

“Æther is the Principle (or Element) in which all bodies float and have their Being. Perhaps it is the bodiless substance of the Souls of Gods and men.

“Time surrounds and holds fast immovably in its grip the illusion of *duration*, pervading the *seeming* Cycles of Spirit and Matter (which are ONE); yet allowing perfect Freedom to all it surrounds and pervades, and through which it courses in waves of motion, or vibration, though in itself not subject to Motion.

“Space is the Body of the Hidden Deity (which yet is bodiless) in all ITS inconceivable Majesty and Grandeur.

“These Seven Elements are all, and THE ALL, interwoven and moving by means of the unknowable Spirit of the All-Father–All-Mother (the true Source of Man’s Soul), the Sublime Paraclete, inconceivable to both Gods and men; for conception

would give them shape and form, and therefore substance—which it has not; and *if* IT had then IT would be mortal or subject to change . . . which is impossible.

“In some such way Man might reflect the Thoughts of the Creators; but these thoughts are still reflections, no matter how elevated their Order; and though they *seem* to exist, they *are* not! And if they *were* they could not exist!

“Apply these and similar ideas or principles to Space, Time, Eternity, Existence and God by means of your own meditations; it may be that it will help you to understand that which I am trying to convey.”

“Yet,” sighed Silver Lotus, “we seem *very* real!”

“Place the accent on ‘seem’ instead of ‘very,’ and you will be nearer the truth, my child,” said the Master smilingly.

Singing Nightingale had listened to Li Wang Ho with the utmost attention, and he shyly said: “What the Master has just told us explains the ‘Birds of Vision’ which I have often seen flying at night. They rise up in the sky, and their silvery bodies disappear right into the Moon, and they sing the most lovely melodies the while. When they are gone entirely, the blue Wings of the Night fold up—and all is silent.”

“Only a real Poet and Mystic can see these Birds,” said Li Wang Ho, “for they are particles projected from his own mind, after his imagination has imaged them.”

“And,” continued Singing Nightingale, “all the Planets and the Stars are the Birds of the Imagination of God! There they fly in the Night-sky and sing their Music of the Heavenly Spheres . . . until they too shall disappear into a Greater Moon, and the Universe of Time and Space encloses all that sleeps with its protecting Pinions folded around That which *was* . . . not . . . but has been translated now in Bliss Divine.”

“Thus,” said the Master, “does the Swan of Light descend and hover over the Mind of the Initiate, selected by the Angels.”

And deep silence reigned within the Hall of the Yellow Rose

THE FETTERED FAVOURITE

A Favourite is he or she who catches the eye of the superior man or the regard of a God.

To accept a favour is to sell one's freedom, as it is said. But if we accept favours and return them with interest we shall have enlarged our freedom.

If a man grants a thousand great favours to a person and then refuses him one small boon: only his last refusal is remembered.

Therefore there is no end to the granting of favours if we wish to retain the goodwill of our favourites.

But if a favourite loses the favour of his benefactor, he shall be more debased than he was before he received the first token of goodwill from his patron—be it God or man.

ONE OF THE SAYINGS OF LI WANG HO

CHAPTER 5
THE FAVOURITE

The day following there was a great influx of visitors at the home of Li Wang Ho. They came to present their respects to the Lady Silver Lotus, and to congratulate her on the high honour she had received from the hands of the mighty Emperor. Good wishes were as plentiful as the eggs filling the nest of a she-dragon—and nothing could be more numerous or auspicious! Excessively prosperous and round-bodied merchants and their opulent wives and many other ladies elbowed each other in plump profusion; bringing lavish presents of all sorts for the Favourite Lady of the Son of Heaven; each with a number of servants carrying the finest examples of their various trades; all with eyes alert for fortunate omens, indicating the bestowal of the coveted Sign of the Rampant Tiger, which shows that such and such a one, exhibiting this fame-proclaiming heraldic shield above the entrance of his Emporium, is entrusted with the profit-procuring supplies of the household needs of the Imperial Court. Each brought lovely “Treasures of Charm,” or “Make-glad” pieces, such as fans, perfume boxes, sheeny pearls, jades, ivories, rolls of poetically named silks, sculptured screens, parcels of glossy silk paper, precious and rare incense, sable skins, tablecloths, kerchiefs, embroidered silk handkerchiefs, boxes of candy or preserved fruit, flowers, preserved dainties such as dried shrimps, ducks, geese, and many other things too numerous to mention.

The Hall of the Yellow Rose was continually stacked with all sorts of delightful things, and the servants kept on running to and fro in order to place all these treasures in spare rooms.

To every person bringing presents Silver Lotus said: “You should not have done so much; I really cannot see how I can accept your generous gifts; it is too good of you, really,” and so on.

The invariable reply was: "These are only a few trifling things; I am really ashamed of their unworthiness," and other polite phrases, as etiquette demanded.

Silver Lotus looked as lovely as a tree of jade in Paradise, and all the visitors gazed at her with admiration. She wore a hairnet of gold-thread set with hundreds of pearls. Her pins and combs were of gold, engraved with mystic animals and birds. Pearl chains and emerald rings outshone each other, and her coat was made of Lotus-root thread, while she wore a skirt of yellow silk. On her tiny feet she wore dainty scarlet shoes, and emerald pendants decorated her white cheeks which shone with the soft radiance of a face powder made out of crushed pearls. A most delicious and strange perfume, evanescent, was wafted around her.

All the visitors were served with wine in large golden cups beset with jewels, and they only took their seats after having been pressed to do so time and again.

"What a happy and splendidly-omened day," said Lai Pao to Li Ho-Lu, "it augurs well for the future."

The girl friends of Silver Lotus and the male portion of the favourite disciples were all present and so was Singing Nightingale, who kept as close as possible to Li Wang Ho, who was seated by the side of Silver Lotus; both occupying equal seats of honour on this occasion.

"I wonder what friend Lu-shun would have to say about all this, were he here?" said Shu Tong to Ying Po Ching.

"Yes," replied the latter, "I really had to let him have his own way with the 'Master' of the Yin Yang yesterday, for it was so amusing to hear how he put that charlatan in his place, as if he were overcome with high-minded pretended indignation."

"The Master seems to think that Lu-shun has the making of a fine disciple," said Shu Tong.

"I believe so too," replied the other, "but we must keep a

strict hand on him for a while lest he forgets himself again. He is like an unset topaz, but once he finds that our beloved Sage is really one of the most benign, lovable and wise men in the Empire he will fit himself into the present setting and become a shining asset; he has plenty of personality."

"That fellow Wang Ch'ung made a great muddle of his amiable efforts to please everybody yesterday," said Shu Tong. "He was versatile, but when at last he shrunk away he must have been filled with melancholy emotions."

"He trusted to the intervention of benevolent Spirits," replied Ying Po Ching, "but such as are benevolent to *his* kind cannot find entry here!"

"I fear we shall not see the merry scamp again," said Shu Tong, "he was amusing while it lasted."

But Shu Tong was wrong, for at that moment the "High" Master of the Yin Yang entered; full of bows and smiles and bland greetings. Approaching the Place of Honour he saluted the Sage and Silver Lotus, and, holding out a small parcel, wrapped in vividly coloured silk, was on the point of handing it over to the Favourite Lady when at a sign of Li Wang Ho two stalwart servants approached him from behind.

"May I have the inestimable honour, sweet Lady, as the Master of the Yin Yang, with many blessings, honoured and peacock-eyed one" At this moment the servants took him by the arms and persuasively conducted him to the outer Gate, to his well-merited, bewildered and undignified confusion.

"As the Master" he began again, when a large and hairy hand was placed over his protesting mouth. Wriggling like an eel he shook himself free for a moment and continued: "of the Yin Yang of honourable" By this time the door was reached but his voice could be heard saying: "degree and importance" when there was a thud in the

distance; the Gate banged, and a moment later the grinning servants re-entered, wiping their hands and readjusting their sandals, which had become somewhat disarranged in the process of bidding farewell and speeding the elegant but rather obtuse Wang Ch'ung on his way out of the house of Li Wang Ho and also out of this story.

The visitors all looked at each other in well-bred and honourable astonishment, until the voice of Li Ho-Lu was heard saying: "Here was one greedy for unearned profits. Having had one lesson already, his dull mind was not content with the graceful manner in which one of us indicated to him in the most polished and forbearing manner that his presence was rather superfluous here. Greed always comes before a thud!"

Li Wang Ho spoke, and said: "The greedy person's hunger is never stilled. The more he fills himself with food, riches, honours, or empty information—the emptier he feels; the emptier he feels the more he hungers; until his bubble of greediness bursts and he becomes emptier than a hole in the air. This is the only way in which a greedy person learns the emptiness of him who is filled with greed."

Heart's Delight asked: "Is it not wrong for a man to abuse another, and even shout him down?"

"Yes," replied the Sage, "but remember that it is better to be abused than ignored; and if you are angered by abuse, suspect yourself as much as you should suspect a person who is overloud in his praise of you. And if abuse provokes you, be sure that it is your own opinion of yourself which bears out the aspersions of your traducer. Be indifferent to abuse, but despise praise. And the louder your opponent shouts, the less is he sure of himself; for noise is ever the sign of incompetence and cowardice.

"Big words are generally employed to conceal the littleness of the ideas they try to express; and bluster is the braying of

the ass-like man: for is it not true that the noisy grasshopper cannot even move a little twig, while the silent elephant can uproot a tree?"

A merry burst of conversation broke out as the disciples told the visitors of the happenings on the previous day, and shouts of laughter greeted the repetition of some of the quaint and diverting sayings of Lu-shun and his wordy opponent.

So sped the happy time, and now Li Wang Ho rose up and all were still to listen to his words.

Introducing Singing Nightingale as a new member of his household, telling the gathering of the lad's great talents, he added: "And I will ask you to hear a short poem he has composed in honour of tomorrow's great event. He will accompany himself on the Moon-Guitar."

Singing Nightingale came forward and sang the Song of:

THE EMPEROR'S PALACE

*The Emperor's Golden Palace
Lies shining in the Sun.*

*Four porcelain Towers stand around,
Which gracefully to heaven bound.
Ten thousand silver bells, so sweet,
Have they, whose tinkling sounds ring out to greet
The happiness that dwells in Summer's Air,
When Silver Maid with mien so fair
Comes forth in answers to those sounds.
And all the flowers in the Palace Grounds
Lift up their lovely heads and listen;
The goldfish in the lakes do jump with joy and glisten
Within their deep cool pools of green and amethystine
Shades. And all the birds sing jubilant songs*

*In multicoloured feathery throngs
As Silver Lotus passes by in glowing ardour,
To meet her Royal Lover in the arbour
Within the Gardens of the Emperor's Golden Palace—*

A-shining in the Sun!

* * * *

This lovely Song, sung and played with fervid artistry, aroused the assembly to the greatest enthusiasm, and all crowded around the Singer and showered upon him colourful compliments and congratulations. That one so young should be able to compose such a sunny, aureate picture in a few words, not to mention the masterly melody he had added to the Poem, was the wonder of all.

But Singing Nightingale—auspicious and happy-omened name—heard only half of what was being said to him and had eyes for no one but Silver Lotus; who smiled down upon him from her seat of honour. When a little more quietness reigned again, one of the visitors remarked to Li Wang Ho that the lad was evidently inspired by the beauty of nature, of things, and of the rare human beings who can truly be considered beautiful in every way, such as was shown in the perfection of the Lady Silver Lotus herself.

To this the Sage replied: “Beauty and ugliness are the same. For not only does beauty lie in the eye of the beholder, as ugliness also does (and *who* shall therefore say with true authority that *this* is ugly and *that* beautiful), but they are both aspects of the same illusion viewed from different angles.

“True beauty,” he continued, “lies not in the outward appearance of a thing, or a living being. The real beauty of an object of Art, a Figure, a Painting, or a building, for instance, lies in the hidden ecstasy which inspired their creators. It lies in the Message they receive from the Higher Beings, and in

their ability to receive that Message and give it shape; just as the ability of the beholder to see in every detail that same beauty is an equal gift from the Heavenly Ones.

“As there are numberless grades of artistic ability to execute the messages of the Gods and give them form, so there exists a similar number of states of inspired attunement which will enable the beholders or listeners to receive that message too—by means of reflections from their own minds—and interpret it to a greater or lesser extent. Some will receive the Message in full and attain to a state of ecstasy equal to the original inspiration; others will be able to reflect less; some will reflect nothing of the beauty but will feel antagonistic towards it; and upon the grade of antagonism will depend the strength of their aversion, which, in their case, may turn a thing of beauty into one of ugliness.

“Can a crude Barbarian appreciate the elevated state of a highly civilized Race? No! He will only be able to rejoice in things of brutal strength, and adore Idols, which to a civilized person seem hideous.

“But are such things really hideous? Again no! For within their seeming ugliness lies hidden an ideal; no matter how unevolved and wrong this ideal may seem to be to others of a different temperament or state of evolution.

“But if that which a Barbarian, an unevolved person, or a decadent one admires evinces lust, cruelty, or hatred: *then* there is true ugliness in both the manifestation itself (and therefore in the mind of its maker, and in the source whence he received his inspiration) and in the mind of the admirer.

“Real beauty lies hidden *within* the material shape or expression (whether in animate or inanimate objects), and can only be perceived with the eye of the spirit; for it is always of a material nature and sent to console Man for all the unpleasant things that come to pass from time to time during his span of material existence. Therefore, the material eye or mind knows

not what real beauty or real ugliness is; and man cannot judge it in this way, but must wait until he has learned to overcome and see through the webs of illusion which surround him on all sides, so that he can penetrate spiritually into the *inner* regions of beauty.”

“But,” asked one of the guests, “is it not just as important, Master Li Wang Ho, to possess an equal amount of knowledge of the more material things in this world? It seems to this humble and uninformed speaker, who has little understanding of the finer shades of the Arts, and even less of the elevated wisdom of such great Philosophers and Sages as yourself—although he is a great admirer of all Arts and Philosophies—that, being placed in a material world within a material body, we cannot apprehend the higher unless we first fully understand the lower worlds?”

“This is extremely well spoken,” replied Li Wang Ho, recognizing in the speaker one of the highest authorities on the ancient as well as modern Arts in all their multifarious manifestations and ramifications; a man of a refined and elegant personality, living at the Capital and famous throughout the Empire for his superior attainments in this and other directions.

“It is well said,” continued the Master, “that to be like Yau, Shun and Yü is to be perfect; and although our present Lord of the Empire has commanded that all the Books of Ancient History should be destroyed (for they contained a great mass of misinformation entirely useless to a proper understanding of the wonderful times we live in today, and of an even greater future, when all the present innovations shall have had time to expand and come to full fruitage), there are certain undeniable periods in our history of which we have definite knowledge, in which certain great personalities left an indelible mark upon this Celestial Realm. Our present Emperor—the greatest of all the Rulers I have in mind—is always the first to acknowledge the accomplishments of his really great predecessors, and I therefore may speak freely.

“Let us consider our first historically known Emperor, the divine Hu-hi—a Son of God of supernatural powers, who first established social order among our People; who had up to then lived like animals in the wilds. Ruling from 6732 until 6618 before this year of our present era, he was the first to establish family life by introducing matrimony. He taught our people to hunt, fish and keep flocks; constructed musical instruments in order to prepare their minds for higher developments by means of the first Art they had ever contacted, and he gave them hieroglyphics, in order to replace the knot-writing previously in use.

“Then we have the Emperor Schon-ming, the divine Labourer, who lived 26 centuries ago; he who invented the agricultural instruments which are still in use today, and taught our people the medicinal properties of numerous plants and herbs.

“Then we have him who built the first Temples, houses and cities, and regulated the calendar, to which he added the intercalary month; namely the Emperor Huang-ti, and his wife, the Lady Si-ling, who first succeeded in the rearing of silkworms and the manufacture of silk.

“In the *Shû-King*, the Canon of History, edited by K'ung Fu-tze himself, you can read of our Emperor Yau, living about 2,100 years ago, who was the greatest Emperor of all, the most perfect Sovereign who had all the virtues; and his equally famous successor Shun; followed again by Shü, who saved the country from utter destruction threatened by the Great Flood, by cutting canals through the hills, thus allowing the waters to escape.

“All these Emperors concentrated on the material advantages and taught our people to have a larger understanding of all material things and conditions, thus preparing them for the further eventual developments of their spiritual qualities.

“And now, in these latter days, when all the Arts and Sciences flourish exceedingly on account of the great men who did so much to awaken in the minds of our people the

potentialities of Good Conduct—as in the case of K'ung Fu-tze, and Spiritual and Divine Wisdom, as taught by Lao Tzú in the *Tao Te Ching*, bringing that holy attunement with all that is elevated and good—without which no great Arts, Philosophies and Sciences can flourish—we have introduced to us the Teachings of the Lord Buddha, telling us that real merit lies not in *works*, but solely in Purity and Wisdom combined.

“Religion cannot be learnt from Books, but solely from the presence of the Buddha within the heart of Man; and each must search within his own heart in order to find Him and hear His Divine Voice. Only when he has accomplished that will he be able in this or a future life to hear the Voices of the Divine Beings in the Upper Regions and become a Master of the Arts and of the Philosophies, and, last of all, of the Hidden Wisdom—which will be given to him by the Voice of the Buddha within his heart, who is always in contact with those in the Higher Worlds of God.

“Thus,” he continued, “your question was entirely right, and uttered at the right moment. Too often do those who are fascinated by the study of the Higher Knowledge forget that they are still in a material region. Knowing that there all is Illusion they neglect their duties as material beings sometimes; forgetting that whatever messages they receive are not only meant for themselves but for their fellows also; so far as the latter are able to comprehend. This neglect of the material is just as wrong as ignoring the spiritual part of Man; there should be a perfect balance between the material and spiritual; *then* the beauty of spiritual inspiration, expressed in a material manner outwardly, will be understood with the aid of the inner eye of the spiritual mind, aided by the material organs of sight and hearing and so we can arrive at that necessary balance I have just mentioned and *know* what true beauty and true ugliness really are.”

Li Wang Ho continued: “The ancient Sages, too, honoured

what was within and sought pleasure in what was without; thus achieving a correct relative proportion of what was due to *both* the within and the without.”

One of the visitors now asked: “Should we always be serious in all we do and so avoid the absurdities of what people call ‘fun’ and ‘amusement’? Is life not too short already if we really wish to make moral and mental progress?”

To this Li Wang Ho answered: “It is as necessary to indulge in innocent fun as air is needed to make a fire burn. The person who is always serious is unbalanced, and if we gave ear to the enemies of light-hearted enjoyment, we might just as well blot out the sun and destroy every flower the Gods have made so that we might have some beauty and pleasure in life. Amusement and fun counterbalance serious thought and study, and the man who spends a certain amount of time in merriment is more ready for the deeper aspects of life than the one who always dwells in gloom.

“Though there is no absurdity which has not its defender, if the absurdity will be too stupid it will destroy itself in the end, and there is no need to worry about it. But good fun, which keeps young the heart and mind, is like true virtue: we cannot do without it, and it will keep people away from vice.”

“How shall one best succeed in any undertaking?” asked another visitor.

“The inferior man,” replied the Sage, “runs round in agitated circles, now trying this, then the other, always on the watch for fortunate omens. But the superior man awaits with fortitude the decrees of Heaven and only acts at the appointed time.

“And when he has to visit the other end of the City, he starts from his own doorway and walks upon the road—unless he is carried by his bearers; and he does not risk his life by jumping from roof to roof like an eager ape, bent on mischief.

“The lesser kind are like the careless servant who has just smashed the piece of priceless jade: she looks around for the

cause of her mishap, forgetting that it is the result of her own ineptitude.

“In the same manner the inferior person destroys success in all he undertakes by omitting to take counsel from on high. Go within and hearken to the voice of thy Heavenly Guide.

“As K’ung Fu-tze has said: ‘When the superior man has free course with his principles, that is what we call success; when such course is denied, that is what we call failure.’ You will now have a better understanding of what he meant by this.

“And always remember that he who has drunk from a cup of jade, should not shake it out afterwards; for thus he might smash the vessel of good fortune!”

Moonbeam now asked: “How shall one deal with scandal?”

The Master replied: “If you hear of a person being slandered, the best thing is never to believe that which ought not to be the truth. The busybody is generally a person who has nothing else to do; but it is also a fact that if scandal were a kite that threatened to fall for lack of wind, all the bystanders would puff their hardest to keep it in the air and make it rise still higher! It is easy to speak well about a stranger; but it is difficult for most not to blame the nearest friend.

“There is a relish in scandal which tickles the moral palate of the unmoral. But the best way to deal with talebearers is to show that you are not amused; for the righteous find no pleasure in unrighteousness.”

“What is the best way of dealing with an impertinent person?” asked another guest.

“Show me an impertinent person and you show me a conceited one without breeding,” replied the Sage.

“An impertinent person, or an impudent one is always a fool who is proud of the greatness of his littleness. He will hold all others in contempt, thus scarring his own unworthy self without being aware of it. In his conceit he will be the

easy victim of the suave, who behold him with an inward but irrefutable sneer. The only form of reason an impertinent man has is prejudice in his own favour.

“And the only way to deal with impertinence is to forgive and forget it; ever after preventing all contact with such an individual.”

“What is the real value of studying antiquity?” asked a scholarly-looking individual.

“If we study antiquity,” replied Li Wang Ho, “and consider the great men who lived and wrought in those ancient times, we not only learn but become delighted in the end if we apply ourselves and behold truth’s bright countenance. The ruins of these ancient worlds were once their glory, just as our present glory will lead to ruin at last. This is a rule of Nature in the manifested worlds, and nothing can prevent the fulfilment of this eternal Law.

“In the study of history lies all wisdom; all subtlety and wit, that is to say: if we apply that which we have learnt from history. Once the love of study has been planted within the mind, nothing can uproot it again. Study is also a way of escape from the troubles of life.

“There is no greater treasure than learning; for the learned man will enjoy the company of his own thoughts. But mere learning does not constitute wisdom. But who will visit the rich man if the wise man makes him welcome? The truly wise are respected—the rich envied. And has not Mèng-zî declared that: ‘He who respects others is respected by them’? So what greater benefit can one receive than being respected by the wise men we respect?

“To look up to a wise man is good; for thus one forgets to look down upon others. And if we are able to respect a wise contemporary, how much more shall we respect the sagacious men of antiquity, who are the Teachers of the erudite of today,

who have been enriched with the spoils of Wisdom which time has consecrated.

“The Wisdom of Antiquity is the Star by which we steer our ship of life into a safe harbour, for it is better to forget the new and unproved notions of today than not to remember the well-founded learning of the profound Sages of long ago.”

Now Silver Lotus spoke and asked: “How shall we best be able to believe in God?”

Li Wang Ho turned to her and said: “Only a fool believes there is no God, no Deity; and even he is not certain: for he can only believe in his own denial, and never know the Truth. But if such a one is alone in the darkness of night, or in peril, he sheds his disbelief in God like a snake casts off its scaly hide.

“If a man has no belief in God, he cannot have any belief in man either; never call such a one your friend, for his heart is empty of all goodness and full of viciousness. Therefore it becomes expedient for him to deny God!

“And it is remarkable that there never was, or can be, a woman who denies God.

“The shallow philosopher believes there is no God; but the true Philosopher adores the Makers and Manifesters of all we behold. A great Barbarian has said that atheism is a disease of the soul before it becomes an error of the understanding. He was only partly right, for the Soul *is* God and never subject to disease. For how could that which is perfect and God be imperfect at any time?

“The denier of God is as bad as the bigot, for both shut out the truth, the first by denial, the second by fear. As the atheist has no faith in God, so has the bigot no faith in the goodness of God whom he turns into an evil spectre, suffering from chronic dogmatism, clothed with the devil’s mantle, armed with a veil of pseudo-holiness with which to hide his own iniquities. A bigot is a man who claims sole rights of entrance to Heaven; but he will find that God cannot be persuaded

to sign an agreement with him: for such contracts are made with Satan alone!

“Neither the bigot nor the atheist has therefore any judgment, and the false fire of their overheated imaginations will burn them up in the end.

“The man without Faith, the man who is sceptical of all that seems good, is generally the most gullible person who will accept the improbable, or even the impossible, such as the absence of a Divine Ruler. For the credulous person believes first of all in evil, and if he ever is forced to believe in goodness he does so only after much reluctant reflection. Such persons are without Faith, and their only belief lies in perfidy.

“But the person who *has* true Faith is possessed of that heroism which will lead him to God, though his Way be lit by utter Darkness. And he will make that darkness shine with the Illumination of his Faith and Aspiration.

“Therefore believe, have Faith, and Trust in the God whose divine Emanations enfold and pervade all the manifested Worlds—though they are but reflections from the senses of the Creators and of Man, and little things in themselves. For if you trust God in little things, how much more sublime will be the greatness of that which He will bestow upon your Faithful Soul when it has done with the material realms for the time being.”

The Master ceased speaking, and now the servants brought in a number of different indoor games, so that the visitors should be able to amuse themselves in diverse ways. There were some who began to play chess, or dominoes, others played various card-games, some were guessing fingers, the loser having to drink a large beaker of wine, whilst others still were telling stories. A few more belated callers had arrived and presented Silver Lotus with packets of acacia incense—the symbol of health—or beautiful jade boxes filled with all sorts of flower seeds—the symbol of lovely children. One even

presented a gorgeously carved bowl full of uncooked rice—the symbol of prosperity. Some of the guests wandered around the various apartments, admiring the tasteful arrangement of everything and the many art treasures, making of the house almost a museum. There was an aviary full of beautiful birds, tanks of rare angel-goldfish, herbariums and pots of exotic flowers, vivariums containing all kinds of living specimens of strange animals and insects. There were jewels, scrolls, books, silken draperies embroidered with mystical figures of celestials, men, animals, birds and fishes in gold-thread on coloured silk; fans, bronze vases, and many other graceful things—mostly presents from grateful disciples. Others went into the Court of Ancestors with its Central Hall, reading the tablets of all those forefathers of the Sage who had ascended to the Upper Heavens.

A continuous hum of happy talk hung like an auspicious rosy cloud of Spring within the precincts and the inner parts of the Master's home.

Silver Lotus and Li Wang Ho beheld it all with the content of peaceful and virtuous minds, and the latter said: "You have learned long ago, my sweet daughter, that the three obediences of a woman are: before her marriage to her father, during marriage to her husband, and in widowhood to her son; may you never experience the last. It is also well to remember that that which we desire most is always full of virtue. For this reason it is wise to bear in mind always *what* the virtues were we saw in the things we once desired so ardently, and not to be blind to them afterwards, when most of us are inclined to forget these same virtues after we have become inured to them by continuous propinquity.

"This applies especially to the state of married bliss; and in this forgetfulness lies the real danger of discontent following happiness. It is true that Fate defeats even the greatest physician, but were it not for illnesses there would be no doctors.

Until Fate decides the parting of the ways let there be no need for 'doctors' in the shape of 'friendly' advisers to thee, my child, when the inevitable moments of friction arrive and the faltering human mind is assailed by doubts. Free thyself whenever this occurs by resolutely refusing to notice anything amiss, and breathe no word to any one of thy perplexities—for this would give them more definite shape. By ignoring them they dissolve into nothingness, and it will be as if they never were; which is literally true, for *nothing* is ever what we imagine it to be.

"But, knowing my sweet Silver Maid, there is really no need to talk to thee like a garrulous old man."

"Oh, beloved Master, and dear sweet Father of my Heart and Soul," replied Silver Lotus with a sob in her voice, "never call thyself *that*; ignorant as I am, possessing but little real Wisdom, it would have been still worse if I had not had the felicity to dwell within the Light of thy Love, Kindness and wise Protection; spiritually, intellectually and physically. Never shall I forget thy wise teachings, and what thou hast said to me just now will for ever be engraved upon the tablets of my memory. How can I ever thank thee and show my eternal love and gratitude?"

And now the visitors began to take their leave, for evening was drawing on apace; it being near the hour of the Dog.

When the last one had gone and Li Wang Ho, Silver Lotus and Singing Nightingale alone remained, the Maiden went into the garden to take a silent farewell of all that had been so dear to her heart until now; nor would she ever forget.

Singing Nightingale followed her with his eyes as she slowly strolled about in deep meditation, her eyes filled with tears; now standing before the Lotus Pool, again softly touching a velvety bloom or flowering shrub.

Hastily the lad fetched a scroll of paper and began to write rapidly.

Li Wang Ho, who had watched both without a word or movement, went over softly to the writer after a few moments, and, when the latter had evidently applied the last stroke of his brush, he said: "What are you writing, my Son?"

Singing Nightingale handed over the scroll without speaking, and the Sage read:

SINGING NIGHTINGALE'S SONG

*The breeze blew softly,
The Spring-rain was falling,
And in the spreading branches of the lofty
Tree a bird's melodious voice was calling.*

*The cherry-trees in glorious bloom,
The flower-embroidered field,
Light up the twilight's deepening gloom
Before the day to night does yield.*

*The sickle of the argent Moon
Rides in the sky, and stars will soon
Come out and shyly peep
At Silver Lotus, who now does keep
A final tryst with all the sweet
Surroundings which she'll never meet
Again, when to the loving arms
Of her beloved she has fled
And made surrender of her charms—
So heavenly that all
The birds, the trees and flowers,
The stars and Moon shall
Fade to nought; and rose-clad bowers
Seem colourless when in the hours
Of Happiness her Lord shall Bless
Her coming with a soft caress.*

The Master drew the lad towards him and kissed his brow in the silence which had descended like a benediction on the place so lately filled with happy talk and laughter.

HERE IS A GARDEN FOR YOU!

It is as glorious as a mountain range of consummate flowers, bright as the radiant hills on which the rainbow rests its splendid base.

Delightful prophets of fragrant beauty: the perfumed blossoms drench the unrevealed paths with rapturous content.

Woven of nectar and air, the smiling blooms nod dainty heads, one at another

Wherever there grows a flower, an Angel has passed by.

O, come with me and take a sip from that great garden-goblet of delight.

ONE OF SINGING NIGHTINGALE'S CHANSONS

CHAPTER 6

THE GARDEN OF DELIGHT

The morning dawned in splendour and the home of Li Wang Ho was filled with ordered bustle. Hurrying but soft-footed servants ran about in all directions, for soon the Silver Lady would commence her journey towards the Capital at the command of her Imperial Lover. A resplendent sedan-chair, gorgeously bedecked with rich silks, banners and flowers stood ready waiting at the Gate for her. Apart from her own carriers and servants there was a glittering escort of soldiers with their officers—sent by the Emperor for her honour and protection—astride fiery horses. Fierce runners, dressed in the Imperial colours, stood ready with their staves and whips, and presently they would advance with loud and threatening shouts to clear the ways of all the lesser ones, that none might block the roads and live!

There were sedan-chairs also for Glowing Rose, Ying Po Ching and Shu Tong, and each of the four chairs was accompanied by a special troop of soldiers carrying banners and weapons. The chair of Silver Lotus had sixteen carriers, and those of the others eight each.

At the head of the troops was the chair of a Marshal, and that important person wore a golden fish on his scarlet robe, the fish being the insignia of his office.

A throng of silent onlookers stood by as near as they dared, and not a whisper was heard from them.

Now came the moment when the travellers entered their chairs, and the whole procession went forward at rapid pace; whilst the soldiers and runners shouted out loudly as they ran.

The road led partly along the side of a great canal, and, as it was yet early, the travellers could see the circles of shadow, cast by the high-arched bridges; this was a fortunate omen, for

these circles of shadow are good-luck rings and bring excellent fortune if you see them or pass through them in a boat.

Walled villages and towns were passed one after another, and outside each could be seen the protecting shrine which keeps them safe from all bad influences, material and spiritual.

At last the magnificent Palaces, Temples, Pagodas and other buildings of the Capital loomed in the distance. But the procession now followed a road that led away from all this, and finally arrived at a marvellously carved and decorated Gate, piercing a high, crenelated wall which had many watchtowers placed at short distances apart; each tower being full of armed sentries.

Here the chairs halted, and Silver Lotus descended from her own sedan-chair and entered through the Gate into the grounds of the Palace, called "The Garden of Delight." She waited for a moment when she was half way through the Gate and waved a goodbye to Glowing Rose and her friends who were then taken away towards the Capital.

And now the Silver Maiden slowly strolled through the lovely gardens, followed for a short distance by respectful and discreet attendants, until at last she crossed a high wooden bridge, shaped like the Moon in her first quarter, which spanned a laughing, glittering stream, joyfully glistening between its flower-laden banks. The attendants stopped while she crossed, remaining on guard on the other side, and Silver Lotus was now alone amidst the colourful beauties which surrounded her on every side.

It was so glorious in that Imperial Garden that it seemed to her a Benediction from the Lords of Life themselves which had taken shape in the forms of the fragrant flowers, trees, shrubs and grasses; as if in answer to the solemn Sacrifices to Heaven performed by the Emperor upon the summit of Mount T'ai in Shan-Tung. Nothing on earth could have been lovelier than this Paradise of all the finest and best in Nature's floral and arboreal realms. It reminded her of the graceful little poem

she had once read in one of Li Wang Ho's ancient manuscripts in which it was said that:

THE FLOWERS OF EDEN

*The Pomegranates' flowers bloom
Bedecked with glistening drops of rain,
And in the Sun the insects zoom*

*From bloom to bloom—
So like those flowers that on the loom
Of Eden's floral Tapestry in sleep have lain
Since that fell WORD which spoke the doom
Of the first human pair. In vain
They seek re-entry, but the twain
Are banished to the outer gloom
Where neither Rose nor Lily bloom.*

*But every day they may regain
Their Bliss for one short shining Hour
When on sweet Charity's rosy Bower
Another blossom comes to flower
In shape of kindly deed, that's done
In name of Him, the Lord of Power;
And all of Eden's blooms rise up and greet the Sun!*

A number of porcelain pagodas could be seen through the trees; and gatehouses, artificial mounts and monumental lakes and fountains, glistening in the sunrays. Bamboos contrasted their light-green foliage against the flowers and darker shaded pines. There were high and flat-roofed summer houses, and many cosy nooks and arbours gladdened the eyes; and there were gay running and leaping rivulets, with the brilliant artemisia flowering in splendidly coloured profusion. There were several

chrysanthemum beds, which in autumn would give delight with their manifold hues; in spring the peach and apricot would vie with each other in beauty, and in winter the plum-blossoms would spread their dainty and graceful white flowerets. The rhododendrons were present in all their rare and choice varieties, and their glorious masses of blooms would usher in the time of summer.

Willows swayed in the soft wind, and many sweet-smelling shrubs scented the air with their aroma.

The purple swallows darted swiftly upon the light breeze and sailed daintily through the branches of the trees or soared after invisible insects above. Orioles flashed and twittered amid the green shadows in the denser clumps, very busy on the affairs of family life.

There were several Halls, dedicated to the Elements, with windows shaped like the Moon. Palms dreamed in silence, their drooping fronds spreading cool patches of shade.

Before magnificent statues the peonies glowed in all colours, and lychee were seen in great abundance, covering their branches with the luscious fruit within their hard and prickly brown shells.

Not only were the Four Seasons represented by their charming messengers in the shape of all these plants, but even at the time of the eight festivals the Garden of Delight presented an ever-entrancing picture; as if eternal spring had taken up its abode there—never to forsake it again.

When Silver Lotus reached one of the larger lakes, she could see the golden and silver carp below the rippling wavelets which were nearly covered with floating red petals; and perfumed breezes wafted slowly across from the flowers on the opposite side.

The constant contrast of all shades of green against the lovely colours of the flowers brought back to her memory a saying of the Master Li Wang Ho, who once had stated that:

“Although the rose is beautiful, it needs the background of its leaves before its beauty can be fully realized.”

How true this was; and how grateful was she that in her own case—though she realized it in true humility of spirit—her beauty would have been a vapid thing of but a short season’s duration had it not been for the Master’s teachings, which had awakened a greater and spiritual beauty within herself, shining outwardly from her inner being, and of such a nature that it never could fade away. Not only that—but it would radiate from her always; no matter what age she should reach before her Ancestors called her home. Such is the true and only beauty in a human being; the rest is dross.

Around her lay spread the marvellous glory of Nature. The velvet moss and flower-embroidered turf in emerald glow; the star-like jasmine close entwined; the eyes of the violet, like those of fairies; the golden sunflowers and rich narcissi, still bedecked with tiny drops of diamantine dew; the snow-pure lilies, unblemished as the garments of angels; could aught be fairer anywhere?

Thus, lost in dreams, the Silver Maiden awaited the coming of her Golden Lover

* * * *

In the meanwhile Glowing Rose, Ying Po Ching and Shu Tong had been taken to the Capital and the home of the Officer who had so kindly invited them to stay with him for a while.

When they arrived at the house they found that all had been made ready for them, and they were conducted to their respective apartments, or guest-halls within the Gardens of the Officer’s dwelling-place. The master of the house himself was on duty at the Imperial Court, but he had left word that his guests were to dress in their ceremonial Court robes as he would presently return home and take them to the Palace for a very special purpose. All did as requested, and when the Officer

returned they were ready to follow him; and so, entering the sedan-chairs once more, they proceeded to their destination.

* * * *

Silver Lotus was watching the play of some butterflies above a clump of rose-bushes when she suddenly heard a slight rustling behind her. Turning round, she beheld the Emperor in his golden Robes of State and with a glad little cry she ran towards him.

“My Belovéd,” said he, “I thank you for coming in this unceremonious manner; but I loved it thus, and I know that you do too. Is all well?”

“It is,” she replied, trembling slightly. “I am here to obey your commands, my Lord.”

Taking each other by the hand they strolled slowly towards the magnificent building that could be seen in the near distance.

They did not speak, but the manner in which they regarded one another was sufficient.

When they were near the Palace a sudden circular wind rose up and scattered high upon the air the thousands of fragrant blossoms which covered the lawns and ground; and like a rain of heavenly benedictions and fluttering like a vast host of brilliant butterflies they descended upon the pair, as if the Divine Lords of Nature bestowed upon them a perfumed Blessing and wished them joy.

They entered through a gateway, inlaid with golden designs and jewels, and passed through a series of magnificent rooms.

Everywhere the richest treasures were displayed in profusion.

Golden carpets, two inches thick, woven of the finest silken velvet covered the floors. Within the velvet were embroidered the loveliest designs in coloured silks. Carved pillars and beams with masterly paintings upon them were seen in every room and passage. In the distance could be heard soft music, so sweetly tuneful that it seemed as if it came from

Heaven. An incense so wonderful that it cannot be described pervaded the whole interior, and the music seemed to come gradually nearer, whilst at the same time the subdued hum of conversation could be heard.

Passing through another great room the Emperor and Silver Lotus walked through a doorway and stepped out upon a veranda.

Descending from this they found themselves within a private courtyard in which none but the Son of Heaven ever entered.

There were within it a number of richly beplumed birds; peacocks displaying their beauties, and storks and cranes standing about in dignified attitudes, whilst on golden stands were cages containing small exotic birds, or larger ones with long wavy tails, and some with tails like a lyre.

Here, in ornamental tubs of finely decorated porcelain grew the hortensia flowers which confer eternal life; also flowers of the Sacred Cloud and those called Fu-Sang. They bloomed in such luxuriance that it dazzled the eyes; and they never faded.

The two lovers crossed this domain of splendour, and, opening a small golden door, entered within.

For a few moments Silver Lotus was utterly confused by the scintillating scene she now beheld, but the Emperor drew her forward, and, seating himself upon a golden throne, indicated with a wave of his hand another throne beside him upon which the Maiden sat down.

The great Throne Hall was filled with a large multitude of great nobles, seated on carved chairs over which tiger-skins had been thrown. They were dressed in splendid uniforms or in Court gowns on which dragons were embroidered in gold wire. Exquisite maidens dressed in the fashion of the Imperial Court stood in rows, and servants were in attendance, holding handkerchiefs and fans with which to refresh the guests.

When the Emperor entered, all the courtiers stood up and then knelt in front of the throne. Gongs were beaten and bells

rang as His Majesty received their homage. Clouds of incense rose up, and the great ceremonial fans waved to and fro. Then came a loud cracking of whips and there was silence.

The courtiers made the prescribed five salutations and kowtowed three times before His Sacred Majesty.

Then an Official rose up and spoke on behalf of the Emperor, so that his words might reach the farthest corners of the Empire.

“Having reigned alone for a number of most eventful years,” the Official said, “and, having with the Help of Heaven built up this Realm to a degree of greatness and power such as it has never known before, and having built Temples, Palaces, Public and other Buildings of such beauty as never could have been conceived previously, and having also freed my peoples from the slavery of the Feudal Lords, and the ignorance of wrong traditions and teachings, We now enter upon a new period of Splendour, when it will be Our happiness and the glory of our Peoples to have beside Us a Lady ripe in all the virtues of Wisdom, Charity and Goodness, besides possessing the utmost personal charm and beauty, who will aid Us in Our many undertakings with her good and wise counsel and cherish Our lonely hours with the happiness of Her dear Presence. We therefore pray to the Sons of Light to guide Us both in all We shall do or not do, and that the Good Fortune Heaven has bestowed on Us hitherto may continue and be shared by all.”

The Official stood back, and now came forward from amongst the High Officials, one whose ceremonial boots trod the floor with dignified pride, and whose sleeves waved in the breeze created by the Great Fans. This was the Chancellor of the Empire and Minister of the Left, together with many other titles, and a great personal friend of the Son of Heaven.

“May Your Sacred Majesty live for ever,” he cried. “We kowtow before the Son of Heaven in greatest humility and awe. Your Majesty has truly said that You have raised this Realm

to such Greatness as it has never known. You have conquered all our most dreaded and ferocious enemies. You have given Peace and Prosperity to this Land, and all the harvests have been plentiful.

“The Lords of Heaven have observed Your Majesty’s conduct and approved of your titanic labours. The Upper Realms have blest You, and all Your Peoples have shared in those Blessings. The peoples from all other lands now come and bow before Your Throne and pay rich Tribute. Your Golden Palace reaches to the sky, Your Fame rises to Heaven, and Your Capital of Jade is the Wonder of the World and can never be equalled. How happy are we all to share these unique felicities! Never have the relations between the throne and the People been so perfect, and the Graciousness of Your Majesty is beyond expression.

“But now a still greater happiness and glory awaits us—who share all Your good fortune with You—in the shape of this fair, wise, and sweet Lady, the Silver Lotus, hallowed Name, and we all rejoice and pray that You and Your Lady may be spared as long as the great Mountains shall last, and that the Light of the Sun, Moon and Stars may shine upon you Both always—and so on us all.

“We offer Your Majesty and our new Empress our most humble congratulations and praise.”

The previous Official now stepped forward again and made known the Emperor’s reply as follows.

“You, my beloved Friend and Minister, having spoken on behalf of all, have made Us happy with your well-omened praises. Your loyalty, fidelity, and above all your friendship is fully appreciated and We are content. We now pronounce a general amnesty throughout the Empire, and special rewards will be distributed to all who have served Us well.”

The Emperor then waved His arms, and he and Silver Lotus withdrew.

When they were alone in their private apartments he drew the Silver Lady towards Him and whispered: "Are you content, beloved?"

"Content, my very dear Husband," she sighed as she sank into his arms.

* * * *

In the town of Ping-Liang Fu the Master Li Wang Ho was alone in one of the upper rooms of his house, overlooking the King-Ho River. He had sat there for some hours in deep meditation, and now, as night was falling, he returned from the Middle Heavens where his spirit had floated, drifting like an evanescent nebulosity across the inner expanses of the serene celestial oceans of divine Æther, swinging up deliciously to the highest realms of supreme felicity . . . unknown to ordinary mortals.

Regrouping his spiritual faculties, so that they should be able to engage the manifested corporealities of this lower plane once more, he breathed a deep sigh and turned towards the cabinet of jade in which were kept clean sheets of writing paper, ink-slabs and brushes. After preparing his materials he sat down at his ornamental writing table, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, ivory and gold, depicting mystic symbols, painted birds and flowers upon rich black lacquer, the whole supported on silver feet.

Wielding his brush with deft, decided strokes, he commenced to write down the visions he had beheld in the dwelling-place of the Gods and some of their wise Teachings; a record for students in ages to come, and a friendly guiding Lamp, lighting up the doubts to which mankind is ever prone. Today these sacred sheets still exist in all their original beauty and splendour; kept reverently by the successors of the personages we have met in this story; a holy inheritance, to last for as long as there is *one* left who seeks the Light of Truth. They form a basis for this simple tale of life in the Celestial Empire of 2,160

years ago. May these records be preserved until the last human being has overcome the snares of life and beheld Heaven in all its divine Glory under the Jade Emperor.

As the Master has said: "To pray to the Gods for Light and then light up a candle in the hope of thus discovering Truth is blasphemy," so can it be truly said that he who has the privilege of reading some of the wise words of the Master, and then turns to the lighter literature of the pleasure-seeker in search of a cheap thrill, hoping thus to learn further wisdom, is just as inept.

The Master wrote: "The White Wisdom of the Gods is truly the Light; and the black sins of the evil-doers are the darkness of Ignorance; but even black sins can become still more unclean when the sinner has the Light offered to him and then spurns it with a diabolical sneer.

"It is said that 'words can make a deeper wound than silence can heal.' If this be true of words that wound, then the virtue of words that bring balm to the smitten soul is above all riches and splendour.

"When we have lost the blessings of our ancestral home and shiver amid the cold blasts of No-love among strangers, we begin to value the inner warmth of true affection (although such is seldom blatantly demonstrated) which radiates from those whom we love and who love us in return."

"But how shall we weak men realize such truths in time to prevent error? As the Master has said: 'Judgement is easier than Justice,' and for this reason he has laid down the rule about judging others; placing it among the seven mortal sins.

"He has further said that: "To have complete Wisdom is to present an unruffled countenance under all extremities of joy and disaster, but the acquisition of true Wisdom is necessarily of slow growth. We cannot force the seed to develop quicker by continually digging it up in order to watch its progress. Therefore we must wait patiently for Wisdom to grow within

our minds by opening our hearts to the warm rays that are ever shining in the effulgence of our Souls; listening carefully all the time for the occasional whisper of love and enlightenment that may travel along one of these rays and illumine us with some Holy Precept.'

"It is, alas, too true that to those who *will* not hear, a loving word is as useless as the singing of a multitude of Angels before the Evil One; but it is also true that Fate will force them one day to listen but then the teachings will be very severe and the path long and steep and full of ruts and pitfalls. Therefore: practise virtue every moment of the day, for its voice is louder than the voice of a roaring tiger, and it will be heard by the Spirits of divine Light and Love.

"The Lords of Destiny place our feet on neutral ground from which three roads radiate. One leads to wilful sin; one to dull ignorance; and one to intelligent knowledge, leading to Sage-hood in the end—if we will. Which way shall we go? Only *we* can decide—but after the decision Fate takes a hand and rewards us at the end of the road according to the direction we have taken. And the choice should not be too difficult for us; for the wise do not stoop to dig in the earth, breaking their fingernails searching for an occasional worm wherewith to assuage their pangs of hunger, when the branches of Heaven's Benevolence are laden with luscious fruit, to which we have only to stretch out a hand in order to pluck it and satisfy ourselves. Nor is he who stands idle between worm and fruit, gaining neither the material nor the spiritual, the one who shall gain entrance to the Land of Ever-growing Delight.

"Truly, we can see by the Sun in which direction lies the road to our goal, but it is only by means of our weary feet that we can reach it. Dreaming about this will not forward us one furlong; for in dreams we may amass the greatest riches and soar to power, but in the waking state it is sometimes very difficult to find sufficient cash for a night's lodging in a mud-hovel!

“We must *act*; live according to the rules of the wise, or according to the words of the pilot within the cabin of our hearts.

“But it is not sufficient to act when we are *led* in this manner, or driven; for even the seed of the lowly thistle may be blown up to heaven by a gust of wind—but it must inevitably fall down to earth again, however slowly; for there is no merit in being carried.

“We must strive mentally and spiritually of our own accord, and rise by our own volition. *That* is the only way in which to storm the Gate and gain Entrance among the Heavenly Ones!

“Let it be well remembered that one cannot live forever by ignoring the fact that all have to pass on at *some* time.

“Prepare then for this inevitable event by storing your mind with all the arcane lore it is possible to acquire by your own and others’ efforts.

“Remember too that it is possible for one determined person to fight his way through a wall of flame, whilst ten are running to a ditch with buckets . . . only to find it dry! so that they perish in the end. And if you do not succeed at once in scaling the heights, you should bear in mind that he who fails to become a king need not remain a scavenger.

“Dwell in the purity of Peace, so that your Inner Self shall be ONE with God. For as outer cleanliness is the symbol of a pure mind, so shall Inner Purity be the emblem of the highest Man can conceive, thus enabling him to perceive his Immaculate Creator.

“And, finally, remember that when it seems to you that the way to Heaven is too steep and too far, that even an ant may climb to the top of a mighty oak; although a mouse will have to perform many great deeds before he will be regarded with the same respect as the tiger!”

During the hours that Li Wang Ho remained at his task, the Singing Nightingale had wandered about from room to room, or had roamed forlornly within the gardens where Silver Lotus had taken farewell on the previous night of all she loved

so dearly. The lad felt utterly lost and miserable without the company of his two benefactors, and at last he sat down and gave vent to his sorrow in :

SINGING NIGHTINGALE'S LAMENT

*Thou art gone, O Silver Moon of Inspiration,
And all the heavens droop with grief;
And sadness reigns within the Hall of Yellow Rose,
Which does forsaken lie in desolation.
I cry all day and night for Thee without relief,
A memory of thy sweet beauty all I can enclose
Within my heart; which in my bosom throbs*

IN LONELINESS.

*In vain I look within thy mirror, to see
If still a shadow of thy dearness does remain;
Alas! there's nought but emptiness,
And no reflections ever more will shine
From that poor surface, which has died
Since Thou art gone; nor does the sea
Of tears I shed for Thee in vain—
Which digs deep furrows of distress
Along my cheeks—produce a sign
Upon that glass, that once was glorified*

WITH THY REFLECTION.

*I roam within the gardens, stilled,
In which thy happy voice did ring
So sweet, and gladdened all the air.
I search in sorrow every lane
On which a golden flower, filled
With radiance, did spring so fair
On every spot thy dainty foot has trod.*

*But now it seems that they have taken wing,
To all the world thy glory to proclaim;
And in despair I raise my voice to God;*

I DROWN IN BITTER TEARS.

*Sometimes I hope that all thy beauty,
Engraved upon my heart,
May yet reflect upon that surface, smooth.
And on my breast I carry
That silver-covered glass;
That once again with tears I'll see
Thee in thy counterpart
Within the Mirror. And perchance thou 'lt tarry
Just a little while and stay to soothe
My lonely heart. Alas—*

MY LOVE—I MISS THEE SO!

Folding up his Manuscript, after carefully drying it, the lad sobbed and went to his room to sleep, and dream within a higher wakefulness.

THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHT

Now let us drown our cares within the joyful streams of coloured light that fill the town abundantly. And revel in the laughing music from the rosebud mouths of merry maidens; and drink the wine of Happiness and fill our soul with Songs that rise from youthful breasts, melodious.

The thunder of the soaring rockets rivals gongs and drums, and tinkling bells and tambourines call to the dance, while demons flee from wholesome mirth and gladness.

For one good laugh is better than a thousand sighs, and where clean joy resides no devil can abide.

LU-SHUN'S EXUBERANCE

CHAPTER 7
THE FEAST OF LANTERNS

In every part of the Celestial Empire the population was busily engaged with the final preparations for the great Feast of Lanterns to be celebrated that evening as soon as the Moon shone in the heavens, dimming the stars above which were to be replaced by the shining candles in the paper lanterns below.

In the Hall of the Yellow Rose all the servants were assembled, setting out the splendid lanterns with which they would issue forth joyfully that evening.

But Li Wang Ho, Singing Nightingale, Li Ho-Lu, Chu Shih-Nien, Lai Pao, and the ladies—apart from Silver Lotus and Glowing Rose—were preparing to go to the Capital to take part in the celebrations there, and, perchance, see Silver Lotus, if only for a moment and from a distance.

All were beautifully dressed and very soon they entered their sedan-chairs which carried them rapidly to their destination.

The whole party made for the home of the Officer with whom Glowing Rose and her two companions were staying. They were heartily welcomed and soon were told about the previous day's Ceremony at the Palace; for their three friends had witnessed it all. Glowing Rose said that she had received a message from the Silver Lotus saying how happy she was, sending at the same time her greetings to the Sage and his disciples.

Glowing Rose was splendidly attired in a long gown of red silk, embroidered in five colours. On her skirt was depicted the design of the Hundred Flowers with golden stems and multicoloured leaves. Her girdle was fastened with a green jade clasp and on her wrists she wore golden bracelets. She had jewels upon her brow; pendants fastened in her hair and over her white cheeks, and her head was covered with a mass of pearls. Her tiny shoes, which were decorated with lovebirds in beautiful silks, could be seen as she gracefully glided along.

Her Officer was very much in attendance, and four singing

girls sang, and played upon their instruments for the entertainment of the guests.

Glowing Rose was as dainty and slender as the stem of a tall wind-swept flower as she greeted the Master and his pupils with a low reverence which the others quickly returned.

The Officer now invited them to inspect his garden and the outlying guest-houses therein, where he asked them all to honour him by staying there for a while.

On one side of the grounds was a long white garden wall which was covered with masses of peach-blossom, reflecting the sun as if they were so many thousands of pieces of rose-quartz on a beach of crystal.

Each Guest-House had a name. There was, for instance, the Hall of the Kingfisher, and all around it grew chrysanthemums in full bloom, though it was not their season. There were such famous blooms as "Golden Girdle," white and yellow "Fên Shih," "Scarlet Cloak," "Doctor's Red," "Purple Cloak," and so on. All were over seven feet tall and lovely to behold.

And so it was with each separate Hall; each of which had a poetical name and was surrounded by all sorts of precious flowers. A paradise of loveliness; and the guests could not find words to express their admiration.

While they were strolling round, the Officer passed behind a sculptured screen and found Glowing Rose leaning against an arbour of honeysuckle. She smiled and gathered some of the blooms to throw at him. This was not unnoticed by the others, and they looked at one another with amusement and glances full of meaning.

Tables and chairs had been set out and presently the servants brought refreshments for the visitors, and the Officer and Glowing Rose rejoined the party.

Precious wine was handed round together with soft pastries and other delicacies and the Officer invited them to eat and drink amidst the flowers, who are for ever silent but know that they are beloved by Man.

A brook meandered through the gardens, babbling joyfully in its musical voice. Great trees threw welcoming shade, and the glory of Nature's beauty was such that it would have made poets exchange verses in the golden haze that lay over all.

There were verandas with vermilion railings, and clumps of willows and patches of roses. There was a Pagoda, called the "Tower of the Pine Winds," and in it famous writers used to sit down sometimes and compose their masterpieces, inspired by their surroundings. There was also the "Tower for listening to the Songs of the Stars and Moon." It was made of carved wood, painted with green characters depicting great poems. There was an artificial mount with a rocky cave and in it were marble seats, whilst the walls were hung with all sorts of musical instruments.

There was to be seen a beautiful Group of the Eight Immortals, carved in green-speckled jade, standing as if in deep conversation beneath some ornamental trees.

As the guests were taking their refreshments amidst all this loveliness, several dancers came running into the garden and grouped themselves on a velvety lawn nearby. They then performed a Ballet based on the Rites of "Welcoming the Spring," and called up the Patrons of the Soil after performing a series of symbolical dances.

Then one of their number gave a single beat upon a drum; and at this signal a new group of dancers rushed in; they were dressed to represent the water-sprites. Now came two beats on the drum, and the wood-sprites joined the water-sprites. Then three beats for the spirits of the seashore; four for the field-sprites; five for the earth-sprites; six for the sprites of the sky and winds, and seven for the mountain-sprites.

Then all the performers, of whom there were now nearly two hundred, spread all over the gardens and danced an ensemble that was truly magnificent.

Singing Nightingale, as well as all the others, stood entranced; and Li Wang Ho turned to the Officer and thanked

him in his usual polished manner, saying that even he, in his long and varied experience, had never seen anything so grandiose.

The Officer replied with becoming graciousness and made light of it all, but his gratifying eloquence and accomplished voice thrilled with pleasure at the appreciation of his guests. These latter uttered their expressions of grateful satisfaction at the courtly manners and unassuming behaviour of their host; and Glowing Rose shone with delight.

The party made another promenade through the grounds and were drawn especially to the side of the water where thousands of rose-petals drifted on the bosom of the silver stream, whilst fish jumped up between them, chasing after any foolish insect which had the temerity to zoom too near the rippling surface. Dragonflies trembled in stationary ecstasy aloft, or darted in iridescent steely blue of glittering body on rosy-tinted gauzy wings.

“This is scenery which leads to a state of spiritual perfection, so that Man at last may be totally absorbed in holy contemplation, excluding all worldly interests or recollections in the end,” said the Sage. “It is the true and only way of attuning with the wonders of the creations of the Gods. The adoration of beauty leads the creature nearer to the Source of all he beholds. Then he will disregard life as it *seems*; for he will have merged in THAT from which all proceeds, and he will be ONE with the *Essence* of Divine Love—which *is* the highest God, and therefore IT is unknown.”

From the cave sounded the sweet tinkling of a Lute, and anon the voice of Singing Nightingale was heard, chanting:

THE MUSIC OF NATURE

*The argent blooms of Plum in glory spread
Like snowy clouds all o'er the grass;*

*And crocuses like white and purple stars
 Bedeck the fields with beauty.
 The daisies joice upon their emerald bed;
 And on a pedestal a golden Vase
 Is filled with pure white Rose, whilst slender bars
 Of silver hang in softly tinkling rows
 Around that Cup and fill with argent harmony
 The Balsamic Air in which the sunlight glows.*

* * * *

A hush of enchantment fell upon the assembly, and even the song of the birds was stilled; as if they too adored the dulcet voice of the unseen singer, who continued:

*Oh, blesséd Hour, and glorious Joy,
 When spirit rises up aloft and does deploy
 It's Angel's wings in rapture sweet,
 To rise in vast delight up to the sky, to greet
 The Hosts of God who rend the Veil
 Of great Illusion for that frail
 Poetic Eye; so that in bliss the Seer may sail
 Back to the Source,
 So far beyond the mortal Mind's travail.*

* * * *

After a short silence which had possessed all that elegant concourse of human souls, the Master said: "Here again the Voice of Inspiration has made itself heard. The true Poet is always a true Mystic—whether he knows it or not. The poetic eye *does* penetrate the Veil of Hidden Mystery, and there are true poets of *all* the Arts; divinely inspired by the Sons of God, lit up by that internal fire within the Soul that finds expression through the mind; and so it sends a message to all those minds which lack the poetic vision until some spark from another

mind lights it up within them, so that they too may find a means of loosening their earthly shackles.”

“Is this, then,” said the Officer, who had been listening with great interest to Li Wang Ho, “the only way in which mankind may find the Path to Heaven, extreme Benevolence?”

The inevitable had happened, for, the dancers having left, the host and his guests were all gathered around the Sage, listening to his words.

“There are,” said the Master, “as many ways to Heaven as there have been, are, and will be human beings, provided they sincerely wish for this divine felicity. The best a man can do is to thank the Celestial Spirits for all good things when they come; to be patient in all adversity; to ask for forgiveness when he has erred and offended against the Laws (which are engraved on each man’s heart, if he will but heed and read them); thus, when he has gone astray somehow, help will always be sent to lift him up again; for the Gods are terribly patient. By avoiding evil to the best of his ability, he will keep the mirror of his heart clean, and the ever-loving Sons of Light will do the rest; for they understand: having once been frail men themselves.”

“This is an awesome thought,” said the Officer, musingly.

“But very true, my Son,” replied the Sage. “If mankind would only realize this truth,” he continued, “they would strive with all their might and main to rise to all that is good, loving, and merciful. Then the world would at once become an earthly Paradise, and the human wolves, jackals and tigers which now abound would lay themselves down by the side of the meek and lowly, and turn their ferocious will to the purpose of helping their Brethren instead of destroying them.”

“Will this ever come to pass?” asked the Officer.

“The Great Message,” replied the Master, “has rung forth many times, and those who have listened have been saved. It is the newcomers, who have but lately evolved from the Shadows, who must ever be taught anew. The true Teachings should

never cease; nor would they if all men were always ready to receive them, but all have to learn their lessons in the hard school of the material before they can ascend to the spiritual.

“After each period of darkness appears a Torch-Bearer who is willing to sacrifice himself in order to bring to Man the Holy Illumination of Truth; and those who are sufficiently evolved will hear and follow.”

It seemed as if the time had sped on velvet wings, unheard, unseen, and the shadows began to lengthen. The Officer noticing this with a start of surprise, now invited his guests to follow him indoors where a marvellous repast was spread in utmost luxury.

After the meal the guests went to their various rooms and attired themselves for a tour through the Capital, in order to see the festivities. After their chairs had carried them to the heart of the City, they all expressed the wish to proceed on foot for awhile so that they might have a clearer view of all that was happening.

The Moon had risen, and they saw the hosts of people crowding around the booths which had been erected in many places, illuminated in green like willows or red as roses. Hundreds of arches had been set up with numerous lanterns in all shapes and sizes suspended from them. Many of the high Officials, in carriages drawn by fiery horses, drove through the crowds. The thunder of hoofs and wheels, added to by the joyous cries of the spectators created a sensation of hilarity and gladness.

There were to be seen gossamer-like lanterns of light and dainty shapes; lanterns in the form of golden and silver lotuses, some like beautiful pagodas, gigantic in size; others like mimosas, sunflowers, wife-lanterns, student-lanterns, many in the shapes of monks, demons, camels, tigers, crabs, fishes, moths, butterflies, toads or dragons; some with the figure of Liu Hai with his golden frog devouring great treasures; others in the shape of K'ung Fu-tze, Yuéh Ming, Liu Ts'ui, Chang

K'uei, or the five Ancients with their sacred scrolls, the eight Immortals, the Nine Barbarians and the eight uncivilized ones, and thousands of others; serious, comical, holy, demoniacal.

Drums beat loudly, bells were ringing, gongs boomed forth, rattles made a noise sufficient to split the ears, melt the brain and pulverize the blood.

Maidens in rows, going hand in hand, showed off their beauty and pretty or coquettish airs; palmists were doing a busy trade; wandering monks struck cymbals and recited the sacred stories of the Saints; pastry cooks shouted their wares in loud voices, candy makers plied their trade and deftly made figures of men, animals, spirits, toys, or anything else you wished to order, and all for only a few cash.

The wine-shops, tea-establishments and other places of amusement were full to overflowing; candles ablaze in silver sconces, the merry laughter of the guests never ceasing for a single moment. Musicians and singers played and sang with unexampled endurance; fireworks were going off everywhere, setting the heavens alight with their splendid brilliance in the shape of flowers, fishes, gods, fierce mystical beasts, suns, moons, stars, and what not. Crackers exploded with loud bangs amid the screams of surprised maidens, rockets flew up in the air as if to pierce the very sky itself; and the noises increased as time went on.

Sedan-Chairs, in the form of large lanterns on which were painted glorious scenes of gardens, mountains, sea views, red clouds riding in blue skies, wood-scenes or religious scenes passed to and fro, lit up by many candles inside, throwing their radiance through the transparent panels, so that everyone could admire the beauty of their decorations.

There was so much to see that the eyes were dazzled and the senses reeled.

The Officer now led his guests to an elegant tea-house, so that they might rest and take some refreshments after their unwonted excursion.

Hardly were they seated when a rather unmelodious voice hailed the Sage and his friends, and the one who approached with many bows was none other than our old friend Lu-shun.

"Greetings, sublime Master and friends," he croaked, "this is an auspicious moment, and this one is overwhelmed with the most elevated happiness at meeting you all so unexpectedly."

Li Wang Ho returned his greetings and introduced him to his host as a new disciple, but lately joined.

The rest were slightly apprehensive, for one never knew how the elegant and worthy Lu-shun might act or react under unforeseen circumstances. But Lu-shun was on his best behaviour this time, and anxious to show that he was determined to profit by the Master's lessons and example in an honourable manner.

He could not refrain, however, from asking if any more had been seen of the "Master" of the Yin Yang. When he was told that it was not likely that that one would ever dare to visit the house of the Sage again he was full of virtuous satisfaction and exclaimed: "That is very good indeed! Is it not said that the wise frog retires to his habitation beneath the lotus-leaf when he sees the threatening beak of the famishing stork? That very inelegant 'Master' of the Poltroons, who does not know how to converse in a polite and polished manner, had better not force again his unwelcome presence upon the refined company of the engaging and wise Master Li Wang Ho and his highly accomplished and charming disciples who are all persons of the most elevated erudition and rank. This lowly one who now speaks has already learnt how to adapt himself to his new Master and friends, and he feels like a pure spring in a field full of flowers; for is it not said that there is nothing more adaptable than water—which takes the shape of anything in which it is contained?"

Ying Po Ching turned to Doctor Chu Shih-Nien and whispered: "When the thief repents he demands that all other thieves shall be arrested!"

"That is true," replied the other, "but it is good to see that our new friend is trying his honest best, at any rate."

"I agree," said Ying Po Ching, "when we remember that among the lower ones every word is either a curse or one of evil scandal, then we may be glad that one who was prone to give vent to biting sarcasm in *every* word is now trying to rid himself of that unnecessary habit. Perhaps his joss-stick of comprehension of the finer grades of life and manners will now be changed into a great light of compassion and kindly understanding."

"What," asked the Sage of Lu-shun, "are your present intentions? Are you staying with us in Ping-Liang Fu for the time being?"

"No, revered Teacher," was the answer, "I am returning to my own town, to sell everything I have, shake benevolent hands with myself when I meet my old enemy, and give him a blessing. After that is all done I wish to open a silk business in your town, and profit from your instructions if I may."

"This is extremely well spoken," said Li Wang Ho, "and when you open your new shop I am sure that you will do well and that your fellow-disciples will give you their patronage."

The ladies all heartily agreed to this and the gentlemen said that they would introduce Lu-shun and his wares to their households.

Lu-shun thanked them all and was quite overcome with gratitude.

He said: "I am beginning to see that Happiness can slip quickly away and out of our reach if we do not hold fast to it by right conduct, and that affliction will walk beside us in such a case. Once upon a time, it was my ambition to find that kind of wisdom which would give me power to destroy my enemy—who is now forgiven—but I realize that that sort of wisdom is foolishness, as it must inevitably destroy *me* instead, whilst my enemy may go free and prosper! (Although now I

should not mind even that.) It is better to feast on a crust of *real* Wisdom—which is Love than to choke at a gala-dinner of ignorant hatred.”

All the rest applauded Lu-shun, for this was the best thing he had said yet, and the eyes of the Sage twinkled kindly.

And now their host sent for the sedan-chairs, saying that if they wished he would take them along a road leading past the Palace. Perhaps the Emperor and Silver Lotus might be watching the distant fireworks, and in this way there was a chance of catching a glimpse of them.

They all agreed, and, after saying goodbye to Lu-shun, they passed once more through the multitudes of merrymakers, until the City was left behind and the quiet of the countryside descended upon them like a velvet curtain of peace.

In a comparatively short time they saw the Golden Palace glittering in the light of the Moon, and on approaching nearer the whole procession slowed down and stopped altogether when, on the veranda of the first floor, they noticed two happy mortals, side by side, absorbed in the glory of the night.

When the two noticed the sedan-chairs halting beneath them they leant forward to see who the visitors were, and, when all descended and knelt in respectful silence, Silver Lotus recognized the figure of Li Wang Ho, and then those of the others.

With a glad little cry she turned to her Royal Spouse, and soon the exceptionally virtuous Emperor and his lovely Lady came down to meet the travellers, who would not rise from their kneeling positions until commanded to do so.

Silver Lotus looked more glorious than ever. Her face was as beautiful as the full Moon and her figure looked as if it were made of precious jade. Her head was covered with diamonds, rubies, emeralds and great pearls, and a wonderful opal, as large as an egg, was glittering in harlequin tints upon her breast. Golden phoenix pins were thrust obliquely through her hair, and in her happiness she seemed like the Empress of Heaven

herself, or even more divine. With a few rapid but gracious words, she and her husband enquired about the well-being of all, and they expressed their satisfaction at seeing them in such an unforeseen and fortunate manner. The visitors replied respectfully, and after a little while they said farewell to the wonderful pair, and, when the Emperor and Silver Lotus had re-entered the Palace, the rest rose up from their kneeling positions which they had resumed after the goodbyes had been said and sat down once more in their sedan-chairs to be taken home to the house of the Officer.

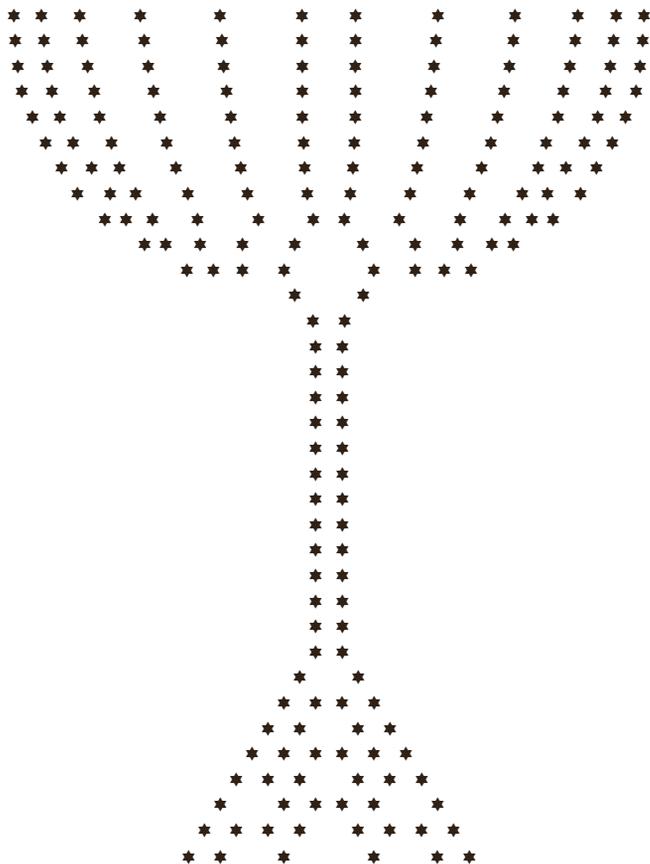
But Singing Nightingale was missing and could be found nowhere.

There was great consternation at this but Li Wang Ho seemed to understand what had happened and told them not to worry. And so they went on their way.

When everything was quiet again, there rang within the Palace Grounds the lovely melody of a Serenade. It was the lad's voice, sounding like the singing of an Angel before the Throne of the Lord of the highest Heaven.

"Hark," said the Imperial Husband and Lover of Silver Lotus, and he whispered to his Belovéd:

*There sounds the Nightingale's entrancing Song,
And luscious notes of liquid gold in sweetest tune
Ride on the argent rays of silv'ry Moon,
Or drift upon the murmur of the dreaming trees
And flow'ring shrubs, whose blossoms scent the balmful breeze,
Which softly takes the Soul of Love on ardent Wings along.*



THE SILVER LOTUS CUP OF HAPPINESS