





E-ASIA
university of oregon libraries

<http://e-asia.uoregon.edu>

紅樓夢

HUNG LOU MENG
THE DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER

E-ASIA
university of oregon libraries

HUNG LOU MENG;

OR,

THE DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER

A CHINESE NOVEL.

BOOK I.

TRANSLATED BY
H. BENCRAFT JOLY.
H.B.M. CONSULAR SERVICE, .
CHINA.

KELLY & WALSH, LIMITED.

HONGKONG, SHANGHAI, YOKOHAMA AND SINGAPORE.
1892.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

HONGKONG:
Printed at the 'CHINA MAIL' OFFICE.

1892.

CONTENTS

PREFACE.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAPTER IX.

CHAPTER X.

CHAPTER XI.

CHAPTER XII.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHAPTER XV.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHAPTER XX.

CHAPTER XXI.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PREFACE.

This translation was suggested not by any pretensions to range myself among the ranks of the body of sinologues, but by the perplexities and difficulties experienced by me as a student in Peking, when, at the completion of the Tzu Erh Chi, I had to plunge in the maze of the Hung Lou Meng.

Shortcomings are, I feel sure, to be discovered, both in the prose, as well as among the doggerel and uncouth rhymes, in which the text has been more adhered to than rhythm; but I shall feel satisfied with the result, if I succeed, even in the least degree, in affording a helping hand to present and future students of the Chinese language.

H. BENCRAFT JOLY.

H.B.M. Vice-Consulate, Macao,
1st September, 1891.

THE DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER.

CHAPTER I.

*Chen Shih-yin, in a vision, apprehends perception and spirituality.
Chia Yü-ts'un, in the (windy and dusty) world, cherishes fond thoughts
of a beautiful maiden.*

This is the opening section; this the first chapter. Subsequent to the visions of a dream which he had, on some previous occasion, experienced, the writer personally relates, he designedly concealed the true circumstances, and borrowed the attributes of perception and spirituality to relate this story of the Record of the Stone. With this purpose, he made use of such designations as Chen Shih-yin (truth under the garb of fiction) and the like. What are, however, the events recorded in this work? Who are the dramatis personae?

Wearied with the drudgery experienced of late in the world, the author speaking for himself, goes on to explain, with the lack of success which attended every single concern, I suddenly bethought myself of the womankind of past ages. Passing one by one under a minute scrutiny, I felt that in action and in lore, one and all were far above me; that in spite of the majesty of my manliness, I could not, in point of fact, compare with these characters of the gentle sex. And my shame forsooth then knew no bounds; while regret, on the other hand, was of no avail, as there was not even a remote possibility of a day of remedy.

On this very day it was that I became desirous to compile, in a connected form, for publication throughout the world, with a view to (universal) information, how that I bear inexorable and manifold retribution; inasmuch as what time, by the sustenance of the benevolence of Heaven, and the virtue of my ancestors, my apparel was rich and fine, and as what days my fare was savory and sumptuous, I disregarded the bounty of education and nurture of

father and mother, and paid no heed to the virtue of precept and injunction of teachers and friends, with the result that I incurred the punishment, of failure recently in the least trifle, and the reckless waste of half my lifetime. There have been meanwhile, generation after generation, those in the inner chambers, the whole mass of whom could not, on any account, be, through my influence, allowed to fall into extinction, in order that I, unfilial as I have been, may have the means to screen my own shortcomings.

Hence it is that the thatched shed, with bamboo mat windows, the bed of tow and the stove of brick, which are at present my share, are not sufficient to deter me from carrying out the fixed purpose of my mind. And could I, furthermore, confront the morning breeze, the evening moon, the willows by the steps and the flowers in the courtyard, methinks these would moisten to a greater degree my mortal pen with ink; but though I lack culture and erudition, what harm is there, however, in employing fiction and unrecondite language to give utterance to the merits of these characters? And were I also able to induce the inmates of the inner chamber to understand and diffuse them, could I besides break the weariness of even so much as a single moment, or could I open the eyes of my contemporaries, will it not forsooth prove a boon?

This consideration has led to the usage of such names as Chia Yü-ts'un and other similar appellations.

More than any in these pages have been employed such words as dreams and visions; but these dreams constitute the main argument of this work, and combine, furthermore, the design of giving a word of warning to my readers.

Reader, can you suggest whence the story begins?

The narration may border on the limits of incoherency and triviality, but it possesses considerable zest. But to begin.

The Empress Nü Wo, (the goddess of works,) in fashioning blocks of stones, for the repair of the heavens, prepared, at the Ta Huang Hills and Wu Ch'i cave, 36,501 blocks of rough stone, each twelve chang in height,

and twenty-four chang square. Of these stones, the Empress Wo only used 36,500; so that one single block remained over and above, without being turned to any account. This was cast down the Ch'ing Keng peak. This stone, strange to say, after having undergone a process of refinement, attained a nature of efficiency, and could, by its innate powers, set itself into motion and was able to expand and to contract.

When it became aware that the whole number of blocks had been made use of to repair the heavens, that it alone had been destitute of the necessary properties and had been unfit to attain selection, it forthwith felt within

page 3

itself vexation and shame, and day and night, it gave way to anguish and sorrow.

One day, while it lamented its lot, it suddenly caught sight, at a great distance, of a Buddhist bonze and of a Taoist priest coming towards that direction. Their appearance was uncommon, their easy manner remarkable. When they drew near this Ch'ing Keng peak, they sat on the ground to rest, and began to converse. But on noticing the block newly-polished and brilliantly clear, which had moreover contracted in dimensions, and become no larger than the pendant of a fan, they were greatly filled with admiration. The Buddhist priest picked it up, and laid it in the palm of his hand.

“Your appearance,” he said laughingly, “may well declare you to be a supernatural object, but as you lack any inherent quality it is necessary to inscribe a few characters on you, so that every one who shall see you may at once recognise you to be a remarkable thing. And subsequently, when you will be taken into a country where honour and affluence will reign, into a family cultured in mind and of official status, in a land where flowers and trees shall flourish with luxuriance, in a town of refinement, renown and glory; when you once will have been there...”

The stone listened with intense delight.

“What characters may I ask,” it consequently inquired, “will you inscribe?”

and what place will I be taken to? pray, pray explain to me in lucid terms.” “You mustn't be inquisitive,” the bonze replied, with a smile, “in days to come you'll certainly understand everything.” Having concluded these words, he forthwith put the stone in his sleeve, and proceeded leisurely on his journey, in company with the Taoist priest. Whither, however, he took the stone, is not divulged. Nor can it be known how many centuries and ages elapsed, before a Taoist priest, K'ung K'ung by name, passed, during his researches after the eternal reason and his quest after immortality, by these Ta Huang Hills, Wu Ch'i cave and Ch'ing Keng Peak. Suddenly perceiving a large block of stone, on the surface of which the traces of characters giving, in a connected form, the various incidents of its fate, could be clearly deciphered, K'ung K'ung examined them from first to last. They, in fact, explained how that this block of worthless stone had originally been devoid of the properties essential for the repairs to the heavens, how it would be transmuted into human form and introduced by Mang Mang the High Lord, and Miao Miao, the Divine, into the world of mortals, and how it would be led over the other bank (across the San Sara). On the surface, the record of the spot where it would fall, the place of its birth, as well as various family trifles and trivial love affairs of young ladies, verses, odes, speeches and enigmas

page 4

was still complete; but the name of the dynasty and the year of the reign were obliterated, and could not be ascertained.

On the obverse, were also the following enigmatical verses:

*Lacking in virtues meet the azure skies to mend,
In vain the mortal world full many a year I wend,
Of a former and after life these facts that be,
Who will for a tradition strange record for me?*

K'ung K'ung, the Taoist, having pondered over these lines for a while, became aware that this stone had a history of some kind.

“Brother stone,” he forthwith said, addressing the stone, “the concerns of past days recorded on you possess, according to your own account, a considerable amount of interest, and have been for this reason inscribed, with the intent of soliciting generations to hand them down as remarkable

occurrences. But in my own opinion, they lack, in the first place, any data by means of which to establish the name of the Emperor and the year of his reign; and, in the second place, these constitute no record of any excellent policy, adopted by any high worthies or high loyal statesmen, in the government of the state, or in the rule of public morals. The contents simply treat of a certain number of maidens, of exceptional character; either of their love affairs or infatuations, or of their small deserts or insignificant talents; and were I to transcribe the whole collection of them, they would, nevertheless, not be estimated as a book of any exceptional worth.”

“Sir Priest,” the stone replied with assurance, “why are you so excessively dull? The dynasties recorded in the rustic histories, which have been written from age to age, have, I am fain to think, invariably assumed, under false pretences, the mere nomenclature of the Han and T'ang dynasties. They differ from the events inscribed on my block, which do not borrow this customary practice, but, being based on my own experiences and natural feelings, present, on the contrary, a novel and unique character. Besides, in the pages of these rustic histories, either the aspersions upon sovereigns and statesmen, or the strictures upon individuals, their wives, and their daughters, or the deeds of licentiousness and violence are too numerous to be computed. Indeed, there is one more kind of loose literature, the wantonness and pollution in which work most easy havoc upon youth.

“As regards the works, in which the characters of scholars and beauties is delineated their allusions are again repeatedly of Wen Chün, their theme in every page of Tzu Chien; a thousand volumes present no diversity; and a thousand characters are but a counterpart of each other. What is more, these works, throughout all their pages, cannot help bordering on extreme licence. The authors, however, had no other object in view than to give

page 5

utterance to a few sentimental odes and elegant ballads of their own, and for this reason they have fictitiously invented the names and surnames of both men and women, and necessarily introduced, in addition, some low characters, who should, like a buffoon in a play, create some excitement

in the plot.

“Still more loathsome is a kind of pedantic and profligate literature, perfectly devoid of all natural sentiment, full of self-contradictions; and, in fact, the contrast to those maidens in my work, whom I have, during half my lifetime, seen with my own eyes and heard with my own ears. And though I will not presume to estimate them as superior to the heroes and heroines in the works of former ages, yet the perusal of the motives and issues of their experiences, may likewise afford matter sufficient to banish dulness, and to break the spell of melancholy.

“As regards the several stanzas of doggerel verse, they may too evoke such laughter as to compel the reader to blurt out the rice, and to spurt out the wine.

“In these pages, the scenes depicting the anguish of separation, the bliss of reunion, and the fortunes of prosperity and of adversity are all, in every detail, true to human nature, and I have not taken upon myself to make the slightest addition, or alteration, which might lead to the perversion of the truth.

“My only object has been that men may, after a drinking bout, or after they wake from sleep or when in need of relaxation from the pressure of business, take up this light literature, and not only expunge the traces of antiquated books, and obtain a new kind of distraction, but that they may also lay by a long life as well as energy and strength; for it bears no point of similarity to those works, whose designs are false, whose course is immoral. Now, Sir Priest, what are your views on the subject?”

K'ung K'ung having pondered for a while over the words, to which he had listened intently, re-perused, throughout, this record of the stone; and finding that the general purport consisted of nought else than a treatise on love, and likewise of an accurate transcription of facts, without the least taint of profligacy injurious to the times, he thereupon copied the contents, from beginning to end, to the intent of charging the world to hand them down as a strange story.

Hence it was that K'ung K'ung, the Taoist, in consequence of his perception, (in his state of) abstraction, of passion, the generation, from

this passion, of voluptuousness, the transmission of this voluptuousness into passion, and the apprehension, by means of passion, of its unreality, forthwith altered his name for that of "Ch'ing Tseng" (the Voluptuous Bonze), and changed the title of "the Memoir of a Stone" (Shih-t'ou-chi,) for that of

page 6

"Ch'ing Tseng Lu," The Record of the Voluptuous Bonze; while K'ung Mei-chi of Tung Lu gave it the name of "Feng Yüeh Pao Chien," "The Precious Mirror of Voluptuousness." In later years, owing to the devotion by Tsao Hsüeh-ch'in in the Tao Hung study, of ten years to the perusal and revision of the work, the additions and modifications effected by him five times, the affix of an index and the division into periods and chapters, the book was again entitled "Chin Ling Shih Erh Ch'ai," "The Twelve Maidens of Chin Ling." A stanza was furthermore composed for the purpose. This then, and no other, is the origin of the Record of the Stone. The poet says appositely:—

*Pages full of silly litter,
Tears a handful sour and bitter;
All a fool the author hold,
But their zest who can unfold?*

You have now understood the causes which brought about the Record of the Stone, but as you are not, as yet, aware what characters are depicted, and what circumstances are related on the surface of the block, reader, please lend an ear to the narrative on the stone, which runs as follows:—

In old days, the land in the South East lay low. In this South-East part of the world, was situated a walled town, Ku Su by name. Within the walls a locality, called the Ch'ang Men, was more than all others throughout the mortal world, the centre, which held the second, if not the first place for fashion and life. Beyond this Ch'ang Men was a street called Shih-li-chieh (Ten Li street); in this street a lane, the Jen Ch'ing lane (Humanity and Purity); and in this lane stood an old temple, which on account of its diminutive dimensions, was called, by general consent, the Gourd temple. Next door to this temple lived the family of a district official, Chen

by surname, Fei by name, and Shih-yin by style. His wife, née Feng, possessed a worthy and virtuous disposition, and had a clear perception of moral propriety and good conduct. This family, though not in actual possession of excessive affluence and honours, was, nevertheless, in their district, conceded to be a clan of well-to-do standing. As this Chen Shih-yin was of a contented and unambitious frame of mind, and entertained no hankering after any official distinction, but day after day of his life took delight in gazing at flowers, planting bamboos, sipping his wine and conning poetical works, he was in fact, in the indulgence of these pursuits, as happy as a supernatural being.

One thing alone marred his happiness. He had lived over half a century and had, as yet, no male offspring around his knees. He had one only child, a daughter, whose infant name was Ying Lien. She was just three years of age. On a long summer day, on which the heat had been intense,

page 7

Shih-yin sat leisurely in his library. Feeling his hand tired, he dropped the book he held, leant his head on a teapoy, and fell asleep.

Of a sudden, while in this state of unconsciousness, it seemed as if he had betaken himself on foot to some spot or other whither he could not discriminate. Unexpectedly he espied, in the opposite direction, two priests coming towards him: the one a Buddhist, the other a Taoist. As they advanced they kept up the conversation in which they were engaged. "Whither do you purpose taking the object you have brought away?" he heard the Taoist inquire. To this question the Buddhist replied with a smile: "Set your mind at ease," he said; "there's now in maturity a plot of a general character involving mundane pleasures, which will presently come to a denouement. The whole number of the votaries of voluptuousness have, as yet, not been quickened or entered the world, and I mean to avail myself of this occasion to introduce this object among their number, so as to give it a chance to go through the span of human existence." "The votaries of voluptuousness of these days will naturally have again to endure the ills of life during their course through the mortal world," the Taoist remarked; "but when, I wonder, will they spring into existence? and in what place will they descend?"

“The account of these circumstances,” the bonze ventured to reply, “is enough to make you laugh! They amount to this: there existed in the west, on the bank of the Ling (spiritual) river, by the side of the San Sheng (thrice-born) stone, a blade of the Chiang Chu (purple pearl) grass. At about the same time it was that the block of stone was, consequent upon its rejection by the goddess of works, also left to ramble and wander to its own gratification, and to roam about at pleasure to every and any place. One day it came within the precincts of the Ching Huan (Monitory Vision) Fairy; and this Fairy, cognizant of the fact that this stone had a history, detained it, therefore, to reside at the Ch’ih Hsia (purple clouds) palace, and apportioned to it the duties of attendant on Shen Ying, a fairy of the Ch’ih Hsia palace.

“This stone would, however, often stroll along the banks of the Ling river, and having at the sight of the blade of spiritual grass been filled with admiration, it, day by day, moistened its roots with sweet dew. This purple pearl grass, at the outset, tarried for months and years; but being at a later period imbued with the essence and luxuriance of heaven and earth, and having incessantly received the moisture and nurture of the sweet dew, divested itself, in course of time, of the form of a grass; assuming, in lieu, a human nature, which gradually became perfected into the person of a girl.

“Every day she was wont to wander beyond the confines of the Li Hen (divested animosities) heavens. When hungry she fed on the Pi Ch’ing (hidden love) fruit—when thirsty she drank the Kuan ch’ou (discharged

page 8

sorrows,) water. Having, however, up to this time, not shewn her gratitude for the virtue of nurture lavished upon her, the result was but natural that she should resolve in her heart upon a constant and incessant purpose to make suitable acknowledgment.

“I have been,” she would often commune within herself, “the recipient of the gracious bounty of rain and dew, but I possess no such water as was lavished upon me to repay it! But should it ever descend into the world in the form of a human being, I will also betake myself thither, along with it;

and if I can only have the means of making restitution to it, with the tears of a whole lifetime, I may be able to make adequate return.”

“This resolution it is that will evolve the descent into the world of so many pleasure-bound spirits of retribution and the experience of fantastic destinies; and this crimson pearl blade will also be among the number. The stone still lies in its original place, and why should not you and I take it along before the tribunal of the Monitory Vision Fairy, and place on its behalf its name on record, so that it should descend into the world, in company with these spirits of passion, and bring this plot to an issue?”

“It is indeed ridiculous,” interposed the Taoist. “Never before have I heard even the very mention of restitution by means of tears! Why should not you and I avail ourselves of this opportunity to likewise go down into the world? and if successful in effecting the salvation of a few of them, will it not be a work meritorious and virtuous?”

“This proposal,” remarked the Buddhist, “is quite in harmony with my own views. Come along then with me to the palace of the Monitory Vision Fairy, and let us deliver up this good-for-nothing object, and have done with it! And when the company of pleasure-bound spirits of wrath descend into human existence, you and I can then enter the world. Half of them have already fallen into the dusty universe, but the whole number of them have not, as yet, come together.”

“Such being the case,” the Taoist acquiesced, “I am ready to follow you, whenever you please to go.”

But to return to Chen Shih-yin. Having heard every one of these words distinctly, he could not refrain from forthwith stepping forward and paying homage. “My spiritual lords,” he said, as he smiled, “accept my obeisance.” The Buddhist and Taoist priests lost no time in responding to the compliment, and they exchanged the usual salutations. “My spiritual lords,” Shih-yin continued; “I have just heard the conversation that passed between you, on causes and effects, a conversation the like of which few mortals have forsooth listened to; but your younger brother is sluggish of intellect, and cannot lucidly fathom the import! Yet could this dulness and simplicity be graciously dispelled, your younger brother may, by

listening minutely, with undefiled ear and careful attention, to a certain degree be aroused to a sense of understanding; and what is more, possibly find the means of escaping the anguish of sinking down into Hades.”

The two spirits smiled, “The conversation,” they added, “refers to the primordial scheme and cannot be divulged before the proper season; but, when the time comes, mind do not forget us two, and you will readily be able to escape from the fiery furnace.”

Shih-yin, after this reply, felt it difficult to make any further inquiries. “The primordial scheme,” he however remarked smiling, “cannot, of course, be divulged; but what manner of thing, I wonder, is the good-for-nothing object you alluded to a short while back? May I not be allowed to judge for myself?”

“This object about which you ask,” the Buddhist Bonze responded, “is intended, I may tell you, by fate to be just glanced at by you.” With these words he produced it, and handed it over to Shih-yin.

Shih-yin received it. On scrutiny he found it, in fact, to be a beautiful gem, so lustrous and so clear that the traces of characters on the surface were distinctly visible. The characters inscribed consisted of the four “T'ung Ling Pao Yü,” “Precious Gem of Spiritual Perception.” On the obverse, were also several columns of minute words, which he was just in the act of looking at intently, when the Buddhist at once expostulated.

“We have already reached,” he exclaimed, “the confines of vision.” Snatching it violently out of his hands, he walked away with the Taoist, under a lofty stone portal, on the face of which appeared in large type the four characters: “T'ai Hsü Huan Ching,” “The Visionary limits of the Great Void.” On each side was a scroll with the lines:

*When falsehood stands for truth, truth likewise becomes false,
Where naught be made to aught, aught changes into naught.*

Shih-yin meant also to follow them on the other side, but, as he was

about to make one step forward, he suddenly heard a crash, just as if the mountains had fallen into ruins, and the earth sunk into destruction. As Shih-yin uttered a loud shout, he looked with strained eye; but all he could see was the fiery sun shining, with glowing rays, while the banana leaves drooped their heads. By that time, half of the circumstances connected with the dream he had had, had already slipped from his memory.

He also noticed a nurse coming towards him with Ying Lien in her arms. To Shih-yin's eyes his daughter appeared even more beautiful, such a bright gem, so precious, and so lovable. Forthwith stretching out his arms, he took her over, and, as he held her in his embrace, he coaxed her to play with him for a while; after which he brought her up to the street to see the great stir occasioned by the procession that was going past.

page 10

He was about to come in, when he caught sight of two priests, one a Taoist, the other a Buddhist, coming hither from the opposite direction. The Buddhist had a head covered with mange, and went barefooted. The Taoist had a limping foot, and his hair was all dishevelled.

Like maniacs, they jostled along, chattering and laughing as they drew near.

As soon as they reached Shih-yin's door, and they perceived him with Ying Lien in his arms, the Bonze began to weep aloud.

Turning towards Shih-yin, he said to him: "My good Sir, why need you carry in your embrace this living but luckless thing, which will involve father and mother in trouble?"

These words did not escape Shih-yin's ear; but persuaded that they amounted to raving talk, he paid no heed whatever to the bonze.

"Part with her and give her to me," the Buddhist still went on to say.

Shih-yin could not restrain his annoyance; and hastily pressing his

daughter closer to him, he was intent upon going in, when the bonze pointed his hand at him, and burst out in a loud fit of laughter.

He then gave utterance to the four lines that follow:

*You indulge your tender daughter and are laughed at as inane;
Vain you face the snow, oh mirror! for it will evanescent wane,
When the festival of lanterns is gone by, guard 'gainst your doom,
'Tis what time the flames will kindle, and the fire will consume.*

Shih-yin understood distinctly the full import of what he heard; but his heart was still full of conjectures. He was about to inquire who and what they were, when he heard the Taoist remark,—“You and I cannot speed together; let us now part company, and each of us will be then able to go after his own business. After the lapse of three ages, I shall be at the Pei Mang mount, waiting for you; and we can, after our reunion, betake ourselves to the Visionary Confines of the Great Void, there to cancel the name of the stone from the records.”

“Excellent! first rate!” exclaimed the Bonze. And at the conclusion of these words, the two men parted, each going his own way, and no trace was again seen of them.

“These two men,” Shih-yin then pondered within his heart, “must have had many experiences, and I ought really to have made more inquiries of them; but at this juncture to indulge in regret is anyhow too late.”

While Shih-yin gave way to these foolish reflections, he suddenly noticed the arrival of a penniless scholar, Chia by surname, Hua by name, Shih-fei by style and Yü-ts'un by nickname, who had taken up his quarters in the Gourd temple next door. This Chia Yü-ts'un was originally a denizen of Hu-Chow,

page 11

and was also of literary and official parentage, but as he was born of the youngest stock, and the possessions of his paternal and maternal ancestors were completely exhausted, and his parents and relatives were dead, he remained the sole and only survivor; and, as he found his

residence in his native place of no avail, he therefore entered the capital in search of that reputation, which would enable him to put the family estate on a proper standing. He had arrived at this place since the year before last, and had, what is more, lived all along in very straitened circumstances. He had made the temple his temporary quarters, and earned a living by daily occupying himself in composing documents and writing letters for customers. Thus it was that Shih-yin had been in constant relations with him.

As soon as Yü-ts'un perceived Shih-yin, he lost no time in saluting him. "My worthy Sir," he observed with a forced smile; "how is it you are leaning against the door and looking out? Is there perchance any news astir in the streets, or in the public places?"

"None whatever," replied Shih-yin, as he returned the smile. "Just a while back, my young daughter was in sobs, and I coaxed her out here to amuse her. I am just now without anything whatever to attend to, so that, dear brother Chia, you come just in the nick of time. Please walk into my mean abode, and let us endeavour, in each other's company, to while away this long summer day."

After he had made this remark, he bade a servant take his daughter in, while he, hand-in-hand with Yü-ts'un, walked into the library, where a young page served tea. They had hardly exchanged a few sentences, when one of the household came in, in flying haste, to announce that Mr. Yen had come to pay a visit.

Shih-yin at once stood up. "Pray excuse my rudeness," he remarked apologetically, "but do sit down; I shall shortly rejoin you, and enjoy the pleasure of your society." "My dear Sir," answered Yü-ts'un, as he got up, also in a conceding way, "suit your own convenience. I've often had the honour of being your guest, and what will it matter if I wait a little?" While these apologies were yet being spoken, Shih-yin had already walked out into the front parlour. During his absence, Yü-ts'un occupied himself in turning over the pages of some poetical work to dispel ennui, when suddenly he heard, outside the window, a woman's cough. Yü-ts'un hurriedly got up and looked out. He saw at a glance that it was a servant girl engaged in picking flowers. Her deportment was out of the common; her eyes so bright, her eyebrows so well defined. Though not a perfect

beauty, she possessed nevertheless charms sufficient to arouse the feelings. Yü-ts'un unwittingly gazed at her with fixed eye. This waiting-maid, belonging to the Chen family, had done picking flowers, and was on the

page 12

point of going in, when she of a sudden raised her eyes and became aware of the presence of some person inside the window, whose head-gear consisted of a turban in tatters, while his clothes were the worse for wear. But in spite of his poverty, he was naturally endowed with a round waist, a broad back, a fat face, a square mouth; added to this, his eyebrows were swordlike, his eyes resembled stars, his nose was straight, his cheeks square.

This servant girl turned away in a hurry and made her escape.

“This man so burly and strong,” she communed within herself, “yet at the same time got up in such poor attire, must, I expect, be no one else than the man, whose name is Chia Yü-ts'un or such like, time after time referred to by my master, and to whom he has repeatedly wished to give a helping hand, but has failed to find a favourable opportunity. And as related to our family there is no connexion or friend in such straits, I feel certain it cannot be any other person than he. Strange to say, my master has further remarked that this man will, for a certainty, not always continue in such a state of destitution.”

As she indulged in this train of thought, she could not restrain herself from turning her head round once or twice.

When Yü-ts'un perceived that she had looked back, he readily interpreted it as a sign that in her heart her thoughts had been of him, and he was frantic with irrepressible joy.

“This girl,” he mused, “is, no doubt, keen-eyed and eminently shrewd, and one in this world who has seen through me.”

The servant youth, after a short time, came into the room; and when Yü-ts'un made inquiries and found out from him that the guests in the front

parlour had been detained to dinner, he could not very well wait any longer, and promptly walked away down a side passage and out of a back door.

When the guests had taken their leave, Shih-yin did not go back to rejoin Yü-ts'un, as he had come to know that he had already left.

In time the mid-autumn festivities drew near; and Shih-yin, after the family banquet was over, had a separate table laid in the library, and crossed over, in the moonlight, as far as the temple and invited Yü-ts'un to come round.

The fact is that Yü-ts'un, ever since the day on which he had seen the girl of the Chen family turn twice round to glance at him, flattered himself that she was friendly disposed towards him, and incessantly fostered fond thoughts of her in his heart. And on this day, which happened to be the mid-autumn feast, he could not, as he gazed at the moon, refrain from cherishing her remembrance. Hence it was that he gave vent to these pentameter verses:

page 13

*Alas! not yet divined my lifelong wish,
And anguish ceaseless comes upon anguish
I came, and sad at heart, my brow I frowned;
She went, and oft her head to look turned round.
Facing the breeze, her shadow she doth watch,
Who's meet this moonlight night with her to match?
The lustrous rays if they my wish but read
Would soon alight upon her beauteous head!*

Yü-ts'un having, after this recitation, recalled again to mind how that throughout his lifetime his literary attainments had had an adverse fate and not met with an opportunity (of reaping distinction), went on to rub his brow, and as he raised his eyes to the skies, he heaved a deep sigh and once more intoned a couplet aloud:

*The gem in the cask a high price it seeks,
The pin in the case to take wing it waits.*

As luck would have it, Shih-yin was at the moment approaching, and upon hearing the lines, he said with a smile: "My dear Yü-ts'un, really your attainments are of no ordinary capacity."

Yü-ts'un lost no time in smiling and replying. "It would be presumption in my part to think so," he observed. "I was simply at random humming a few verses composed by former writers, and what reason is there to laud me to such an excessive degree? To what, my dear Sir, do I owe the pleasure of your visit?" he went on to inquire. "Tonight," replied Shih-yin, "is the mid-autumn feast, generally known as the full-moon festival; and as I could not help thinking that living, as you my worthy brother are, as a mere stranger in this Buddhist temple, you could not but experience the feeling of loneliness. I have, for the express purpose, prepared a small entertainment, and will be pleased if you will come to my mean abode to have a glass of wine. But I wonder whether you will entertain favourably my modest invitation?" Yü-ts'un, after listening to the proposal, put forward no refusal of any sort; but remarked complacently: "Being the recipient of such marked attention, how can I presume to repel your generous consideration?"

As he gave expression to these words, he walked off there and then, in company with Shih-yin, and came over once again into the court in front of the library. In a few minutes, tea was over.

The cups and dishes had been laid from an early hour, and needless to say the wines were luscious; the fare sumptuous.

The two friends took their seats. At first they leisurely replenished their glasses, and quietly sipped their wine; but as, little by little, they entered into conversation, their good cheer grew more genial, and unawares the glasses began to fly round, and the cups to be exchanged.

page 14

At this very hour, in every house of the neighbourhood, sounded the fife and lute, while the inmates indulged in music and singing. Above head, the orb of the radiant moon shone with an all-pervading splendour, and with a steady lustrous light, while the two friends, as their exuberance increased, drained their cups dry so soon as they reached their lips.

Yü-ts'un, at this stage of the collation, was considerably under the influence of wine, and the vehemence of his high spirits was irrepressible. As he gazed at the moon, he fostered thoughts, to which he gave vent by the recital of a double couplet.

*'Tis what time three meets five, Selene is a globe!
Her pure rays fill the court, the jadelike rails enrobe!
Lo! in the heavens her disk to view doth now arise,
And in the earth below to gaze men lift their eyes.*

“Excellent!” cried Shih-yin with a loud voice, after he had heard these lines; “I have repeatedly maintained that it was impossible for you to remain long inferior to any, and now the verses you have recited are a prognostic of your rapid advancement. Already it is evident that, before long, you will extend your footsteps far above the clouds! I must congratulate you! I must congratulate you! Let me, with my own hands, pour a glass of wine to pay you my compliments.”

Yü-ts'un drained the cup. “What I am about to say,” he explained as he suddenly heaved a sigh, “is not the maudlin talk of a man under the effects of wine. As far as the subjects at present set in the examinations go, I could, perchance, also have well been able to enter the list, and to send in my name as a candidate; but I have, just now, no means whatever to make provision for luggage and for travelling expenses. The distance too to Shen Ching is a long one, and I could not depend upon the sale of papers or the composition of essays to find the means of getting there.”

Shih-yin gave him no time to conclude. “Why did you not speak about this sooner?” he interposed with haste. “I have long entertained this suspicion; but as, whenever I met you, this conversation was never broached, I did not presume to make myself officious. But if such be the state of affairs just now, I lack, I admit, literary qualification, but on the two subjects of friendly spirit and pecuniary means, I have, nevertheless, some experience. Moreover, I rejoice that next year is just the season for the triennial examinations, and you should start for the capital with all despatch; and in the tripos next spring, you will, by carrying the prize, be able to do justice to the proficiency you can boast of. As regards the travelling expenses and the other items, the provision of everything

necessary for you by my own self will again not render nugatory your mean acquaintance with me.”

page 15

Forthwith, he directed a servant lad to go and pack up at once fifty taels of pure silver and two suits of winter clothes.

“The nineteenth,” he continued, “is a propitious day, and you should lose no time in hiring a boat and starting on your journey westwards. And when, by your eminent talents, you shall have soared high to a lofty position, and we meet again next winter, will not the occasion be extremely felicitous?”

Yü-ts'un accepted the money and clothes with but scanty expression of gratitude. In fact, he paid no thought whatever to the gifts, but went on, again drinking his wine, as he chattered and laughed.

It was only when the third watch of that day had already struck that the two friends parted company; and Shih-yin, after seeing Yü-ts'un off, retired to his room and slept, with one sleep all through, never waking until the sun was well up in the skies.

Remembering the occurrence of the previous night, he meant to write a couple of letters of recommendation for Yü-ts'un to take along with him to the capital, to enable him, after handing them over at the mansions of certain officials, to find some place as a temporary home. He accordingly despatched a servant to ask him to come round, but the man returned and reported that from what the bonze said, “Mr. Chia had started on his journey to the capital, at the fifth watch of that very morning, that he had also left a message with the bonze to deliver to you, Sir, to the effect that men of letters paid no heed to lucky or unlucky days, that the sole consideration with them was the nature of the matter in hand, and that he could find no time to come round in person and bid good-bye.”

Shih-yin after hearing this message had no alternative but to banish the subject from his thoughts.

In comfortable circumstances, time indeed goes by with easy stride.

Soon drew near also the happy festival of the 15th of the 1st moon, and Shih-yin told a servant Huo Ch'i to take Ying Lien to see the sacrificial fires and flowery lanterns.

About the middle of the night, Huo Ch'i was hard pressed, and he forthwith set Ying Lien down on the doorstep of a certain house. When he felt relieved, he came back to take her up, but failed to find anywhere any trace of Ying Lien. In a terrible plight, Huo Ch'i prosecuted his search throughout half the night; but even by the dawn of day, he had not discovered any clue of her whereabouts. Huo Ch'i, lacking, on the other hand, the courage to go back and face his master, promptly made his escape to his native village.

page 16

Shih-yin—in fact, the husband as well as the wife—seeing that their child had not come home during the whole night, readily concluded that some mishap must have befallen her. Hastily they despatched several servants to go in search of her, but one and all returned to report that there was neither vestige nor tidings of her.

This couple had only had this child, and this at the meridian of their life, so that her sudden disappearance plunged them in such great distress that day and night they mourned her loss to such a point as to well nigh pay no heed to their very lives.

A month in no time went by. Shih-yin was the first to fall ill, and his wife, Dame Feng, likewise, by dint of fretting for her daughter, was also prostrated with sickness. The doctor was, day after day, sent for, and the oracle consulted by means of divination.

Little did any one think that on this day, being the 15th of the 3rd moon, while the sacrificial oblations were being prepared in the Hu Lu temple, a pan with oil would have caught fire, through the want of care on the part of the bonze, and that in a short time the flames would have consumed the paper pasted on the windows.

Among the natives of this district bamboo fences and wooden partitions were in general use, and these too proved a source of calamity so ordained by fate (to consummate this decree).

With promptness (the fire) extended to two buildings, then enveloped three, then dragged four (into ruin), and then spread to five houses, until the whole street was in a blaze, resembling the flames of a volcano. Though both the military and the people at once ran to the rescue, the fire had already assumed a serious hold, so that it was impossible for them to afford any effective assistance for its suppression.

It blazed away straight through the night, before it was extinguished, and consumed, there is in fact no saying how many dwelling houses. Anyhow, pitiful to relate, the Chen house, situated as it was next door to the temple, was, at an early part of the evening, reduced to a heap of tiles and bricks; and nothing but the lives of that couple and several inmates of the family did not sustain any injuries.

Shih-yin was in despair, but all he could do was to stamp his feet and heave deep sighs. After consulting with his wife, they betook themselves to a farm of theirs, where they took up their quarters temporarily. But as it happened that water had of late years been scarce, and no crops been reaped, robbers and thieves had sprung up like bees, and though the Government troops were bent upon their capture, it was anyhow difficult to settle down quietly on the farm. He therefore had no other resource

page 17

than to convert, at a loss, the whole of his property into money, and to take his wife and two servant girls and come over for shelter to the house of his father-in-law.

His father-in-law, Feng Su, by name, was a native of Ta Ju Chou. Although only a labourer, he was nevertheless in easy circumstances at home. When he on this occasion saw his son-in-law come to him in such distress, he forthwith felt at heart considerable displeasure. Fortunately Shih-yin had still in his possession the money derived from the unprofitable realization of his property, so that he produced and handed it to his father-in-law, commissioning him to purchase, whenever a suitable opportunity presented itself, a house and land as a provision for food and raiment against days to come. This Feng Su, however, only expended the half of the sum, and pocketed the other half, merely acquiring for him

some fallow land and a dilapidated house.

Shih-yin being, on the other hand, a man of books and with no experience in matters connected with business and with sowing and reaping, subsisted, by hook and by crook, for about a year or two, when he became more impoverished.

In his presence, Feng Su would readily give vent to specious utterances, while, with others, and behind his back, he on the contrary expressed his indignation against his improvidence in his mode of living, and against his sole delight of eating and playing the lazy.

Shih-yin, aware of the want of harmony with his father-in-law, could not help giving way, in his own heart, to feelings of regret and pain. In addition to this, the fright and vexation which he had undergone the year before, the anguish and suffering (he had had to endure), had already worked havoc (on his constitution); and being a man advanced in years, and assailed by the joint attack of poverty and disease, he at length gradually began to display symptoms of decline.

Strange coincidence, as he, on this day, came leaning on his staff and with considerable strain, as far as the street for a little relaxation, he suddenly caught sight, approaching from the off side, of a Taoist priest with a crippled foot; his maniac appearance so repulsive, his shoes of straw, his dress all in tatters, muttering several sentiments to this effect:

*All men spiritual life know to be good,
But fame to disregard they ne'er succeed!
From old till now the statesmen where are they?
Waste lie their graves, a heap of grass, extinct.
All men spiritual life know to be good,
But to forget gold, silver, ill succeed!
Through life they grudge their hoardings to be scant,
And when plenty has come, their eyelids close.*

page 18

*All men spiritual life hold to be good,
Yet to forget wives, maids, they ne'er succeed!
Who speak of grateful love while lives their lord,*

*And dead their lord, another they pursue.
All men spiritual life know to be good,
But sons and grandsons to forget never succeed!
From old till now of parents soft many,
But filial sons and grandsons who have seen?*

Shih-yin upon hearing these words, hastily came up to the priest, "What were you so glibly holding forth?" he inquired. "All I could hear were a lot of hao liao (excellent, finality.)"

"You may well have heard the two words 'hao liao,'" answered the Taoist with a smile, "but can you be said to have fathomed their meaning? You should know that all things in this world are excellent, when they have attained finality; when they have attained finality, they are excellent; but when they have not attained finality, they are not excellent; if they would be excellent, they should attain finality. My song is entitled Excellent-finality (hao liao)."

Shih-yin was gifted with a natural perspicacity that enabled him, as soon as he heard these remarks, to grasp their spirit.

"Wait a while," he therefore said smilingly; "let me unravel this excellent-finality song of yours; do you mind?"

"Please by all means go on with the interpretation," urged the Taoist; whereupon Shih-yin proceeded in this strain:

*Sordid rooms and vacant courts,
Replete in years gone by with beds where statesmen lay;
Parched grass and withered banyan trees,
Where once were halls for song and dance!
Spiders' webs the carved pillars intertwine,
The green gauze now is also pasted on the straw windows!
What about the cosmetic fresh concocted or the powder just scented;
Why has the hair too on each temple become white like hoarfrost!
Yesterday the tumulus of yellow earth buried the bleached bones,
To-night under the red silk curtain reclines the couple!
Gold fills the coffers, silver fills the boxes,
But in a twinkle, the beggars will all abuse you!
While you deplore that the life of others is not long,*

*You forget that you yourself are approaching death!
You educate your sons with all propriety,
But they may some day, 'tis hard to say become thieves;
Though you choose (your fare and home) the fatted beam,
You may, who can say, fall into some place of easy virtue!
Through your dislike of the gauze hat as mean,
You have come to be locked in a cangue;
Yesterday, poor fellow, you felt cold in a tattered coat,
To-day, you despise the purple embroidered dress as long!*

page 19

*Confusion reigns far and wide! you have just sung your part, I come on
the boards,
Instead of yours, you recognise another as your native land;
What utter perversion!
In one word, it comes to this we make wedding clothes for others!
(We sow for others to reap.)*

The crazy limping Taoist clapped his hands. "Your interpretation is explicit," he remarked with a hearty laugh, "your interpretation is explicit!"

Shih-yin promptly said nothing more than,—“Walk on;” and seizing the stole from the Taoist's shoulder, he flung it over his own. He did not, however, return home, but leisurely walked away, in company with the eccentric priest.

The report of his disappearance was at once bruited abroad, and plunged the whole neighbourhood in commotion; and converted into a piece of news, it was circulated from mouth to mouth.

Dame Feng, Shih-yin's wife, upon hearing the tidings, had such a fit of weeping that she hung between life and death; but her only alternative was to consult with her father, and to despatch servants on all sides to institute inquiries. No news was however received of him, and she had nothing else to do but to practise resignation, and to remain dependent upon the support of her parents for her subsistence. She had fortunately still by her side, to wait upon her, two servant girls, who had been with her in days gone by; and the three of them, mistress as well as servants,

occupied themselves day and night with needlework, to assist her father in his daily expenses.

This Feng Su had after all, in spite of his daily murmurings against his bad luck, no help but to submit to the inevitable.

On a certain day, the elder servant girl of the Chen family was at the door purchasing thread, and while there, she of a sudden heard in the street shouts of runners clearing the way, and every one explain that the new magistrate had come to take up his office.

The girl, as she peeped out from inside the door, perceived the lictors and policemen go by two by two; and when unexpectedly in a state chair, was carried past an official, in black hat and red coat, she was indeed quite taken aback.

“The face of this officer would seem familiar,” she argued within herself; “just as if I had seen him somewhere or other ere this.”

Shortly she entered the house, and banishing at once the occurrence from her mind, she did not give it a second thought. At night, however, while she was waiting to go to bed, she suddenly heard a sound like a rap

page 20

at the door. A band of men boisterously cried out: “We are messengers, deputed by the worthy magistrate of this district, and come to summon one of you to an enquiry.”

Feng Su, upon hearing these words, fell into such a terrible consternation that his eyes stared wide and his mouth gaped.

What calamity was impending is not as yet ascertained, but, reader, listen to the explanation contained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II.

*The spirit of Mrs. Chia Shih-yin departs from the town of Yang Chou.
Leng Tzu-hsing dilates upon the Jung Kuo Mansion.*

To continue. Feng Su, upon hearing the shouts of the public messengers, came out in a flurry and forcing a smile, he asked them to explain (their errand); but all these people did was to continue bawling out: "Be quick, and ask Mr. Chen to come out."

"My surname is Feng," said Feng Su, as he promptly forced himself to smile; "It isn't Chen at all: I had once a son-in-law whose surname was Chen, but he has left home, it is now already a year or two back. Is it perchance about him that you are inquiring?"

To which the public servants remarked: "We know nothing about Chen or Chia (true or false); but as he is your son-in-law, we'll take you at once along with us to make verbal answer to our master and have done with it."

And forthwith the whole bevy of public servants hustled Feng Su on, as they went on their way back; while every one in the Feng family was seized with consternation, and could not imagine what it was all about.

It was no earlier than the second watch, when Feng Su returned home; and they, one and all, pressed him with questions as to what had happened.

"The fact is," he explained, "the newly-appointed Magistrate, whose surname is Chia, whose name is Huo and who is a native of Hu-chow, has been on intimate terms, in years gone by, with our son-in-law; that at the sight of the girl Chiao Hsing, standing at the door, in the act of buying thread, he concluded that he must have shifted his quarters over here, and hence it was that his messengers came to fetch him. I gave him a clear account of the various circumstances (of his misfortunes), and the Magistrate was for a time much distressed and expressed his regret. He then went on to make inquiries about my grand-daughter, and I explained

that she had been lost, while looking at the illuminations. 'No matter,' put in the

page 21

Magistrate, 'I will by and by order my men to make search, and I feel certain that they will find her and bring her back.' Then ensued a short conversation, after which I was about to go, when he presented me with the sum of two taels."

The mistress of the Chen family (Mrs. Chen Shih-yin) could not but feel very much affected by what she heard, and the whole evening she uttered not a word.

The next day, at an early hour, Yü-ts'un sent some of his men to bring over to Chen's wife presents, consisting of two packets of silver, and four pieces of brocaded silk, as a token of gratitude, and to Feng Su also a confidential letter, requesting him to ask of Mrs. Chen her maid Chiao Hsing to become his second wife.

Feng Su was so intensely delighted that his eyebrows expanded, his eyes smiled, and he felt eager to toady to the Magistrate (by presenting the girl to him). He hastened to employ all his persuasive powers with his daughter (to further his purpose), and on the same evening he forthwith escorted Chiao Hsing in a small chair to the Yamen.

The joy experienced by Yü-ts'un need not be dilated upon. He also presented Feng Su with a packet containing one hundred ounces of gold; and sent numerous valuable presents to Mrs. Chen, enjoining her "to live cheerfully in the anticipation of finding out the whereabouts of her daughter."

It must be explained, however, that the maid Chi'ao Hsing was the very person, who, a few years ago, had looked round at Yü-ts'un and who, by one simple, unpremeditated glance, evolved, in fact, this extraordinary destiny which was indeed an event beyond conception.

Who would ever have foreseen that fate and fortune would both have so favoured her that she should, contrary to all anticipation, give birth to a

son, after living with Yü-ts'un barely a year, that in addition to this, after the lapse of another half year, Yü-ts'un's wife should have contracted a sudden illness and departed this life, and that Yü-ts'un should have at once raised her to the rank of first wife. Her destiny is adequately expressed by the lines:

*Through but one single, casual look
Soon an exalted place she took.*

The fact is that after Yü-ts'un had been presented with the money by Shih-yin, he promptly started on the 16th day for the capital, and at the triennial great tripos, his wishes were gratified to the full. Having successfully carried off his degree of graduate of the third rank, his name was put by selection on the list for provincial appointments. By this time, he had been raised to the rank of Magistrate in this district; but, in spite of the

page 22

excellence and sufficiency of his accomplishments and abilities, he could not escape being ambitious and overbearing. He failed besides, confident as he was in his own merits, in respect toward his superiors, with the result that these officials looked upon him scornfully with the corner of the eye.

A year had hardly elapsed, when he was readily denounced in a memorial to the Throne by the High Provincial authorities, who represented that he was of a haughty disposition, that he had taken upon himself to introduce innovations in the rites and ceremonies, that overtly, while he endeavoured to enjoy the reputation of probity and uprightness, he, secretly, combined the nature of the tiger and wolf; with the consequence that he had been the cause of much trouble in the district, and that he had made life intolerable for the people, &c. &c.

The Dragon countenance of the Emperor was considerably incensed. His Majesty lost no time in issuing commands, in reply to the Memorial, that he should be deprived of his official status.

On the arrival of the despatch from the Board, great was the joy felt by

every officer, without exception, of the prefecture in which he had held office. Yü-ts'un, though at heart intensely mortified and incensed, betrayed not the least outward symptom of annoyance, but still preserved, as of old, a smiling and cheerful countenance.

He handed over charge of all official business and removed the savings which he had accumulated during the several years he had been in office, his family and all his chattels to his original home; where, after having put everything in proper order, he himself travelled (carried the winds and sleeved the moon) far and wide, visiting every relic of note in the whole Empire.

As luck would have it, on a certain day while making a second journey through the Wei Yang district, he heard the news that the Salt Commissioner appointed this year was Lin Ju-hai. This Lin Ju-hai's family name was Lin, his name Hai and his style Ju-hai. He had obtained the third place in the previous triennial examination, and had, by this time, already risen to the rank of Director of the Court of Censors. He was a native of Ku Su. He had been recently named by Imperial appointment a Censor attached to the Salt Inspectorate, and had arrived at his post only a short while back.

In fact, the ancestors of Lin Ju-hai had, from years back, successively inherited the title of Marquis, which rank, by its present descent to Ju-hai, had already been enjoyed by five generations. When first conferred, the hereditary right to the title had been limited to three generations; but of late years, by an act of magnanimous favour and generous beneficence, extraordinary bounty had been superadded; and on the arrival of the

page 23

succession to the father of Ju-hai, the right had been extended to another degree. It had now descended to Ju-hai, who had, besides this title of nobility, begun his career as a successful graduate. But though his family had been through uninterrupted ages the recipient of imperial bounties, his kindred had all been anyhow men of culture.

The only misfortune had been that the several branches of the Lin family had not been prolific, so that the numbers of its members continued

limited; and though there existed several households, they were all however to Ju-hai no closer relatives than first cousins. Neither were there any connections of the same lineage, or of the same parentage.

Ju-hai was at this date past forty; and had only had a son, who had died the previous year, in the third year of his age. Though he had several handmaids, he had not had the good fortune of having another son; but this was too a matter that could not be remedied.

By his wife, née Chia, he had a daughter, to whom the infant name of Tai Yü was given. She was, at this time, in her fifth year. Upon her the parents doated as much as if she were a brilliant pearl in the palm of their hand. Seeing that she was endowed with natural gifts of intelligence and good looks, they also felt solicitous to bestow upon her a certain knowledge of books, with no other purpose than that of satisfying, by this illusory way, their wishes of having a son to nurture and of dispelling the anguish felt by them, on account of the desolation and void in their family circle (round their knees).

But to proceed. Yü-ts'un, while sojourning at an inn, was unexpectedly laid up with a violent chill. Finding on his recovery, that his funds were not sufficient to pay his expenses, he was thinking of looking out for some house where he could find a resting place when he suddenly came across two friends acquainted with the new Salt Commissioner. Knowing that this official was desirous to find a tutor to instruct his daughter, they lost no time in recommending Yü-ts'un, who moved into the Yamen.

His female pupil was youthful in years and delicate in physique, so that her lessons were irregular. Besides herself, there were only two waiting girls, who remained in attendance during the hours of study, so that Yü-ts'un was spared considerable trouble and had a suitable opportunity to attend to the improvement of his health.

In a twinkle, another year and more slipped by, and when least expected, the mother of his ward, née Chia, was carried away after a short illness. His pupil (during her mother's sickness) was dutiful in her attendance, and prepared the medicines for her use. (And after her death,) she went into the deepest mourning prescribed by the rites, and gave way to such excess of

grief that, naturally delicate as she was, her old complaint, on this account, broke out anew.

Being unable for a considerable time to prosecute her studies, Yü-ts'un lived at leisure and had no duties to attend to. Whenever therefore the wind was genial and the sun mild, he was wont to stroll at random, after he had done with his meals.

On this particular day, he, by some accident, extended his walk beyond the suburbs, and desirous to contemplate the nature of the rustic scenery, he, with listless step, came up to a spot encircled by hills and streaming pools, by luxuriant clumps of trees and thick groves of bamboos. Nestling in the dense foliage stood a temple. The doors and courts were in ruins. The walls, inner and outer, in disrepair. An inscription on a tablet testified that this was the temple of Spiritual Perception. On the sides of the door was also a pair of old and dilapidated scrolls with the following enigmatical verses.

*Behind ample there is, yet to retract the hand, the mind heeds not, until.
Before the mortal vision lies no path, when comes to turn the will.*

“These two sentences,” Yü-ts'un pondered after perusal, “although simple in language, are profound in signification. I have previous to this visited many a spacious temple, located on hills of note, but never have I beheld an inscription referring to anything of the kind. The meaning contained in these words must, I feel certain, owe their origin to the experiences of some person or other; but there's no saying. But why should I not go in and inquire for myself?”

Upon walking in, he at a glance caught sight of no one else, but of a very aged bonze, of unkempt appearance, cooking his rice. When Yü-ts'un perceived that he paid no notice, he went up to him and asked him one or two questions, but as the old priest was dull of hearing and a dotard, and as he had lost his teeth, and his tongue was blunt, he made most irrelevant replies.

Yü-ts'un lost all patience with him, and withdrew again from the compound with the intention of going as far as the village public house to have a drink or two, so as to enhance the enjoyment of the rustic scenery. With easy stride, he accordingly walked up to the place. Scarcely had he passed the threshold of the public house, when he perceived some one or other among the visitors who had been sitting sipping their wine on the divan, jump up and come up to greet him, with a face beaming with laughter.

“What a strange meeting! What a strange meeting!” he exclaimed aloud.

page 25

Yü-ts'un speedily looked at him, (and remembered) that this person had, in past days, carried on business in a curio establishment in the capital, and that his surname was Leng and his style Tzu-hsing.

A mutual friendship had existed between them during their sojourn, in days of yore, in the capital; and as Yü-ts'un had entertained the highest opinion of Leng Tzu-hsing, as being a man of action and of great abilities, while this Leng Tzu-hsing, on the other hand, borrowed of the reputation of refinement enjoyed by Yü-ts'un, the two had consequently all along lived in perfect harmony and companionship.

“When did you get here?” Yü-ts'un eagerly inquired also smilingly. “I wasn't in the least aware of your arrival. This unexpected meeting is positively a strange piece of good fortune.”

“I went home,” Tzu-hsing replied, “about the close of last year, but now as I am again bound to the capital, I passed through here on my way to look up a friend of mine and talk some matters over. He had the kindness to press me to stay with him for a couple of days longer, and as I after all have no urgent business to attend to, I am tarrying a few days, but purpose starting about the middle of the moon. My friend is busy to-day, so I roamed listlessly as far as here, never dreaming of such a fortunate meeting.”

While speaking, he made Yü-ts'un sit down at the same table, and ordered a fresh supply of wine and eatables; and as the two friends

chatted of one thing and another, they slowly sipped their wine.

The conversation ran on what had occurred after the separation, and Yü-ts'un inquired, "Is there any news of any kind in the capital?"

"There's nothing new whatever," answered Tzu-hsing. "There is one thing however: in the family of one of your worthy kinsmen, of the same name as yourself, a trifling, but yet remarkable, occurrence has taken place."

"None of my kindred reside in the capital," rejoined Yü-ts'un with a smile. "To what can you be alluding?"

"How can it be that you people who have the same surname do not belong to one clan?" remarked Tzu-hsing, sarcastically.

"In whose family?" inquired Yü-ts'un.

"The Chia family," replied Tzu-hsing smiling, "whose quarters are in the Jung Kuo Mansion, does not after all reflect discredit upon the lintel of your door, my venerable friend."

"What!" exclaimed Yü-ts'un, "did this affair take place in that family? Were we to begin reckoning, we would find the members of my clan to be anything but limited in number. Since the time of our ancestor Chia Fu, who lived while the Eastern Han dynasty occupied the Throne, the branches of our family have been numerous and flourishing; they are now to be found in every single province, and who could, with any accuracy,

page 26

ascertain their whereabouts? As regards the Jung-kuo branch in particular, their names are in fact inscribed on the same register as our own, but rich and exalted as they are, we have never presumed to claim them as our relatives, so that we have become more and more estranged."

"Don't make any such assertions," Tzu-hsing remarked with a sigh, "the present two mansions of Jung and Ning have both alike also suffered

reverses, and they cannot come up to their state of days of yore.”

“Up to this day, these two households of Ning and of Jung,” Yü-ts'un suggested, “still maintain a very large retinue of people, and how can it be that they have met with reverses?”

“To explain this would be indeed a long story,” said Leng Tzu-hsing. “Last year,” continued Yü-ts'un, “I arrived at Chin Ling, as I entertained a wish to visit the remains of interest of the six dynasties, and as I on that day entered the walled town of Shih T'ou, I passed by the entrance of that old residence. On the east side of the street, stood the Ning Kuo mansion; on the west the Jung Kuo mansion; and these two, adjoining each other as they do, cover in fact well-nigh half of the whole length of the street. Outside the front gate everything was, it is true, lonely and deserted; but at a glance into the interior over the enclosing wall, I perceived that the halls, pavilions, two-storied structures and porches presented still a majestic and lofty appearance. Even the flower garden, which extends over the whole area of the back grounds, with its trees and rockeries, also possessed to that day an air of luxuriance and freshness, which betrayed no signs of a ruined or decrepid establishment.”

“You have had the good fortune of starting in life as a graduate,” explained Tzu-tsing as he smiled, “and yet are not aware of the saying uttered by some one of old: that a centipede even when dead does not lie stiff. (These families) may, according to your version, not be up to the prosperity of former years, but, compared with the family of an ordinary official, their condition anyhow presents a difference. Of late the number of the inmates has, day by day, been on the increase; their affairs have become daily more numerous; of masters and servants, high and low, who live in ease and respectability very many there are; but of those who exercise any forethought, or make any provision, there is not even one. In their daily wants, their extravagances, and their expenditure, they are also unable to adapt themselves to circumstances and practise economy; (so that though) the present external framework may not have suffered any considerable collapse, their purses have anyhow begun to feel an exhausting process! But this is a mere trifle. There is another more serious matter. Would any one ever believe that in such families of official status, in a clan of education and culture, the sons and grandsons of the

present age would after all be each (succeeding) generation below the standard of the former?"

Yü-ts'un, having listened to these remarks, observed: "How ever can it be possible that families of such education and refinement can observe any system of training and nurture which is not excellent? Concerning the other branches, I am not in a position to say anything; but restricting myself to the two mansions of Jung and Ning, they are those in which, above all others, the education of their children is methodical."

"I was just now alluding to none other than these two establishments," Tzu-hsing observed with a sigh; "but let me tell you all. In days of yore, the duke of Ning Kuo and the duke of Jung Kuo were two uterine brothers. The Ning duke was the elder; he had four sons. After the death of the duke of Ning Kuo, his eldest son, Chia Tai-hua, came into the title. He also had two sons; but the eldest, whose name was Hu, died at the age of eight or nine; and the only survivor, the second son, Chia Ching, inherited the title. His whole mind is at this time set upon Taoist doctrines; his sole delight is to burn the pill and refine the dual powers; while every other thought finds no place in his mind. Happily, he had, at an early age, left a son, Chia Chen, behind in the lay world, and his father, engrossed as his whole heart was with the idea of attaining spiritual life, ceded the succession of the official title to him. His parent is, besides, not willing to return to the original family seat, but lives outside the walls of the capital, foolishly hobnobbing with all the Taoist priests. This Mr. Chen had also a son, Chia Jung, who is, at this period, just in his sixteenth year. Mr. Ching gives at present no attention to anything at all, so that Mr. Chen naturally devotes no time to his studies, but being bent upon nought else but incessant high pleasure, he has subversed the order of things in the Ning Kuo mansion, and yet no one can summon the courage to come and hold him in check. But I'll now tell you about the Jung mansion for your edification. The strange occurrence, to which I alluded just now, came about in this manner. After the demise of the Jung duke, the eldest son, Chia Tai-shan, inherited the rank. He took to himself as wife, the daughter of Marquis Shih, a noble family of Chin Ling, by whom he had two sons; the elder being Chia She, the younger Chia Cheng. This Tai Shan is now dead long ago; but his wife is still alive, and the elder son,

Chia She, succeeded to the degree. He is a man of amiable and genial disposition, but he likewise gives no thought to the direction of any domestic concern. The second son Chia Cheng displayed, from his early childhood, a great liking for books, and grew up to be correct and upright in character. His grandfather doated upon him, and would have had him start in life through the arena of public examinations, but, when least expected, Tai-shan, being

page 28

on the point of death, bequeathed a petition, which was laid before the Emperor. His Majesty, out of regard for his former minister, issued immediate commands that the elder son should inherit the estate, and further inquired how many sons there were besides him, all of whom he at once expressed a wish to be introduced in his imperial presence. His Majesty, moreover, displayed exceptional favour, and conferred upon Mr. Cheng the brevet rank of second class Assistant Secretary (of a Board), and commanded him to enter the Board to acquire the necessary experience. He has already now been promoted to the office of second class Secretary. This Mr. Cheng's wife, née Wang, first gave birth to a son called Chia Chu, who became a Licentiate in his fourteenth year. At barely twenty, he married, but fell ill and died soon after the birth of a son. Her (Mrs. Cheng's) second child was a daughter, who came into the world, by a strange coincidence, on the first day of the year. She had an unexpected (pleasure) in the birth, the succeeding year, of another son, who, still more remarkable to say, had, at the time of his birth, a piece of variegated and crystal-like brilliant jade in his mouth, on which were yet visible the outlines of several characters. Now, tell me, was not this a novel and strange occurrence? eh?"

"Strange indeed!" exclaimed Yü-ts'un with a smile; "but I presume the coming experiences of this being will not be mean."

Tzu-hsing gave a faint smile. "One and all," he remarked, "entertain the same idea. Hence it is that his mother doats upon him like upon a precious jewel. On the day of his first birthday, Mr. Cheng readily entertained a wish to put the bent of his inclinations to the test, and placed before the child all kinds of things, without number, for him to grasp from. Contrary to every expectation, he scorned every other object,

and, stretching forth his hand, he simply took hold of rouge, powder and a few hair-pins, with which he began to play. Mr. Cheng experienced at once displeasure, as he maintained that this youth would, by and bye, grow up into a sybarite, devoted to wine and women, and for this reason it is, that he soon began to feel not much attachment for him. But his grandmother is the one who, in spite of everything, prizes him like the breath of her own life. The very mention of what happened is even strange! He is now grown up to be seven or eight years old, and, although exceptionally wilful, in intelligence and precocity, however, not one in a hundred could come up to him! And as for the utterances of this child, they are no less remarkable. The bones and flesh of woman, he argues, are made of water, while those of man of mud. 'Women to my eyes are pure and pleasing,' he says, 'while at the sight of man, I readily feel how corrupt, foul and repelling they are!' Now tell me, are not these words ridiculous? There can be no doubt whatever that he will by and bye turn out to be a licentious roué."

page 29

Yü-ts'un, whose countenance suddenly assumed a stern air, promptly interrupted the conversation. "It doesn't quite follow," he suggested. "You people don't, I regret to say, understand the destiny of this child. The fact is that even the old Hanlin scholar Mr. Cheng was erroneously looked upon as a loose rake and dissolute debauchee! But unless a person, through much study of books and knowledge of letters, so increases (in lore) as to attain the talent of discerning the nature of things, and the vigour of mind to fathom the Taoist reason as well as to comprehend the first principle, he is not in a position to form any judgment."

Tzu-hsing upon perceiving the weighty import of what he propounded, "Please explain," he asked hastily, "the drift (of your argument)." To which Yü-ts'un responded: "Of the human beings created by the operation of heaven and earth, if we exclude those who are gifted with extreme benevolence and extreme viciousness, the rest, for the most part, present no striking diversity. If they be extremely benevolent, they fall in, at the time of their birth, with an era of propitious fortune; while those extremely vicious correspond, at the time of their existence, with an era of calamity. When those who coexist with propitious fortune come into life, the world is in order; when those who coexist with unpropitious

fortune come into life, the world is in danger. Yao, Shun, Yü, Ch'eng T'ang, Wen Wang, Wu Wang, Chou Kung, Chao Kung, Confucius, Mencius, T'ung Hu, Han Hsin, Chou Tzu, Ch'eng Tzu, Chu Tzu and Chang Tzu were ordained to see light in an auspicious era. Whereas Ch'i Yu, Kung Kung, Chieh Wang, Chou Wang, Shih Huang, Wang Mang, Tsao Ts'ao, Wen Wen, An Hu-shan, Ch'in Kuei and others were one and all destined to come into the world during a calamitous age. Those endowed with extreme benevolence set the world in order; those possessed of extreme maliciousness turn the world into disorder. Purity, intelligence, spirituality and subtlety constitute the vital spirit of right which pervades heaven and earth, and the persons gifted with benevolence are its natural fruit. Malignity and perversity constitute the spirit of evil, which permeates heaven and earth, and malicious persons are affected by its influence. The days of perpetual happiness and eminent good fortune, and the era of perfect peace and tranquility, which now prevail, are the offspring of the pure, intelligent, divine and subtle spirit which ascends above, to the very Emperor, and below reaches the rustic and uncultured classes. Every one is without exception under its influence. The superfluity of the subtle spirit expands far and wide, and finding nowhere to betake itself to, becomes, in due course, transformed into dew, or gentle breeze; and, by a process of diffusion, it pervades the whole world.

“The spirit of malignity and perversity, unable to expand under the brilliant sky and transmuting sun, eventually coagulates, pervades and stops

page 30

up the deep gutters and extensive caverns; and when of a sudden the wind agitates it or it be impelled by the clouds, and any slight disposition, on its part, supervenes to set itself in motion, or to break its bounds, and so little as even the minutest fraction does unexpectedly find an outlet, and happens to come across any spirit of perception and subtlety which may be at the time passing by, the spirit of right does not yield to the spirit of evil, and the spirit of evil is again envious of the spirit of right, so that the two do not harmonize. Just like wind, water, thunder and lightning, which, when they meet in the bowels of the earth, must necessarily, as they are both to dissolve and are likewise unable to yield, clash and explode to the end that they may at length exhaust

themselves. Hence it is that these spirits have also forcibly to diffuse themselves into the human race to find an outlet, so that they may then completely disperse, with the result that men and women are suddenly imbued with these spirits and spring into existence. At best, (these human beings) cannot be generated into philanthropists or perfect men; at worst, they cannot also embody extreme perversity or extreme wickedness. Yet placed among one million beings, the spirit of intelligence, refinement, perception and subtlety will be above these one million beings; while, on the other hand, the perverse, depraved and inhuman embodiment will likewise be below the million of men. Born in a noble and wealthy family, these men will be a salacious, lustful lot; born of literary, virtuous or poor parentage, they will turn out retired scholars or men of mark; though they may by some accident be born in a destitute and poverty-stricken home, they cannot possibly, in fact, ever sink so low as to become runners or menials, or contentedly brook to be of the common herd or to be driven and curbed like a horse in harness. They will become, for a certainty, either actors of note or courtesans of notoriety; as instanced in former years by Hsü Yu, T'ao Ch'ien, Yuan Chi, Chi Kang, Liu Ling, the two families of Wang and Hsieh, Ku Hu-t'ou, Ch'en Hou-chu, T'ang Ming-huang, Sung Hui-tsung, Liu T'ing-chih, Wen Fei-ching, Mei Nan-kung, Shih Man-ch'ing, Lui C'hih-ch'ing and Chin Shao-yu, and exemplified now-a-days by Ni Yün-lin, T'ang Po-hu, Chu Chih-shan, and also by Li Kuei-men, Huang P'an-cho, Ching Hsin-mo, Cho Wen-chün; and the women Hung Fu, Hsieh T'ao, Ch'ü Ying, Ch'ao Yün and others; all of whom were and are of the same stamp, though placed in different scenes of action."

"From what you say," observed Tzu-hsing, "success makes (a man) a duke or a marquis; ruin, a thief!"

"Quite so; that's just my idea!" replied Yü-ts'un; "I've not as yet let you know that after my degradation from office, I spent the last couple of years in travelling for pleasure all over each province, and that I also myself

page 31

came across two extraordinary youths. This is why, when a short while back you alluded to this Pao-yü, I at once conjectured, with a good deal

of certainty, that he must be a human being of the same stamp. There's no need for me to speak of any farther than the walled city of Chin Ling. This Mr. Chen was, by imperial appointment, named Principal of the Government Public College of the Chin Ling province. Do you perhaps know him?"

"Who doesn't know him?" remarked Tzu-hsing. "This Chen family is an old connection of the Chia family. These two families were on terms of great intimacy, and I myself likewise enjoyed the pleasure of their friendship for many a day."

"Last year, when at Chin Ling," Yü-ts'un continued with a smile, "some one recommended me as resident tutor to the school in the Chen mansion; and when I moved into it I saw for myself the state of things. Who would ever think that that household was grand and luxurious to such a degree! But they are an affluent family, and withal full of propriety, so that a school like this was of course not one easy to obtain. The pupil, however, was, it is true, a young tyro, but far more troublesome to teach than a candidate for the examination of graduate of the second degree. Were I to enter into details, you would indeed have a laugh. 'I must needs,' he explained, 'have the company of two girls in my studies to enable me to read at all, and to keep likewise my brain clear. Otherwise, if left to myself, my head gets all in a muddle.' Time after time, he further expounded to his young attendants, how extremely honourable and extremely pure were the two words representing woman, that they are more valuable and precious than the auspicious animal, the felicitous bird, rare flowers and uncommon plants. 'You may not' (he was wont to say), 'on any account heedlessly utter them, you set of foul mouths and filthy tongues! these two words are of the utmost import! Whenever you have occasion to allude to them, you must, before you can do so with impunity, take pure water and scented tea and rinse your mouths. In the event of any slip of the tongue, I shall at once have your teeth extracted, and your eyes gouged out.' His obstinacy and waywardness are, in every respect, out of the common. After he was allowed to leave school, and to return home, he became, at the sight of the young ladies, so tractable, gentle, sharp, and polite, transformed, in fact, like one of them. And though, for this reason, his father has punished him on more than one occasion, by giving him a sound thrashing, such as brought him to the verge of death, he cannot however change. Whenever he was being

beaten, and could no more endure the pain, he was wont to promptly break forth in promiscuous loud shouts, 'Girls! girls!' The young ladies, who heard him from the inner chambers, subsequently made fun of him. 'Why,'

page 32

they said, 'when you are being thrashed, and you are in pain, your only thought is to bawl out girls! Is it perchance that you expect us young ladies to go and intercede for you? How is that you have no sense of shame?' To their taunts he gave a most plausible explanation. 'Once,' he replied, 'when in the agony of pain, I gave vent to shouting girls, in the hope, perchance, I did not then know, of its being able to alleviate the soreness. After I had, with this purpose, given one cry, I really felt the pain considerably better; and now that I have obtained this secret spell, I have recourse, at once, when I am in the height of anguish, to shouts of girls, one shout after another. Now what do you say to this? Isn't this absurd, eh?'

"The grandmother is so infatuated by her extreme tenderness for this youth, that, time after time, she has, on her grandson's account, found fault with the tutor, and called her son to task, with the result that I resigned my post and took my leave. A youth, with a disposition such as his, cannot assuredly either perpetuate intact the estate of his father and grandfather, or follow the injunctions of teacher or advice of friends. The pity is, however, that there are, in that family, several excellent female cousins, the like of all of whom it would be difficult to discover."

"Quite so!" remarked Tzu-hsing; "there are now three young ladies in the Chia family who are simply perfection itself. The eldest is a daughter of Mr. Cheng, Yuan Ch'un by name, who, on account of her excellence, filial piety, talents, and virtue, has been selected as a governess in the palace. The second is the daughter of Mr. She's handmaid, and is called Ying Ch'un; the third is T'an Ch'un, the child of Mr. Cheng's handmaid; while the fourth is the uterine sister of Mr. Chen of the Ning Mansion. Her name is Hsi Ch'un. As dowager lady Shih is so fondly attached to her granddaughters, they come, for the most part, over to their grandmother's place to prosecute their studies together, and each one of these girls is, I hear, without a fault."

“More admirable,” observed Yü-ts'un, “is the regime (adhered to) in the Chen family, where the names of the female children have all been selected from the list of male names, and are unlike all those out-of-the-way names, such as Spring Blossom, Scented Gem, and the like flowery terms in vogue in other families. But how is it that the Chia family have likewise fallen into this common practice?”

“Not so!” ventured Tzu-h'sing. “It is simply because the eldest daughter was born on the first of the first moon, that the name of Yuan Ch'un was given to her; while with the rest this character Ch'un (spring) was then followed. The names of the senior generation are, in like manner, adopted from those of their brothers; and there is at present an instance in

page 33

support of this. The wife of your present worthy master, Mr. Lin, is the uterine sister of Mr. Chia. She and Mr. Chia Cheng, and she went, while at home, under the name of Chia Min. Should you question the truth of what I say, you are at liberty, on your return, to make minute inquiries and you'll be convinced.”

Yü-ts'un clapped his hands and said smiling, “It's so, I know! for this female pupil of mine, whose name is Tai-yü, invariably pronounces the character min as mi, whenever she comes across it in the course of her reading; while, in writing, when she comes to the character 'min,' she likewise reduces the strokes by one, sometimes by two. Often have I speculated in my mind (as to the cause), but the remarks I've heard you mention, convince me, without doubt, that it is no other reason (than that of reverence to her mother's name). Strange enough, this pupil of mine is unique in her speech and deportment, and in no way like any ordinary young lady. But considering that her mother was no commonplace woman herself, it is natural that she should have given birth to such a child. Besides, knowing, as I do now, that she is the granddaughter of the Jung family, it is no matter of surprise to me that she is what she is. Poor girl, her mother, after all, died in the course of the last month.”

Tzu-hsing heaved a sigh. “Of three elderly sisters,” he explained, “this

one was the youngest, and she too is gone! Of the sisters of the senior generation not one even survives! But now we'll see what the husbands of this younger generation will be like by and bye!"

"Yes," replied Yü-ts'un. "But some while back you mentioned that Mr. Cheng has had a son, born with a piece of jade in his mouth, and that he has besides a tender-aged grandson left by his eldest son; but is it likely that this Mr. She has not, himself, as yet, had any male issue?"

"After Mr. Cheng had this son with the jade," Tzu-hsing added, "his handmaid gave birth to another son, who whether he be good or bad, I don't at all know. At all events, he has by his side two sons and a grandson, but what these will grow up to be by and bye, I cannot tell. As regards Mr. Chia She, he too has had two sons; the second of whom, Chia Lien, is by this time about twenty. He took to wife a relative of his, a niece of Mr. Cheng's wife, a Miss Wang, and has now been married for the last two years. This Mr. Lien has lately obtained by purchase the rank of sub-prefect. He too takes little pleasure in books, but as far as worldly affairs go, he is so versatile and glib of tongue, that he has recently taken up his quarters with his uncle Mr. Cheng, to whom he gives a helping hand in the management of domestic matters. Who would have thought it, however, ever since his marriage with his worthy wife, not a single person, whether high or low, has there been who has not looked up to her with regard; with the result

page 34

that Mr. Lien himself has, in fact, had to take a back seat (*lit.* withdrew 35 li). In looks, she is also so extremely beautiful, in speech so extremely quick and fluent, in ingenuity so deep and astute, that even a man could, in no way, come up to her mark."

After hearing these remarks Yü-ts'un smiled. "You now perceive," he said, "that my argument is no fallacy, and that the several persons about whom you and I have just been talking are, we may presume, human beings, who, one and all, have been generated by the spirit of right, and the spirit of evil, and come to life by the same royal road; but of course there's no saying."

“Enough,” cried Tzu-hsing, “of right and enough of evil; we've been doing nothing but settling other people's accounts; come now, have another glass, and you'll be the better for it!”

“While bent upon talking,” Yü-ts'un explained, “I've had more glasses than is good for me.”

“Speaking of irrelevant matters about other people,” Tzu-hsing rejoined complacently, “is quite the thing to help us swallow our wine; so come now; what harm will happen, if we do have a few glasses more.”

Yü-ts'un thereupon looked out of the window.

“The day is also far advanced,” he remarked, “and if we don't take care, the gates will be closing; let us leisurely enter the city, and as we go along, there will be nothing to prevent us from continuing our chat.”

Forthwith the two friends rose from their seats, settled and paid their wine bill, and were just going, when they unexpectedly heard some one from behind say with a loud voice:

“Accept my congratulations, Brother Yü-ts'un; I've now come, with the express purpose of giving you the welcome news!”

Yü-ts'un lost no time in turning his head round to look at the speaker. But reader, if you wish to learn who the man was, listen to the details given in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III.

Lin Ju-hai appeals to his brother-in-law, Chia Cheng, recommending Yü-ts'un, his daughter's tutor, to his consideration.

Dowager lady Chia sends to fetch her granddaughter, out of commiseration for her being a motherless child.

But to proceed with our narrative.

Yü-ts'un, on speedily turning round, perceived that the speaker was no other than a certain Chang Ju-kuei, an old colleague of his, who had been denounced and deprived of office, on account of some case or other;

page 35

a native of that district, who had, since his degradation, resided in his family home.

Having lately come to hear the news that a memorial, presented in the capital, that the former officers (who had been cashiered) should be reinstated, had received the imperial consent, he had promptly done all he could, in every nook and corner, to obtain influence, and to find the means (of righting his position,) when he, unexpectedly, came across Yü-ts'un, to whom he therefore lost no time in offering his congratulations. The two friends exchanged the conventional salutations, and Chang Ju-kuei forthwith communicated the tidings to Yü-ts'un.

Yü-ts'un was delighted, but after he had made a few remarks, in a great hurry, each took his leave and sped on his own way homewards.

Leng Tzu-hsing, upon hearing this conversation, hastened at once to propose a plan, advising Yü-ts'un to request Lin Ju-hai, in his turn, to appeal in the capital to Mr. Chia Cheng for support.

Yü-ts'un accepted the suggestion, and parted from his companion.

On his return to his quarters, he made all haste to lay his hand on the

Metropolitan Gazette, and having ascertained that the news was authentic, he had on the next day a personal consultation with Ju-hai.

“Providence and good fortune are both alike propitious!” exclaimed Ju-hai. “After the death of my wife, my mother-in-law, whose residence is in the capital, was so very solicitous on my daughter’s account, for having no one to depend upon, that she despatched, at an early period, boats with men and women servants to come and fetch her. But my child was at the time not quite over her illness, and that is why she has not yet started. I was, this very moment, cogitating to send my daughter to the capital. And in view of the obligation, under which I am to you for the instruction you have heretofore conferred upon her, remaining as yet unrequited, there is no reason why, when such an opportunity as this presents itself, I should not do my utmost to find means to make proper acknowledgment. I have already, in anticipation, given the matter my attention, and written a letter of recommendation to my brother-in-law, urging him to put everything right for you, in order that I may, to a certain extent, be able to give effect to my modest wishes. As for any outlay that may prove necessary, I have given proper explanation, in the letter to my brother-in-law, so that you, my brother, need not trouble yourself by giving way to much anxiety.”

As Yü-ts'un bowed and expressed his appreciation in most profuse language,—

“Pray,” he asked, “where does your honoured brother-in-law reside?”

page 36

and what is his official capacity? But I fear I'm too coarse in my manner, and could not presume to obtrude myself in his presence.”

Ju-hai smiled. “And yet,” he remarked, “this brother-in-law of mine is after all of one and the same family as your worthy self, for he is the grandson of the Duke Jung. My elder brother-in-law has now inherited the status of Captain-General of the first grade. His name is She, his style Ngen-hou. My second brother-in-law's name is Cheng, his style is Tzu-chou. His present post is that of a Second class Secretary in the Board of Works. He is modest and kindhearted, and has much in him of the habits of his

grandfather; not one of that purse-proud and haughty kind of men. That is why I have written to him and made the request on your behalf. Were he different to what he really is, not only would he cast a slur upon your honest purpose, honourable brother, but I myself likewise would not have been as prompt in taking action."

When Yü-ts'un heard these remarks, he at length credited what had been told him by Tzu-hsing the day before, and he lost no time in again expressing his sense of gratitude to Lin Ju-hai.

Ju-hai resumed the conversation.

"I have fixed," (he explained,) "upon the second of next month, for my young daughter's departure for the capital, and, if you, brother mine, were to travel along with her, would it not be an advantage to herself, as well as to yourself?"

Yü-ts'un signified his acquiescence as he listened to his proposal; feeling in his inner self extremely elated.

Ju-hai availed himself of the earliest opportunity to get ready the presents (for the capital) and all the requirements for the journey, which (when completed,) Yü-ts'un took over one by one. His pupil could not, at first, brook the idea, of a separation from her father, but the pressing wishes of her grandmother left her no course (but to comply).

"Your father," Ju-hai furthermore argued with her, "is already fifty; and I entertain no wish to marry again; and then you are always ailing; besides, with your extreme youth, you have, above, no mother of your own to take care of you, and below, no sisters to attend to you. If you now go and have your maternal grandmother, as well as your mother's brothers and your cousins to depend upon, you will be doing the best thing to reduce the anxiety which I feel in my heart on your behalf. Why then should you not go?"

Tai-yü, after listening to what her father had to say, parted from him in a flood of tears and followed her nurse and several old matrons from the Jung mansion on board her boat, and set out on her journey.

Yü-ts'un had a boat to himself, and with two youths to wait on him, he prosecuted his voyage in the wake of Tai-yü.

By a certain day, they reached Ching Tu; and Yü-ts'un, after first adjusting his hat and clothes, came, attended by a youth, to the door of the Jung mansion, and sent in a card, which showed his lineage.

Chia Cheng had, by this time, perused his brother-in-law's letter, and he speedily asked him to walk in. When they met, he found in Yü-ts'un an imposing manner and polite address.

This Chia Cheng had, in fact, a great penchant above all things for men of education, men courteous to the talented, respectful to the learned, ready to lend a helping hand to the needy and to succour the distressed, and was, to a great extent, like his grandfather. As it was besides a wish intimated by his brother-in-law, he therefore treated Yü-ts'un with a consideration still more unusual, and readily strained all his resources to assist him.

On the very day on which the memorial was submitted to the Throne, he obtained by his efforts, a reinstatement to office, and before the expiry of two months, Yü-ts'un was forthwith selected to fill the appointment of prefect of Ying T'ien in Chin Ling. Taking leave of Chia Cheng, he chose a propitious day, and proceeded to his post, where we will leave him without further notice for the present.

But to return to Tai-yü. On the day on which she left the boat, and the moment she put her foot on shore, there were forthwith at her disposal chairs for her own use, and carts for the luggage, sent over from the Jung mansion.

Lin Tai-yü had often heard her mother recount how different was her grandmother's house from that of other people's; and having seen for herself how above the common run were already the attendants of the three grades, (sent to wait upon her,) in attire, in their fare, in all their articles of use, "how much more," (she thought to herself) "now that I am going to her home, must I be careful at every step, and circumspect at

every moment! Nor must I utter one word too many, nor make one step more than is proper, for fear lest I should be ridiculed by any of them!”

From the moment she got into the chair, and they had entered within the city walls, she found, as she looked around, through the gauze window, at the bustle in the streets and public places and at the immense concourse of people, everything naturally so unlike what she had seen elsewhere.

After they had also been a considerable time on the way, she suddenly caught sight, at the northern end of the street, of two huge squatting lions of marble and of three lofty gates with (knockers representing) the heads of animals. In front of these gates, sat, in a row, about ten men in coloured

page 38

hats and fine attire. The main gate was not open. It was only through the side gates, on the east and west, that people went in and came out. Above the centre gate was a tablet. On this tablet were inscribed in five large characters—“The Ning Kuo mansion erected by imperial command.”

“This must be grandmother's eldest son's residence,” reflected Tai-yü.

Towards the east, again, at no great distance, were three more high gateways, likewise of the same kind as those she had just seen. This was the Jung Kuo mansion.

They did not however go in by the main gate; but simply made their entrance through the east side door.

With the sedans on their shoulders, (the bearers) proceeded about the distance of the throw of an arrow, when upon turning a corner, they hastily put down the chairs. The matrons, who came behind, one and all also dismounted. (The bearers) were changed for four youths of seventeen or eighteen, with hats and clothes without a blemish, and while they carried the chair, the whole bevy of matrons followed on foot.

When they reached a creeper-laden gate, the sedan was put down, and all the youths stepped back and retired. The matrons came forward, raised the screen, and supported Tai-yü to descend from the chair.

Lin Tai-yü entered the door with the creepers, resting on the hand of a matron.

On both sides was a verandah, like two outstretched arms. An Entrance Hall stood in the centre, in the middle of which was a door-screen of Ta Li marble, set in an ebony frame. On the other side of this screen were three very small halls. At the back of these came at once an extensive courtyard, belonging to the main building.

In the front part were five parlours, the frieze of the ceiling of which was all carved, and the pillars ornamented. On either side, were covered avenues, resembling passages through a rock. In the side-rooms were suspended cages, full of parrots of every colour, thrushes, and birds of every description.

On the terrace-steps, sat several waiting maids, dressed in red and green, and the whole company of them advanced, with beaming faces, to greet them, when they saw the party approach. "Her venerable ladyship," they said, "was at this very moment thinking of you, miss, and, by a strange coincidence, here you are."

Three or four of them forthwith vied with each other in raising the door curtain, while at the same time was heard some one announce: "Miss Lin has arrived."

page 39

No sooner had she entered the room, than she espied two servants supporting a venerable lady, with silver-white hair, coming forward to greet her. Convinced that this lady must be her grandmother, she was about to prostrate herself and pay her obeisance, when she was quickly clasped in the arms of her grandmother, who held her close against her bosom; and as she called her "my liver! my flesh!" (my love! my darling!) she began to sob aloud.

The bystanders too, at once, without one exception, melted into tears; and Tai-yü herself found some difficulty in restraining her sobs. Little by little the whole party succeeded in consoling her, and Tai-yü at length paid her obeisance to her grandmother. Her ladyship thereupon pointed them out one by one to Tai-yü. "This," she said, "is the wife of your uncle, your mother's elder brother; this is the wife of your uncle, her second brother; and this is your eldest sister-in-law Chu, the wife of your senior cousin Chu."

Tai-yü bowed to each one of them (with folded arms).

"Ask the young ladies in," dowager lady Chia went on to say; "tell them a guest from afar has just arrived, one who comes for the first time; and that they may not go to their lessons."

The servants with one voice signified their obedience, and two of them speedily went to carry out her orders.

Not long after three nurses and five or six waiting-maids were seen ushering in three young ladies. The first was somewhat plump in figure and of medium height; her cheeks had a congealed appearance, like a fresh lichee; her nose was glossy like goose fat. She was gracious, demure, and lovable to look at.

The second had sloping shoulders, and a slim waist. Tall and slender was she in stature, with a face like the egg of a goose. Her eyes so beautiful, with their well-curved eyebrows, possessed in their gaze a bewitching flash. At the very sight of her refined and elegant manners all idea of vulgarity was forgotten.

The third was below the medium size, and her mien was, as yet, childlike.

In their head ornaments, jewelry, and dress, the get-up of the three young ladies was identical.

Tai-yü speedily rose to greet them and to exchange salutations. After they had made each other's acquaintance, they all took a seat, whereupon the servants brought the tea. Their conversation was confined to Tai-yü's mother,—how she had fallen ill, what doctors had

attended her, what medicines had been given her, and how she had been buried and mourned; and dowager lady Chia was naturally again in great anguish.

“Of all my daughters,” she remarked, “your mother was the one I loved best, and now in a twinkling, she has passed away, before me too, and I’ve not been able to so much as see her face. How can this not make my heart sore-stricken?”

And as she gave vent to these feelings, she took Tai-yü’s hand in hers, and again gave way to sobs; and it was only after the members of the family had quickly made use of much exhortation and coaxing, that they succeeded, little by little, in stopping her tears.

They all perceived that Tai-yü, despite her youthful years and appearance, was lady-like in her deportment and address, and that though with her delicate figure and countenance, (she seemed as if) unable to bear the very weight of her clothes, she possessed, however, a certain captivating air. And as they readily noticed the symptoms of a weak constitution, they went on in consequence to make inquiries as to what medicines she ordinarily took, and how it was that her complaint had not been cured.

“I have,” explained Tai-yü, “been in this state ever since I was born; though I’ve taken medicines from the very time I was able to eat rice, up to the present, and have been treated by ever so many doctors of note, I’ve not derived any benefit. In the year when I was yet only three, I remember a mangy-headed bonze coming to our house, and saying that he would take me along, and make a nun of me; but my father and mother would, on no account, give their consent. ‘As you cannot bear to part from her and to give her up,’ he then remarked, ‘her ailment will, I fear, never, throughout her life, be cured. If you wish to see her all right, it is only to be done by not letting her, from this day forward, on any account, listen to the sound of weeping, or see, with the exception of her parents, any relatives outside the family circle. Then alone will she be able to go through this existence in peace and in quiet.’ No one heeded the nonsensical talk of this raving priest; but here am I, up to this very day, dosing myself with ginseng pills as a tonic.”

“What a lucky coincidence!” interposed dowager lady Chia; “some of these pills are being compounded here, and I’ll simply tell them to have an extra supply made; that’s all.”

Hardly had she finished these words, when a sound of laughter was heard from the back courtyard. “Here I am too late!” the voice said, “and not in time to receive the distant visitor!”

“Every one of all these people,” reflected Tai-yü, “holds her peace and suppresses the very breath of her mouth; and who, I wonder, is this coming in this reckless and rude manner?”

page 41

While, as yet, preoccupied with these thoughts, she caught sight of a crowd of married women and waiting-maids enter from the back room, pressing round a regular beauty.

The attire of this person bore no similarity to that of the young ladies. In all her splendour and lustre, she looked like a fairy or a goddess. In her coiffure, she had a band of gold filigree work, representing the eight precious things, inlaid with pearls; and wore pins, at the head of each of which were five phoenixes in a rampant position, with pendants of pearls. On her neck, she had a reddish gold necklet, like coiled dragons, with a fringe of tassels. On her person, she wore a tight-sleeved jacket, of dark red flowered satin, covered with hundreds of butterflies, embroidered in gold, interspersed with flowers. Over all, she had a variegated stiff-silk pelisse, lined with slate-blue ermine; while her nether garments consisted of a jupe of kingfisher-colour foreign crepe, brocaded with flowers.

She had a pair of eyes, triangular in shape like those of the red phoenix, two eyebrows, curved upwards at each temple, like willow leaves. Her stature was elegant; her figure graceful; her powdered face like dawning spring, majestic, yet not haughty. Her carnation lips, long before they parted, betrayed a smile.

Tai-yü eagerly rose and greeted her.

Old lady Chia then smiled. “You don’t know her,” she observed. “This is a

cunning vixen, who has made quite a name in this establishment! In Nanking, she went by the appellation of vixen, and if you simply call her Feng Vixen, it will do.”

Tai-yü was just at a loss how to address her, when all her cousins informed Tai-yü, that this was her sister-in-law Lien.

Tai-yü had not, it is true, made her acquaintance before, but she had heard her mother mention that her eldest maternal uncle Chia She's son, Chia Lien, had married the niece of Madame Wang, her second brother's wife, a girl who had, from her infancy, purposely been nurtured to supply the place of a son, and to whom the school name of Wang Hsi-feng had been given.

Tai-yü lost no time in returning her smile and saluting her with all propriety, addressing her as my sister-in-law. This Hsi-feng laid hold of Tai-yü's hand, and minutely scrutinised her, for a while, from head to foot; after which she led her back next to dowager lady Chia, where they both took a seat.

“If really there be a being of such beauty in the world,” she consequently observed with a smile, “I may well consider as having set eyes upon it to-day! Besides, in the air of her whole person, she doesn't in fact look

page 42

like your granddaughter-in-law, our worthy ancestor, but in every way like your ladyship's own kindred-granddaughter! It's no wonder then that your venerable ladyship should have, day after day, had her unforgotten, even for a second, in your lips and heart. It's a pity, however, that this cousin of mine should have such a hard lot! How did it happen that our aunt died at such an early period?”

As she uttered these words, she hastily took her handkerchief and wiped the tears from her eyes.

“I've only just recovered from a fit of crying,” dowager lady Chia observed, as she smiled, “and have you again come to start me? Your cousin has only now arrived from a distant journey, and she is so delicate

to boot! Besides, we have a few minutes back succeeded in coaxing her to restrain her sobs, so drop at once making any allusion to your former remarks!”

This Hsi-feng, upon hearing these words, lost no time in converting her sorrow into joy.

“Quite right,” she remarked. “But at the sight of my cousin, my whole heart was absorbed in her, and I felt happy, and yet wounded at heart: but having disregarded my venerable ancestor’s presence, I deserve to be beaten, I do indeed!”

And hastily taking once more Tai-yü’s hand in her own: “How old are you, cousin?” she inquired; “Have you been to school? What medicines are you taking? while you live here, you mustn’t feel homesick; and if there’s anything you would like to eat, or to play with, mind you come and tell me! or should the waiting maids or the matrons fail in their duties, don’t forget also to report them to me.”

Addressing at the same time the matrons, she went on to ask, “Have Miss Lin’s luggage and effects been brought in? How many servants has she brought along with her? Go, as soon as you can, and sweep two lower rooms and ask them to go and rest.”

As she spake, tea and refreshments had already been served, and Hsi-feng herself handed round the cups and offered the fruits.

Upon hearing the question further put by her maternal aunt Secunda, “Whether the issue of the monthly allowances of money had been finished or not yet?” Hsi-feng replied: “The issue of the money has also been completed; but a few moments back, when I went along with several servants to the back upper-loft, in search of the satins, we looked for ever so long, but we saw nothing of the kind of satins alluded to by you, madame, yesterday; so may it not be that your memory misgives you?”

“Whether there be any or not, of that special kind, is of no consequence,” observed madame Wang. “You should take out,” she therefore went on

to add, "any two pieces which first come under your hand, for this cousin of yours to make herself dresses with; and in the evening, if I don't forget, I'll send some one to fetch them."

"I've in fact already made every provision," rejoined Hsi-feng; "knowing very well that my cousin would be arriving within these two days, I have had everything got ready for her. And when you, madame, go back, if you will pass an eye over everything, I shall be able to send them round."

Madame Wang gave a smile, nodded her head assentingly, but uttered not a word by way of reply.

The tea and fruit had by this time been cleared, and dowager lady Chia directed two old nurses to take Tai-yü to go and see her two maternal uncles; whereupon Chia She's wife, madame Hsing, hastily stood up and with a smiling face suggested, "I'll take my niece over; for it will after all be considerably better if I go!"

"Quite so!" answered dowager lady Chia, smiling; "you can go home too, and there will be no need for you to come over again!"

Madame Hsing expressed her assent, and forthwith led Tai-yü to take leave of madame Wang. The whole party escorted them as far as the door of the Entrance Hall, hung with creepers, where several youths had drawn a carriage, painted light blue, with a kingfisher-coloured hood.

Madame Hsing led Tai-yü by the hand and they got up into their seats. The whole company of matrons put the curtain down, and then bade the youths raise the carriage; who dragged it along, until they came to an open space, where they at length put the mules into harness.

Going out again by the eastern side gate, they proceeded in an easterly direction, passed the main entrance of the Jung mansion, and entered a lofty doorway painted black. On the arrival in front of the ceremonial gate, they at once dismounted from the curricle, and madame Hsing, hand-in-hand with Tai-yü, walked into the court.

“These grounds,” surmised Tai-yü to herself, “must have been originally converted from a piece partitioned from the garden of the Jung mansion.”

Having entered three rows of ceremonial gates they actually caught sight of the main structure, with its vestibules and porches, all of which, though on a small scale, were full of artistic and unique beauty. They were nothing like the lofty, imposing, massive and luxurious style of architecture on the other side, yet the avenues and rockeries, in the various places in the court, were all in perfect taste.

When they reached the interior of the principal pavilion, a large concourse of handmaids and waiting maids, got up in gala dress, were already

page 44

there to greet them. Madame Hsing pressed Tai-yü into a seat, while she bade some one go into the outer library and request Mr. Chia She to come over.

In a few minutes the servant returned. “Master,” she explained, “says: ‘that he has not felt quite well for several days, that as the meeting with Miss Lin will affect both her as well as himself, he does not for the present feel equal to seeing each other, that he advises Miss Lin not to feel despondent or homesick; that she ought to feel quite at home with her venerable ladyship, (her grandmother,) as well as her maternal aunts; that her cousins are, it is true, blunt, but that if all the young ladies associated together in one place, they may also perchance dispel some dulness; that if ever (Miss Lin) has any grievance, she should at once speak out, and on no account feel a stranger; and everything will then be right.’”

Tai-yü lost no time in respectfully standing up, resuming her seat after she had listened to every sentence of the message to her. After a while, she said goodbye, and though madame Hsing used every argument to induce her to stay for the repast and then leave, Tai-yü smiled and said, “I shouldn’t under ordinary circumstances refuse the invitation to dinner, which you, aunt, in your love kindly extend to me, but I have still to cross over and pay my respects to my maternal uncle Secundus; if I went too

late, it would, I fear, be a lack of respect on my part; but I shall accept on another occasion. I hope therefore that you will, dear aunt, kindly excuse me.”

“If such be the case,” madame Hsing replied, “it's all right.” And presently directing two nurses to take her niece over, in the carriage, in which they had come a while back, Tai-yü thereupon took her leave; madame Hsing escorting her as far as the ceremonial gate, where she gave some further directions to all the company of servants. She followed the curricle with her eyes so long as it remained in sight, and at length retraced her footsteps.

Tai-yü shortly entered the Jung Mansion, descended from the carriage, and preceded by all the nurses, she at once proceeded towards the east, turned a corner, passed through an Entrance Hall, running east and west, and walked in a southern direction, at the back of the Large Hall. On the inner side of a ceremonial gate, and at the upper end of a spacious court, stood a large main building, with five apartments, flanked on both sides by out-houses (stretching out) like the antlers on the head of deer; side-gates, resembling passages through a hill, establishing a thorough communication all round; (a main building) lofty, majestic, solid and grand, and unlike those in the compound of dowager lady Chia.

Tai-yü readily concluded that this at last was the main inner suite of apartments. A raised broad road led in a straight line to the large gate.

page 45

Upon entering the Hall, and raising her head, she first of all perceived before her a large tablet with blue ground, upon which figured nine dragons of reddish gold. The inscription on this tablet consisted of three characters as large as a peck-measure, and declared that this was the Hall of Glorious Felicity.

At the end, was a row of characters of minute size, denoting the year, month and day, upon which His Majesty had been pleased to confer the tablet upon Chia Yuan, Duke of Jung Kuo. Besides this tablet, were numberless costly articles bearing the autograph of the Emperor. On the large black ebony table, engraved with dragons, were placed three

antique blue and green bronze tripods, about three feet in height. On the wall hung a large picture representing black dragons, such as were seen in waiting chambers of the Sui dynasty. On one side stood a gold cup of chased work, while on the other, a crystal casket. On the ground were placed, in two rows, sixteen chairs, made of hard-grained cedar.

There was also a pair of scrolls consisting of black-wood antithetical tablets, inlaid with the strokes of words in chased gold. Their burden was this:

*On the platform shine resplendent pearls like sun or moon,
And the sheen of the Hall facade gleams like russet sky.*

Below, was a row of small characters, denoting that the scroll had been written by the hand of Mu Shih, a fellow-countryman and old friend of the family, who, for his meritorious services, had the hereditary title of Prince of Tung Ngan conferred upon him.

The fact is that madame Wang was also not in the habit of sitting and resting, in this main apartment, but in three side-rooms on the east, so that the nurses at once led Tai-yü through the door of the eastern wing.

On a stove-couch, near the window, was spread a foreign red carpet. On the side of honour, were laid deep red reclining-cushions, with dragons, with gold cash (for scales), and an oblong brown-coloured sitting-cushion with gold-cash-spotted dragons. On the two sides, stood one of a pair of small teapoy of foreign lacquer of peach-blossom pattern. On the teapoy on the left, were spread out Wen Wang tripods, spoons, chopsticks and scent-bottles. On the teapoy on the right, were vases from the Ju Kiln, painted with girls of great beauty, in which were placed seasonable flowers; (on it were) also teacups, a tea service and the like articles.

On the floor on the west side of the room, were four chairs in a row, all of which were covered with antimacassars, embroidered with silverish-red flowers, while below, at the feet of these chairs, stood four footstools. On either side, was also one of a pair of high teapoy, and these teapoy were covered with teacups and flower vases.

The other nick-nacks need not be minutely described.

The old nurses pressed Tai-yü to sit down on the stove-couch; but, on perceiving near the edge of the couch two embroidered cushions, placed one opposite the other, she thought of the gradation of seats, and did not therefore place herself on the couch, but on a chair on the eastern side of the room; whereupon the waiting maids, in attendance in these quarters, hastened to serve the tea.

While Tai-yü was sipping her tea, she observed the headgear, dress, deportment and manners of the several waiting maids, which she really found so unlike what she had seen in other households. She had hardly finished her tea, when she noticed a waiting maid approach, dressed in a red satin jacket, and a waistcoat of blue satin with scollops.

“My lady requests Miss Lin to come over and sit with her,” she remarked as she put on a smile.

The old nurses, upon hearing this message, speedily ushered Tai-yü again out of this apartment, into the three-roomed small main building by the eastern porch.

On the stove-couch, situated at the principal part of the room, was placed, in a transverse position, a low couch-table, at the upper end of which were laid out, in a heap, books and a tea service. Against the partition-wall, on the east side, facing the west, was a reclining pillow, made of blue satin, neither old nor new.

Madame Wang, however, occupied the lower seat, on the west side, on which was likewise placed a rather shabby blue satin sitting-rug, with a back-cushion; and upon perceiving Tai-yü come in she urged her at once to sit on the east side.

Tai-yü concluded, in her mind, that this seat must certainly belong to Chia Cheng, and espying, next to the couch, a row of three chairs, covered with antimacassars, strewn with embroidered flowers, somewhat also the worse for use, Tai-yü sat down on one of these chairs.

But as madame Wang pressed her again and again to sit on the couch, Tai-yü had at length to take a seat next to her.

“Your uncle,” madame Wang explained, “is gone to observe this day as a fast day, but you'll see him by and bye. There's, however, one thing I want to talk to you about. Your three female cousins are all, it is true, everything that is nice; and you will, when later on you come together for study, or to learn how to do needlework, or whenever, at any time, you romp and laugh together, find them all most obliging; but there's one thing that causes me very much concern. I have here one, who is the very root of retribution, the incarnation of all mischief, one who is a ne'er-do-well, a

page 47

prince of malignant spirits in this family. He is gone to-day to pay his vows in the temple, and is not back yet, but you will see him in the evening, when you will readily be able to judge for yourself. One thing you must do, and that is, from this time forth, not to pay any notice to him. All these cousins of yours don't venture to bring any taint upon themselves by provoking him.”

Tai-yü had in days gone by heard her mother explain that she had a nephew, born into the world, holding a piece of jade in his mouth, who was perverse beyond measure, who took no pleasure in his books, and whose sole great delight was to play the giddy dog in the inner apartments; that her maternal grandmother, on the other hand, loved him so fondly that no one ever presumed to call him to account, so that when, in this instance, she heard madame Wang's advice, she at once felt certain that it must be this very cousin.

“Isn't it to the cousin born with jade in his mouth, that you are alluding to, aunt?” she inquired as she returned her smile. “When I was at home, I remember my mother telling me more than once of this very cousin, who (she said) was a year older than I, and whose infant name was Pao Yü. She added that his disposition was really wayward, but that he treats all his cousins with the utmost consideration. Besides, now that I have come here, I shall, of course, be always together with my female cousins, while the boys will have their own court, and separate quarters; and how ever

will there be any cause of bringing any slur upon myself by provoking him?"

"You don't know the reasons (that prompt me to warn you)," replied madame Wang laughingly. "He is so unlike all the rest, all because he has, since his youth up, been doated upon by our old lady! The fact is that he has been spoilt, through over-indulgence, by being always in the company of his female cousins! If his female cousins pay no heed to him, he is, at any rate, somewhat orderly, but the day his cousins say one word more to him than usual, much trouble forthwith arises, at the outburst of delight in his heart. That's why I enjoin upon you not to heed him. From his mouth, at one time, issue sugared words and mellifluous phrases; and at another, like the heavens devoid of the sun, he becomes a raving fool; so whatever you do, don't believe all he says."

Tai-yü was assenting to every bit of advice as it was uttered, when unexpectedly she beheld a waiting-maid walk in. "Her venerable ladyship over there," she said, "has sent word about the evening meal."

Madame Wang hastily took Tai-yü by the hand, and emerging by the door of the back-room, they went eastwards by the verandah at the back. Past the side gate, was a roadway, running north and south. On the

page 48

southern side were a pavilion with three divisions and a Reception Hall with a colonnade. On the north, stood a large screen wall, painted white; behind it was a very small building, with a door of half the ordinary size.

"These are your cousin Feng's rooms," explained madame Wang to Tai-yü, as she pointed to them smiling. "You'll know in future your way to come and find her; and if you ever lack anything, mind you mention it to her, and she'll make it all right."

At the door of this court, were also several youths, who had recently had the tufts of their hair tied together, who all dropped their hands against their sides, and stood in a respectful posture. Madame Wang then led Tai-yü by the hand through a corridor, running east and west, into what was dowager lady Chia's back-court. Forthwith they entered the door of

the back suite of rooms, where stood, already in attendance, a large number of servants, who, when they saw madame Wang arrive, set to work setting the tables and chairs in order.

Chia Chu's wife, nee Li, served the eatables, while Hsi-feng placed the chopsticks, and madame Wang brought the soup in. Dowager lady Chia was seated all alone on the divan, in the main part of the apartment, on the two sides of which stood four vacant chairs.

Hsi-feng at once drew Tai-yü, meaning to make her sit in the foremost chair on the left side, but Tai-yü steadily and concedingly declined.

“Your aunts and sisters-in-law, standing on the right and left,” dowager lady Chia smilingly explained, “won't have their repast in here, and as you're a guest, it's but proper that you should take that seat.”

Then alone it was that Tai-yü asked for permission to sit down, seating herself on the chair.

Madame Wang likewise took a seat at old lady Chia's instance; and the three cousins, Ying Ch'un and the others, having craved for leave to sit down, at length came forward, and Ying Ch'un took the first chair on the right, T'an Ch'un the second, and Hsi Ch'un the second on the left. Waiting maids stood by holding in their hands, flips and finger-bowls and napkins, while Mrs. Li and lady Feng, the two of them, kept near the table advising them what to eat, and pressing them to help themselves.

In the outer apartments, the married women and waiting-maids in attendance, were, it is true, very numerous; but not even so much as the sound of the cawing of a crow could be heard.

The repast over, each one was presented by a waiting-maid, with tea in a small tea tray; but the Lin family had all along impressed upon the mind of their daughter that in order to show due regard to happiness, and to preserve good health, it was essential, after every meal, to wait a while,

before drinking any tea, so that it should not do any harm to the

intestines. When, therefore, Tai-yü perceived how many habits there were in this establishment unlike those which prevailed in her home, she too had no alternative but to conform herself to a certain extent with them. Upon taking over the cup of tea, servants came once more and presented finger-bowls for them to rinse their mouths, and Tai-yü also rinsed hers; and after they had all again finished washing their hands, tea was eventually served a second time, and this was, at length, the tea that was intended to be drunk.

“You can all go,” observed dowager lady Chia, “and let us alone to have a chat.”

Madame Wang rose as soon as she heard these words, and having made a few irrelevant remarks, she led the way and left the room along with the two ladies, Mrs. Li and lady Feng.

Dowager lady Chia, having inquired of Tai-yü what books she was reading, “I have just begun reading the Four Books,” Tai-yü replied. “What books are my cousins reading?” Tai-yü went on to ask.

“Books, you say!” exclaimed dowager lady Chia; “why all they know are a few characters, that's all.”

The sentence was barely out of her lips, when a continuous sounding of footsteps was heard outside, and a waiting maid entered and announced that Pao Yü was coming. Tai-yü was speculating in her mind how it was that this Pao Yü had turned out such a good-for-nothing fellow, when he happened to walk in.

He was, in fact, a young man of tender years, wearing on his head, to hold his hair together, a cap of gold of purplish tinge, inlaid with precious gems. Parallel with his eyebrows was attached a circlet, embroidered with gold, and representing two dragons snatching a pearl. He wore an archery-sleeved deep red jacket, with hundreds of butterflies worked in gold of two different shades, interspersed with flowers; and was girded with a sash of variegated silk, with clusters of designs, to which was attached long tassels; a kind of sash worn in the palace. Over all, he had a slate-blue fringed coat of Japanese brocaded satin, with eight bunches of flowers in relief; and wore a pair of light blue satin white-soled, half-

dress court-shoes.

His face was like the full moon at mid-autumn; his complexion, like morning flowers in spring; the hair along his temples, as if chiselled with a knife; his eyebrows, as if pencilled with ink; his nose like a suspended gallbladder (a well-cut and shapely nose); his eyes like vernal waves; his angry look even resembled a smile; his glance, even when stern, was full of sentiment.

page 50

Round his neck he had a gold dragon necklet with a fringe; also a cord of variegated silk, to which was attached a piece of beautiful jade.

As soon as Tai-yü became conscious of his presence, she was quite taken aback. "How very strange!" she was reflecting in her mind; "it would seem as if I had seen him somewhere or other, for his face appears extremely familiar to my eyes;" when she noticed Pao Yü face dowager lady Chia and make his obeisance. "Go and see your mother and then come back," remarked her venerable ladyship; and at once he turned round and quitted the room.

On his return, he had already changed his hat and suit. All round his head, he had a fringe of short hair, plaited into small queues, and bound with red silk. The queues were gathered up at the crown, and all the hair, which had been allowed to grow since his birth, was plaited into a thick queue, which looked as black and as glossy as lacquer. Between the crown of the head and the extremity of the queue, hung a string of four large pearls, with pendants of gold, representing the eight precious things. On his person, he wore a long silvery-red coat, more or less old, bestrewn with embroidery of flowers. He had still round his neck the necklet, precious gem, amulet of Recorded Name, philacteries, and other ornaments. Below were partly visible a fir-cone coloured brocaded silk pair of trousers, socks spotted with black designs, with ornamented edges, and a pair of deep red, thick-soled shoes.

(Got up as he was now,) his face displayed a still whiter appearance, as if painted, and his eyes as if they were set off with carnation. As he rolled his eyes, they brimmed with love. When he gave utterance to speech, he

seemed to smile. But the chief natural pleasing feature was mainly centred in the curve of his eyebrows. The ten thousand and one fond sentiments, fostered by him during the whole of his existence, were all amassed in the corner of his eyes.

His outward appearance may have been pleasing to the highest degree, but yet it was no easy matter to fathom what lay beneath it.

There are a couple of roundelays, composed by a later poet, (after the excellent rhythm of the) Hsi Chiang Yueh, which depict Pao Yü in a most adequate manner.

The roundelays run as follows:

*To gloom and passion prone, without a rhyme,
Inane and madlike was he many a time,
His outer self, forsooth, fine may have been,
But one wild, howling waste his mind within:
Addled his brain that nothing he could see;
A dunce! to read essays so loth to be!
Perverse in bearing, in temper wayward;
For human censure he had no regard.*

page 51

*When rich, wealth to enjoy he knew not how;
When poor, to poverty he could not bow.
Alas! what utter waste of lustrous grace!
To state, to family what a disgrace!
Of ne'er-do-wells below he was the prime,
Unfilial like him none up to this time.
Ye lads, pampered with sumptuous fare and dress,
Beware! In this youth's footsteps do not press!*

But to proceed with our story.

“You have gone and changed your clothes,” observed dowager lady Chia, “before being introduced to the distant guest. Why don't you yet salute your cousin?”

Pao Yü had long ago become aware of the presence of a most beautiful young lady, who, he readily concluded, must be no other than the daughter of his aunt Lin. He hastened to advance up to her, and make his bow; and after their introduction, he resumed his seat, whence he minutely scrutinised her features, (which he thought) so unlike those of all other girls.

Her two arched eyebrows, thick as clustered smoke, bore a certain not very pronounced frowning wrinkle. She had a pair of eyes, which possessed a cheerful, and yet one would say, a sad expression, overflowing with sentiment. Her face showed the prints of sorrow stamped on her two dimpled cheeks. She was beautiful, but her whole frame was the prey of a hereditary disease. The tears in her eyes glistened like small specks. Her balmy breath was so gentle. She was as demure as a lovely flower reflected in the water. Her gait resembled a frail willow, agitated by the wind. Her heart, compared with that of Pi Kan, had one more aperture of intelligence; while her ailment exceeded (in intensity) by three degrees the ailment of Hsi-Tzu.

Pao Yü, having concluded his scrutiny of her, put on a smile and said, "This cousin I have already seen in days gone by."

"There you are again with your nonsense," exclaimed lady Chia, sneeringly; "how could you have seen her before?"

"Though I may not have seen her, ere this," observed Pao Yü with a smirk, "yet when I look at her face, it seems so familiar, and to my mind, it would appear as if we had been old acquaintances; just as if, in fact, we were now meeting after a long separation."

"That will do! that will do!" remarked dowager lady Chia; "such being the case, you will be the more intimate."

Pao Yü, thereupon, went up to Tai-yü, and taking a seat next to her, continued to look at her again with all intentness for a good long while.

"Have you read any books, cousin?" he asked.

"I haven't as yet," replied Tai-yü, "read any books, as I have only been to school for a year; all I know are simply a few characters."

page 51

"What is your worthy name, cousin?" Pao Yü went on to ask; whereupon Tai-yü speedily told him her name.

"Your style?" inquired Pao Yü; to which question Tai-yü replied, "I have no style."

"I'll give you a style," suggested Pao Yü smilingly; "won't the double style 'P'in P'in,' 'knitting brows,' do very well?"

"From what part of the standard books does that come?" T'an Ch'un hastily interposed.

"It is stated in the Thorough Research into the state of Creation from remote ages to the present day," Pao Yü went on to explain, "that, in the western quarter, there exists a stone, called Tai, (black,) which can be used, in lieu of ink, to blacken the eyebrows with. Besides the eyebrows of this cousin taper in a way, as if they were contracted, so that the selection of these two characters is most appropriate, isn't it?"

"This is just another plagiarism, I fear," observed T'an Ch'un, with an ironic smirk.

"Exclusive of the Four Books," Pao Yü remarked smilingly, "the majority of works are plagiarised; and is it only I, perchance, who plagiarise? Have you got any jade or not?" he went on to inquire, addressing Tai-yü, (to the discomfiture) of all who could not make out what he meant.

"It's because he has a jade himself," Tai-yü forthwith reasoned within her mind, "that he asks me whether I have one or not.—No; I haven't one," she replied. "That jade of yours is besides a rare object, and how could every one have one?"

As soon as Pao Yü heard this remark, he at once burst out in a fit of his raving complaint, and unclasping the gem, he dashed it disdainfully on

the floor. "Rare object, indeed!" he shouted, as he heaped invective on it; "it has no idea how to discriminate the excellent from the mean, among human beings; and do tell me, has it any perception or not? I too can do without this rubbish!"

All those, who stood below, were startled; and in a body they pressed forward, vying with each other as to who should pick up the gem.

Dowager lady Chia was so distressed that she clasped Pao Yü in her embrace. "You child of wrath," she exclaimed. "When you get into a passion, it's easy enough for you to beat and abuse people; but what makes you fling away that stem of life?"

Pao Yü's face was covered with the traces of tears. "All my cousins here, senior as well as junior," he rejoined, as he sobbed, "have no gem, and if it's only I to have one, there's no fun in it, I maintain! and now comes this

page 53

angelic sort of cousin, and she too has none, so that it's clear enough that it is no profitable thing."

Dowager lady Chia hastened to coax him. "This cousin of yours," she explained, "would, under former circumstances, have come here with a jade; and it's because your aunt felt unable, as she lay on her death-bed, to reconcile herself to the separation from your cousin, that in the absence of any remedy, she forthwith took the gem belonging to her (daughter), along with her (in the grave); so that, in the first place, by the fulfilment of the rites of burying the living with the dead might be accomplished the filial piety of your cousin; and in the second place, that the spirit of your aunt might also, for the time being, use it to gratify the wish of gazing on your cousin. That's why she simply told you that she had no jade; for she couldn't very well have had any desire to give vent to self-praise. Now, how can you ever compare yourself with her? and don't you yet carefully and circumspectly put it on? Mind, your mother may come to know what you have done!"

As she uttered these words, she speedily took the jade over from the hand of the waiting-maid, and she herself fastened it on for him.

When Pao Yü heard this explanation, he indulged in reflection, but could not even then advance any further arguments.

A nurse came at the moment and inquired about Tai-yü's quarters, and dowager lady Chia at once added, "Shift Pao Yü along with me, into the warm room of my suite of apartments, and put your mistress, Miss Lin, temporarily in the green gauze house; and when the rest of the winter is over, and repairs are taken in hand in spring in their rooms, an additional wing can be put up for her to take up her quarters in."

"My dear ancestor," ventured Pao Yü; "the bed I occupy outside the green gauze house is very comfortable; and what need is there again for me to leave it and come and disturb your old ladyship's peace and quiet?"

"Well, all right," observed dowager lady Chia, after some consideration; "but let each one of you have a nurse, as well as a waiting-maid to attend on you; the other servants can remain in the outside rooms and keep night watch and be ready to answer any call."

At an early hour, besides, Hsi-feng had sent a servant round with a grey flowered curtain, embroidered coverlets and satin quilts and other such articles.

Tai-yü had brought along with her only two servants; the one was her own nurse, dame Wang, and the other was a young waiting-maid of sixteen, whose name was called Hsüeh Yen. Dowager lady Chia, perceiving that Hsüeh Yen was too youthful and quite a child in her manner, while nurse

page 54

Wang was, on the other hand, too aged, conjectured that Tai-yü would, in all her wants, not have things as she liked, so she detached two waiting-maids, who were her own personal attendants, named Tzu Chüan and Ying Ko, and attached them to Tai-yü's service. Just as had Ying Ch'un and the other girls, each one of whom had besides the wet nurses of their youth, four other nurses to advise and direct them, and exclusive of two

personal maids to look after their dress and toilette, four or five additional young maids to do the washing and sweeping of the rooms and the running about backwards and forwards on errands.

Nurse Wang, Tzu Chüan and other girls entered at once upon their attendance on Tai-yü in the green gauze rooms, while Pao Yü's wet-nurse, dame Li, together with an elderly waiting-maid, called Hsi Jen, were on duty in the room with the large bed.

This Hsi Jen had also been, originally, one of dowager lady Chia's servant-girls. Her name was in days gone by, Chen Chu. As her venerable ladyship, in her tender love for Pao Yü, had feared that Pao Yü's servant girls were not equal to their duties, she readily handed her to Pao Yü, as she had hitherto had experience of how sincere and considerate she was at heart.

Pao Yü, knowing that her surname was at one time Hua, and having once seen in some verses of an ancient poet, the line "the fragrance of flowers wafts itself into man," lost no time in explaining the fact to dowager lady Chia, who at once changed her name into Hsi Jen.

This Hsi Jen had several simple traits. While in attendance upon dowager lady Chia, in her heart and her eyes there was no one but her venerable ladyship, and her alone; and now in her attendance upon Pao Yü, her heart and her eyes were again full of Pao Yü, and him alone. But as Pao Yü was of a perverse temperament and did not heed her repeated injunctions, she felt at heart exceedingly grieved.

At night, after nurse Li had fallen asleep, seeing that in the inner chambers, Tai-yü, Ying Ko and the others had not as yet retired to rest, she disrobed herself, and with gentle step walked in.

"How is it, miss," she inquired smiling, "that you have not turned in as yet?"

Tai-yü at once put on a smile. "Sit down, sister," she rejoined, pressing her to take a seat. Hsi Jen sat on the edge of the bed.

"Miss Lin," interposed Ying Ko smirkingly, "has been here in an awful

state of mind! She has cried so to herself, that her eyes were flooded, as soon as she dried her tears. 'It's only to-day that I've come,' she said, 'and I've already been the cause of the outbreak of your young master's failing. Now had he broken that jade, as he hurled it on the ground, wouldn't it

page 55

have been my fault? Hence it was that she was so wounded at heart, that I had all the trouble in the world, before I could appease her.”

“Desist at once, Miss! Don't go on like this,” Hsi Jen advised her; “there will, I fear, in the future, happen things far more strange and ridiculous than this; and if you allow yourself to be wounded and affected to such a degree by a conduct such as his, you will, I apprehend, suffer endless wounds and anguish; so be quick and dispel this over-sensitive nature!”

“What you sisters advise me,” replied Tai-yü, “I shall bear in mind, and it will be all right.”

They had another chat, which lasted for some time, before they at length retired to rest for the night.

The next day, (she and her cousins) got up at an early hour and went over to pay their respects to dowager lady Chia, after which upon coming to madame Wang's apartments, they happened to find madame Wang and Hsi-feng together, opening the letters which had arrived from Chin Ling. There were also in the room two married women, who had been sent from madame Wang's elder brother's wife's house to deliver a message.

Tai-yü was, it is true, not aware of what was up, but T'an Ch'un and the others knew that they were discussing the son of her mother's sister, married in the Hsüeh family, in the city of Chin Ling, a cousin of theirs, Hsüeh P'an, who relying upon his wealth and influence had, by assaulting a man, committed homicide, and who was now to be tried in the court of the Ying T'ien Prefecture.

Her maternal uncle, Wang Tzu-t'eng, had now, on the receipt of the

tidings, despatched messengers to bring over the news to the Chia family. But the next chapter will explain what was the ultimate issue of the wish entertained in this mansion to send for the Hsüeh family to come to the capital

CHAPTER IV.

*An ill-fated girl happens to meet an ill-fated young man.
The Hu Lu Bonze adjudicates the Hu Lu case.*

Tai-yü, for we shall now return to our story, having come, along with her cousin to madame Wang's apartments, found madame Wang discussing certain domestic occurrences with the messengers, who had arrived from her elder brother's wife's home, and conversing also about the case of homicide, in which the family of her mother's sister had become involved, and other such relevant topics. Perceiving how pressing and perplexing were

page 56

the matters in which madame Wang was engaged, the young ladies promptly left her apartments, and came over to the rooms of their widow sister-in-law, Mrs. Li.

This Mrs. Li had originally been the spouse of Chia Chu. Although Chu had died at an early age, he had the good fortune of leaving behind him a son, to whom the name of Chia Lan was given. He was, at this period, just in his fifth year, and had already entered school, and applied himself to books.

This Mrs. Li was also the daughter of an official of note in Chin Ling. Her father's name was Li Shou-chung, who had, at one time, been Imperial Libationer. Among his kindred, men as well as women had all devoted themselves to poetry and letters; but ever since Li Shou-chung continued the line of succession, he readily asserted that the absence of literary attainments in his daughter was indeed a virtue, so that it soon came about that she did not apply herself in real earnest to learning; with the result that all she studied were some parts of the "Four Books for women," and the "Memoirs of excellent women," that all she read did not extend beyond a limited number of characters, and that all she committed to memory were the examples of these few worthy female characters of dynasties of yore; while she attached special importance to spinning and female handiwork. To this reason is to be assigned the name selected for

her, of Li Wan (Li, the weaver), and the style of Kung Ts'ai (Palace Sempstress).

Hence it was that, though this Li Wan still continued, after the loss of her mate, while she was as yet in the spring of her life, to live amidst affluence and luxury, she nevertheless resembled in every respect a block of rotten wood or dead ashes. She had no inclination whatsoever to inquire after anything or to listen to anything; while her sole and exclusive thought was to wait upon her relatives and educate her son; and, in addition to this, to teach her young sisters-in-law to do needlework and to read aloud.

Tai-yü was, it is true, at this period living as a guest in the Chia mansion, where she certainly had the several young ladies to associate with her, but, outside her aged father, (she thought) there was really no need for her to extend affection to any of the rest.

But we will now speak of Chia Yü-ts'un. Having obtained the appointment of Prefect of Ying T'ien, he had no sooner arrived at his post than a charge of manslaughter was laid before his court. This had arisen from some rivalry between two parties in the purchase of a slave-girl, either of whom would not yield his right; with the result that a serious assault occurred, which ended in homicide.

Yü-ts'un had, with all promptitude, the servants of the plaintiffs brought before him, and subjected them to an examination.

page 57

“The victim of the assault,” the plaintiffs deposed, “was your servants' master. Having on a certain day, purchased a servant-girl, she unexpectedly turned out to be a girl who had been carried away and sold by a kidnapper. This kidnapper had, first of all, got hold of our family's money, and our master had given out that he would on the third day, which was a propitious day, take her over into the house, but this kidnapper stealthily sold her over again to the Hsüeh family. When we came to know of this, we went in search of the seller to lay hold of him, and bring back the girl by force. But the Hsüeh party has been all along the bully of Chin Ling, full of confidence in his wealth, full of presumption

on account of his prestige; and his arrogant menials in a body seized our master and beat him to death. The murderous master and his crew have all long ago made good their escape, leaving no trace behind them, while there only remain several parties not concerned in the affair. Your servants have for a whole year lodged complaints, but there has been no one to do our cause justice, and we therefore implore your Lordship to have the bloodstained criminals arrested, and thus conduce to the maintenance of humanity and benevolence; and the living, as well as the dead, will feel boundless gratitude for this heavenly bounty.”

When Yü-ts'un heard their appeal, he flew into a fiery rage. “What!” he exclaimed. “How could a case of such gravity have taken place as the murder of a man, and the culprits have been allowed to run away scot-free, without being arrested? Issue warrants, and despatch constables to at once lay hold of the relatives of the bloodstained criminals and bring them to be examined by means of torture.”

Thereupon he espied a Retainer, who was standing by the judgment-table, wink at him, signifying that he should not issue the warrants. Yü-ts'un gave way to secret suspicion, and felt compelled to desist.

Withdrawing from the Court-room, he retired into a private chamber, from whence he dismissed his followers, only keeping this single Retainer to wait upon him.

The Retainer speedily advanced and paid his obeisance. “Your worship,” he said smiling, “has persistently been rising in official honours, and increasing in wealth so that, in the course of about eight or nine years, you have forgotten me.”

“Your face is, however, extremely familiar,” observed Yü-ts'un, “but I cannot, for the moment, recall who you are.”

“Honourable people forget many things,” remarked the Retainer, as he smiled. “What! Have you even forgotten the place where you started in life? and do you not remember what occurred, in years gone by, in the Hu Lu Temple?”

Yü-ts'un was filled with extreme astonishment; and past events then began to dawn upon him.

The fact is that this Retainer had been at one time a young priest in the Hu Lu temple; but as, after its destruction by fire, he had no place to rest his frame, he remembered how light and easy was, after all, this kind of occupation, and being unable to reconcile himself to the solitude and quiet of a temple, he accordingly availed himself of his years, which were as yet few, to let his hair grow, and become a retainer.

Yü-ts'un had had no idea that it was he. Hastily taking his hand in his, he smilingly observed, "You are, indeed, an old acquaintance!" and then pressed him to take a seat, so as to have a chat with more ease, but the Retainer would not presume to sit down.

"Friendships," Yü-ts'un remarked, putting on a smiling expression, "contracted in poor circumstances should not be forgotten! This is a private room; so that if you sat down, what would it matter?"

The Retainer thereupon craved permission to take a seat, and sat down gingerly, all awry.

"Why did you, a short while back," Yü-ts'un inquired, "not allow me to issue the warrants?"

"Your illustrious office," replied the Retainer, "has brought your worship here, and is it likely you have not transcribed some philactery of your post in this province!"

"What is an office-philactery?" asked Yü-ts'un with alacrity.

"Now-a-days," explained the Retainer, "those who become local officers provide themselves invariably with a secret list, in which are entered the names and surnames of the most influential and affluent gentry of note in the province. This is in vogue in every province. Should inadvertently, at any moment, one give umbrage to persons of this status, why, not only office, but I fear even one's life, it would be difficult to preserve. That's why these lists are called office-philacteries. This Hsüeh family, just a

while back spoken of, how could your worship presume to provoke? This case in question affords no difficulties whatever in the way of a settlement; but the prefects, who have held office before you, have all, by doing violence to the feelings and good name of these people, come to the end they did.”

As he uttered these words, he produced, from inside a purse which he had handy, a transcribed office-philactery, which he handed over to Yü-ts'un; who upon perusal, found it full of trite and unpolished expressions of public opinion, with regard to the leading clans and notable official families in that particular district. They ran as follows:

The “Chia” family is not “chia,” a myth; white jade form the Halls; gold compose their horses! The “A Fang” Palace is three hundred *li* in

page 59

extent, but is no fit residence for a “Shih” of Chin Ling. The eastern seas lack white jade beds, and the “Lung Wang,” king of the Dragons, has come to ask for one of the Chin Ling Wang, (Mr. Wang of Chin Ling.) In a plenteous year, snow, (Hsüeh,) is very plentiful; their pearls and gems are like sand, their gold like iron.

Scarcely had Yü-ts'un done reading, when suddenly was heard the announcement, communicated by the beating of a gong, that Mr. Wang had come to pay his respects.

Yü-ts'un hastily adjusted his official clothes and hat, and went out of the room to greet and receive the visitor. Returning after a short while he proceeded to question the Retainer (about what he had been perusing.)

“These four families,” explained the Retainer, “are all interlaced by ties of relationship, so that if you offend one, you offend all; if you honour one, you honour all. For support and protection, they all have those to take care of their interests! Now this Hsüeh, who is charged with homicide, is indeed the Hsüeh implied by 'in a plenteous year, (Hsüeh,) snow, is very plentiful.' In fact, not only has he these three families to rely upon, but his (father's) old friends, and his own relatives and friends are both to be found in the capital, as well as abroad in the provinces; and they are,

what is more, not few in number. Who is it then that your Worship purposes having arrested?"

When Yü-ts'un had heard these remarks, he forthwith put on a smile and inquired of the Retainer, "If what you say be true, how is then this lawsuit to be settled? Are you also perchance well aware of the place of retreat of this homicide?"

"I don't deceive your Worship," the Retainer ventured smiling, "when I say that not only do I know the hiding-place of this homicide, but that I also am acquainted with the man who kidnapped and sold the girl; I likewise knew full well the poor devil and buyer, now deceased. But wait, and I'll tell your worship all, with full details. This person, who succumbed to the assault, was the son of a minor gentry. His name was Feng Yüeh. His father and mother are both deceased, and he has likewise no brothers. He looked after some scanty property in order to eke out a living. His age was eighteen or nineteen; and he had a strong penchant for men's, and not much for women's society. But this was too the retribution (for sins committed) in a previous existence! for coming, by a strange coincidence, in the way of this kidnapper, who was selling the maid, he straightway at a glance fell in love with this girl, and made up his mind to purchase her and make her his second wife; entering an oath not to associate with any male friends, nor even to marry another girl. And so much in earnest was he in this matter that he had to wait until after the third day before she could enter his household

page 60

(so as to make the necessary preparations for the marriage). But who would have foreseen the issue? This kidnapper quietly disposed of her again by sale to the Hsüeh family; his intention being to pocket the price-money from both parties, and effect his escape. Contrary to his calculations, he couldn't after all run away in time, and the two buyers laid hold of him and beat him, till he was half dead; but neither of them would take his coin back, each insisting upon the possession of the girl. But do you think that young gentleman, Mr. Hsüeh, would yield his claim to her person? Why, he at once summoned his servants and bade them have recourse to force; and, taking this young man Feng, they assailed him till they made mincemeat of him. He was then carried back to his

home, where he finally died after the expiry of three days. This young Mr. Hsüeh had previously chosen a day, on which he meant to set out for the capital, and though he had beaten the young man Feng to death, and carried off the girl, he nevertheless behaved in the manner of a man who had had no concern in the affair. And all he gave his mind to was to take his family and go along on his way; but not in any wise in order to evade (the consequences) of this (occurrence). This case of homicide, (he looked upon) as a most trivial and insignificant matter, which, (he thought), his brother and servants, who were on the spot, would be enough to settle. But, however, enough of this person. Now does your worship know who this girl is who was sold?"

"How could I possibly know?" answered Yü-ts'un.

"And yet," remarked the Retainer, as he laughed coldly, "this is a person to whom you are indebted for great obligations; for she is no one else than the daughter of Mr. Chen, who lived next door to the Hu Lu temple. Her infant name is 'Ying Lien.'"

"What! is it really she?" exclaimed Yü-ts'un full of surprise. "I heard that she had been kidnapped, ever since she was five years old; but has she only been sold recently?"

"Kidnappers of this kind," continued the Retainer, "only abduct infant girls, whom they bring up till they reach the age of twelve or thirteen, when they take them into strange districts and dispose of them through their agents. In days gone by, we used daily to coax this girl, Ying Lien, to romp with us, so that we got to be exceedingly friendly. Hence it is that though, with the lapse of seven or eight years, her mien has assumed a more surpassingly lovely appearance, her general features have, on the other hand, undergone no change; and this is why I can recognise her. Besides, in the centre of her two eyebrows, she had a spot, of the size of a grain of rice, of carnation colour, which she has had ever since she was born into the world. This kidnapper, it also happened, rented my house to live in; and on a certain day, on which the kidnapper was not at home, I even set her a few questions.

She said, 'that the kidnapper had so beaten her, that she felt intimidated, and couldn't on any account, venture to speak out; simply averring that the kidnapper was her own father, and that, as he had no funds to repay his debts, he had consequently disposed of her by sale!' I tried time after time to induce her to answer me, but she again gave way to tears and added no more than: 'I don't really remember anything of my youth.' Of this, anyhow, there can be no doubt; on a certain day the young man Feng and the kidnapper met, said the money was paid down; but as the kidnapper happened to be intoxicated, Ying Lien exclaimed, as she sighed: 'My punishment has this day been consummated!' Later on again, when she heard that young Feng would, after three days, have her taken over to his house, she once more underwent a change and put on such a sorrowful look that, unable to brook the sight of it, I waited till the kidnapper went out, when I again told my wife to go and cheer her by representing to her that this Mr. Feng's fixed purpose to wait for a propitious day, on which to come and take her over, was ample proof that he would not look upon her as a servant-girl. 'Furthermore,' (explained my wife to her), 'he is a sort of person exceedingly given to fast habits, and has at home ample means to live upon, so that if, besides, with his extreme aversion to women, he actually purchases you now, at a fancy price, you should be able to guess the issue, without any explanation. You have to bear suspense only for two or three days, and what need is there to be sorrowful and dejected?' After these assurances, she became somewhat composed, flattering herself that she would from henceforth have a home of her own.

“But who would believe that the world is but full of disappointments! On the succeeding day, it came about that the kidnapper again sold her to the Hsüeh family! Had he disposed of her to any other party, no harm would anyhow have resulted; but this young gentleman Hsüeh, who is nicknamed by all, 'the Foolish and overbearing Prince,' is the most perverse and passionate being in the whole world. What is more, he throws money away as if it were dust. The day on which he gave the thrashing with blows like falling leaves and flowing water, he dragged (*lit.* pull alive, drag dead) Ying Lien away more dead than alive, by sheer force, and no one, even up to this date, is aware whether she be among the dead or the living. This young Feng had a spell of empty happiness; for (not only) was his wish not fulfilled, but on the contrary he spent money and lost his life; and was not this a lamentable case?”

When Yü-ts'un heard this account he also heaved a sigh. "This was indeed," he observed, "a retribution in store for them! Their encounter was likewise not accidental; for had it been, how was it that this Feng Yüeh took a fancy to Ying Lien?"

page 62

"This Ying Lien had, during all these years, to endure much harsh treatment from the hands of the kidnapper, and had, at length, obtained the means of escape; and being besides full of warm feeling, had he actually made her his wife, and had they come together, the event would certainly have been happy; but, as luck would have it, there occurred again this contretemps.

"This Hsüeh is, it is true, more laden with riches and honours than Feng was, but when we bear in mind what kind of man he is he certainly, with his large bevy of handmaids, and his licentious and inordinate habits, cannot ever be held equal to Feng Yüeh, who had set his heart upon one person! This may appositely be termed a fantastic sentimental destiny, which, by a strange coincidence, befell a couple consisting of an ill-fated young fellow and girl! But why discuss third parties? The only thing now is how to decide this case, so as to put things right."

"Your worship," remarked the Retainer smiling, "displayed, in years gone by, such great intelligence and decision, and how is it that today you, on the contrary, become a person without any resources! Your servant has heard that the promotion of your worship to fill up this office is due to the exertions of the Chia and Wang families; and as this Hsüeh P'an is a relative of the Chia mansion, why doesn't your worship take your craft along with the stream, and bring, by the performance of a kindness, this case to an issue, so that you may again in days to come, be able to go and face the two Dukes Chia and Wang?"

"What you suggest," replied Yü-ts'un, "is, of course, right enough; but this case involves a human life, and honoured as I have been, by His Majesty the Emperor, by a restoration to office, and selection to an appointment, how can I at the very moment, when I may strain all my energies to show my gratitude, by reason of a private consideration, set the laws at

nought? This is a thing which I really haven't the courage to do.”

“What your worship says is naturally right and proper,” remarked the Retainer at these words, smiling sarcastically, “but at the present stage of the world, such things cannot be done. Haven't you heard the saying of a man of old to the effect that great men take action suitable to the times. 'He who presses,' he adds, 'towards what is auspicious and avoids what is inauspicious is a perfect man.' From what your worship says, not only you couldn't, by any display of zeal, repay your obligation to His Majesty, but, what is more, your own life you will find it difficult to preserve. There are still three more considerations necessary to insure a safe settlement.”

Yü-ts'un drooped his head for a considerable time.

“What is there in your idea to be done?” he at length inquired.

“Your servant,” responded the Retainer, “has already devised a most excellent plan. It's this: To-morrow, when your Lordship sits in court,

page 63

you should, merely for form's sake, make much ado, by despatching letters and issuing warrants for the arrest of the culprits. The murderer will naturally not be forthcoming; and as the plaintiffs will be strong in their displeasure, you will of course have some members of the clan of the Hsüeh family, together with a few servants and others, taken into custody, and examined under torture, when your servant will be behind the scenes to bring matters to a settlement, by bidding them report that the victim had succumbed to a sudden ailment, and by urging the whole number of the kindred, as well as the headmen of the place, to hand in a declaration to that effect. Your Worship can aver that you understand perfectly how to write charms in dust, and conjure the spirit; having had an altar, covered with dust, placed in the court, you should bid the military and people to come and look on to their heart's content. Your Worship can give out that the divining spirit has declared: 'that the deceased, Feng Yüeh, and Hsüeh P'an had been enemies in a former life, that having now met in the narrow road, their destinies were consummated; that Hsüeh P'an has, by this time, contracted some indescribable disease and perished from the effects of the persecution of the spirit of Feng.'

That as the calamity had originated entirely from the action of the kidnapper, exclusive of dealing with the kidnapper according to law, the rest need not be interfered with, and so on. Your servant will be in the background to speak to the kidnapper and urge him to make a full confession; and when people find that the response of the divining spirit harmonizes with the statements of the kidnapper, they will, as a matter of course, entertain no suspicion.

“The Hsüeh family have plenty of money, so that if your Worship adjudicates that they should pay five hundred, they can afford it, or one thousand will also be within their means; and this sum can be handed to the Feng family to meet the outlay of burning incense and burial expenses. The Feng family are, besides, people of not much consequence, and (the fuss made by them) being simply for money, they too will, when they have got the cash in hand, have nothing more to say. But may it please your worship to consider carefully this plan and see what you think of it?”

“It isn't a safe course! It isn't a safe course!” Yü-ts'un observed as he smiled. “Let me further think and deliberate; and possibly by succeeding in suppressing public criticism, the matter might also be settled.”

These two closed their consultation by a fixed determination, and the next day, when he sat in judgment, he marked off a whole company of the plaintiffs as well as of the accused, as were mentioned by name, and had them brought before him. Yü-ts'un examined them with additional minuteness, and discovered in point of fact, that the inmates of the Feng family were extremely few, that they merely relied upon this charge with the idea

page 64

of obtaining some compensation for joss-sticks and burials; and that the Hsüeh family, presuming on their prestige and confident of patronage, had been obstinate in the refusal to make any mutual concession, with the result that confusion had supervened, and that no decision had been arrived at.

Following readily the bent of his feelings, Yü-ts'un disregarded the laws,

and adjudicated this suit in a random way; and as the Feng family came in for a considerable sum, with which to meet the expense for incense and the funeral, they had, after all, not very much to say (in the way of objections.)

With all despatch, Yü-ts'un wrote and forwarded two letters, one to Chia Cheng, and the other to Wang Tzu-t'eng, at that time commander-in-chief of a Metropolitan Division, simply informing them: that the case, in which their worthy nephew was concerned, had come to a close, and that there was no need for them to give way to any extreme solicitude.

This case had been settled through the exclusive action of the young priest of the Hu Lu temple, now an official Retainer; and Yü-ts'un, apprehending, on the other hand, lest he might in the presence of others, divulge the circumstances connected with the days gone by, when he was in a state of penury, naturally felt very unhappy in his mind. But at a later period, he succeeded, by ultimately finding in him some shortcoming, and deporting him to a far-away place, in setting his fears at rest.

But we will put Yü-ts'un on one side, and refer to the young man Hsüeh, who purchased Ying Lien, and assaulted Feng Yuan to death.

He too was a native of Chin Ling and belonged to a family literary during successive generations; but this young Hsüeh had recently, when of tender age, lost his father, and his widowed mother out of pity for his being the only male issue and a fatherless child, could not help doating on him and indulging him to such a degree, that when he, in course of time, grew up to years of manhood, he was good for nothing.

In their home, furthermore, was the wealth of a millionaire, and they were, at this time, in receipt of an income from His Majesty's privy purse, for the purvey of various articles.

This young Hsüeh went at school under the name of P'an. His style was Wen Ch'i. His natural habits were extravagant; his language haughty and supercilious. He had, of course, also been to school, but all he knew was a limited number of characters, and those not well. The whole day long, his sole delight was in cock-fighting and horse-racing, rambling over hills

and doing the sights.

Though a Purveyor, by Imperial appointment, he had not the least idea of anything relating to matters of business or of the world. All he was

page 65

good for was: to take advantage of the friendships enjoyed by his grandfather in days of old, to present himself at the Board of Revenue to perfunctorily sign his name and to draw the allowance and rations; while the rest of his affairs he, needless to say, left his partners and old servants of the family to manage for him.

His widowed mother, a Miss Wang, was the youngest sister of Wang Tzu-t'eng, whose present office was that of Commander-in-Chief of a Metropolitan Division; and was, with Madame Wang, the spouse of Chia Cheng, of the Jung Kuo Mansion, sisters born of one mother. She was, in this year, more or less forty years of age and had only one son: this Hsüeh P'an.

She also had a daughter, who was two years younger than Hsüeh P'an, and whose infant name was Pao Ch'ai. She was beautiful in appearance, and elegant and refined in deportment. In days gone by, when her father lived, he was extremely fond of this girl, and had her read books and study characters, so that, as compared with her brother, she was actually a hundred times his superior. Having become aware, ever since her father's death, that her brother could not appease the anguish of her mother's heart, she at once dispelled all thoughts of books, and gave her sole mind to needlework, to the menage and other such concerns, so as to be able to participate in her mother's sorrow, and to bear the fatigue in lieu of her.

As of late the Emperor on the Throne held learning and propriety in high esteem, His Majesty called together and singled out talent and ability, upon which he deigned to display exceptional grace and favour. Besides the number called forth from private life and chosen as Imperial secondary wives, the daughters of families of hereditary official status and renown were without exception, reported by name to the authorities, and communicated to the Board, in anticipation of the selection for maids

in waiting to the Imperial Princesses and daughters of Imperial Princes in their studies, and for filling up the offices of persons of eminence, to urge them to become excellent.

Ever since the death of Hsüeh P'an's father, the various assistants, managers and partners, and other employes in the respective provinces, perceiving how youthful Hsüeh P'an was in years, and how much he lacked worldly experience, readily availed themselves of the time to begin swindling and defrauding. The business, carried on in various different places in the capital, gradually also began to fall off and to show a deficit.

Hsüeh P'an had all along heard that the capital was the one place for gaieties, and was just entertaining the idea of going on a visit, when he eagerly jumped at the opportunity (that presented itself,) first of all to

page 66

escort his sister, who was going to wait for the selection, in the second place to see his relatives, and in the third to enter personally the capital, (professedly) to settle up long-standing accounts, and to make arrangements for new outlays, but, in reality, with the sole purpose of seeing the life and splendour of the metropolis.

He therefore, had, at an early period, got ready his baggage and small luggage, as well as the presents for relatives and friends, things of every description of local production, presents in acknowledgment of favours received, and other such effects, and he was about to choose a day to start on his journey when unexpectedly he came in the way of the kidnapper who offered Ying Lien for sale. As soon as Hsüeh P'an saw how distinguished Ying Lien was in her appearance, he formed the resolution of buying her; and when he encountered Feng Yüeh, come with the object of depriving him of her, he in the assurance of superiority, called his sturdy menials together, who set upon Feng Yüeh and beat him to death. Forthwith collecting all the affairs of the household, and entrusting them one by one to the charge of some members of the clan and several elderly servants of the family, he promptly took his mother, sister and others and after all started on his distant journey, while the charge of homicide he, however, treated as child's play, flattering himself that if he spent a few filthy pieces of money, there was no doubt as to its

settlement.

He had been on his journey how many days, he had not reckoned, when, on a certain day, as they were about to enter the capital, he furthermore heard that his maternal uncle, Wang Tzu-t'eng, had been raised to the rank of Supreme Governor of nine provinces, and had been honoured with an Imperial command to leave the capital and inspect the frontiers.

Hsüeh P'an was at heart secretly elated. "I was just lamenting," he thought, "that on my visit to the capital, I would have my maternal uncle to exercise control over me, and that I wouldn't be able to gambol and frisk to my heart's content, but now that he is leaving the capital, on promotion, it's evident that Heaven accomplishes man's wishes."

As he consequently held consultation with his mother; "Though we have," he argued, "several houses of our own in the capital, yet for these last ten years or so, there has been no one to live in them, and the people charged with the looking after them must unavoidably have stealthily rented them to some one or other. It's therefore needful to let servants go ahead to sweep and get the place in proper order, before we can very well go ourselves."

"What need is there to go to such trouble?" retorted his mother; "the main object of our present visit to the capital is first of all to pay our respects to our relatives and friends; and it is, either at your elder uncle's, my brother's place, or at your other uncle's, my sister's husband's home, both of

page 67

which families' houses are extremely spacious, that we can put up provisionally, and by and bye, at our ease, we can send servants to make our house tidy. Now won't this be a considerable saving of trouble?"

"My uncle, your brother," suggested Hsüeh P'an, "has just been raised to an appointment in an outside province, so that, of course, in his house, things must be topsy-turvy, on account of his departure; and should we betake ourselves, like a hive of bees and a long trail, to him for shelter; won't we appear very inconsiderate?"

“Your uncle,” remarked his mother, “is, it is true, going on promotion, but there's besides the house of your aunt, my sister. What is more, during these last few years from both your uncle's and aunt's have, time after time, been sent messages, and letters forwarded, asking us to come over; and now that we've come, is it likely, though your uncle is busy with his preparations to start on his journey, that your aunt of the Chia family won't do all she can to press us to stay? Besides, were we to have our house got ready in a scramble, won't it make people think it strange? I however know your idea very well that were we kept to stay at your uncle's and aunt's, you won't escape being under strict restraint, unlike what would be the case were we to live in our own house, as you would be free then to act as you please! Such being the case, go, on your own account, and choose some place to take up your quarters in, while I myself, who have been separated from your aunt and cousins for these several years, would however like to stay with them for a few days; and I'll go along with your sister and look up your aunt at her home. What do you say; will this suit you or not?”

Hsüeh P'an, upon hearing his mother speak in this strain, knew well enough that he could not bring her round from her determination; and he had no help but to issue the necessary directions to the servants to make straight for the Jung Kuo mansion. Madame Wang had by this time already come to know that in the lawsuit, in which Hsüeh P'an was concerned, Chia Yü-ts'un had fortunately intervened and lent his good offices, and was at length more composed in her mind. But when she again saw that her eldest brother had been advanced to a post on the frontier, she was just deploring that, deprived of the intercourse of the relatives of her mother's family, how doubly lonely she would feel; when, after the lapse of a few days, some one of the household brought the unexpected announcement that “our lady, your sister, has, with the young gentleman, the young lady and her whole household, entered the capital and have dismounted from their vehicles outside the main entrance.” This news so delighted madame Wang that she rushed out, with a few attendants, to greet them in the large Entrance Hall, and brought Mrs. Hsüeh and the others into her house.

The two sisters were now reunited, at an advanced period of their lives, so that mixed feelings of sorrow and joy thronged together, but on these it is, of course, needless to dilate.

After conversing for a time on what had occurred, subsequent to their separation, madame Wang took them to pay their obeisance to dowager lady Chia. They then handed over the various kinds of presents and indigenous articles, and after the whole family had been introduced, a banquet was also spread to greet the guests.

Hsüeh P'an, having paid his respects to Chia Cheng and Chia Lien, was likewise taken to see Chia She, Chia Chen and the other members.

Chia Cheng sent a messenger to tell madame Wang that "aunt' Hsüeh had already seen many springs and autumns, while their nephew was of tender age, with no experience, so that there was every fear, were he to live outside, that something would again take place. In the South-east corner of our compound," (he sent word,) "there are in the Pear Fragrance Court, over ten apartments, all of which are vacant and lying idle; and were we to tell the servants to sweep them, and invite 'aunt' Hsüeh and the young gentleman and lady to take up their quarters there, it would be an extremely wise thing."

Madame Wang had in fact been entertaining the wish to keep them to live with them, when dowager lady Chia also sent some one to say that, "Mrs. Hsüeh should be asked to put up in the mansion in order that a greater friendliness should exist between them all."

Mrs. Hsüeh herself had all along been desirous to live in one place with her relatives, so as to be able to keep a certain check over her son, fearing that, if they lived in a separate house outside, the natural bent of his habits would run riot, and that some calamity would be brought on; and she therefore, there and then, expressed her sense of appreciation, and accepted the invitation. She further privately told madame Wang in clear terms, that every kind of daily expense and general contribution would have to be entirely avoided and withdrawn as that would be the only thing to justify her to make any protracted stay. And madame Wang aware that she had, in her home, no difficulty in this line, promptly in fact complied with her wishes.

From this date it was that "aunt" Hsüeh and her children took up their quarters in the Pear Fragrance Court.

This Court of Pear Fragrance had, we must explain, been at one time used as a place for the quiet retirement of the Duke Jung in his advanced years. It was on a small scale, but ingeniously laid out. There were, at least, over ten structures. The front halls and the back houses were all in perfect style. There was a separate door giving on to the street, and the

page 69

people of the household of Hsüeh P'an used this door to go in and out. At the south-west quarter, there was also a side door, which communicated with a narrow roadway. Beyond this narrow road, was the eastern court of madame Wang's principal apartment; so that every day, either after her repast, or in the evening, Mrs. Hsüeh would readily come over and converse, on one thing and another, with dowager lady Chia, or have a chat with madame Wang; while Pao-ch'ai came together, day after day, with Tai-yü, Ying-ch'un, her sisters and the other girls, either to read, to play chess, or to do needlework, and the pleasure which they derived was indeed perfect.

Hsüeh P'an however had all along from the first instance, been loth to live in the Chia mansion, as he dreaded that with the discipline enforced by his uncle, he would not be able to be his own master; but his mother had made up her mind so positively to remain there, and what was more, every one in the Chia mansion was most pressing in their efforts to keep them, that there was no alternative for him but to take up his quarters temporarily there, while he at the same time directed servants to go and sweep the apartments of their own house, with a view that they should move into them when they were ready.

But, contrary to expectation, after they had been in their quarters for not over a month, Hsüeh P'an came to be on intimate relations with all the young men among the kindred of the Chia mansion, the half of whom were extravagant in their habits, so that great was, of course, his delight to frequent them. To-day, they would come together to drink wine; the next day to look at flowers. They even assembled to gamble, to dissipate

and to go everywhere and anywhere; leading, with all their enticements, Hsüeh P'an so far astray, that he became far worse, by a hundred times, than he was hitherto.

Although it must be conceded that Chia Cheng was in the education of his children quite correct, and in the control of his family quite systematic, yet in the first place, the clan was so large and the members so numerous, that he was unable to attend to the entire supervision; and, in the second place, the head of the family, at this period, was Chia Chen, who, as the eldest grandchild of the Ning mansion, had likewise now come into the inheritance of the official status, with the result that all matters connected with the clan devolved upon his sole and exclusive control. In the third place, public as well as private concerns were manifold and complex, and being a man of negligent disposition, he estimated ordinary affairs of so little consequence that any respite from his official duties he devoted to no more than the study of books and the playing of chess.

Furthermore, this Pear Fragrance Court was separated by two rows of buildings from his quarters and was also provided with a separate door

page 70

opening into the street, so that, being able at their own heart's desire to go out and to come in, these several young fellows could well indulge their caprices, and gratify the bent of their minds. Hence it was that Hsüeh P'an, in course of time gradually extinguished from his memory every idea of shifting their quarters.

But what transpired, on subsequent days, the following chapter will explain.

CHAPTER V.

*The spirit of Chia Pao Yü visits the confines of the Great Void.
The Monitory Vision Fairy expounds, in ballads, the Dream of the Red Chamber.*

Having in the fourth Chapter explained, to some degree, the circumstances attending the settlement of the mother and children of the Hsüeh family in the Jung mansion, and other incidental matters, we will now revert to Lin Tai-yü.

Ever since her arrival in the Jung mansion, dowager lady Chia showed her the highest sympathy and affection, so that in everything connected with sleeping, eating, rising and accommodation she was on the same footing as Pao Yü; with the result that Ying Ch'un, Hsi Ch'un and T'an Ch'un, her three granddaughters, had after all to take a back seat. In fact, the intimate and close friendliness and love which sprung up between the two persons Pao Yü and Tai-yü, was, in the same degree, of an exceptional kind, as compared with those existing between the others. By daylight they were wont to walk together, and to sit together. At night, they would desist together, and rest together. Really it was a case of harmony in language and concord in ideas, of the consistency of varnish or of glue, (a close friendship), when at this unexpected juncture there came this girl, Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai, who, though not very much older in years (than the others), was, nevertheless, in manner so correct, and in features so beautiful that the consensus of opinion was that Tai-yü herself could not come up to her standard.

What is more, in her ways Pao-Ch'ai was so full of good tact, so considerate and accommodating, so unlike Tai-yü, who was supercilious, self-confident, and without any regard for the world below, that the natural consequence was that she soon completely won the hearts of the lower classes. Even the whole number of waiting-maids would also for the most part, play and joke with Pao-ch'ai. Hence it was that Tai-yü fostered, in her heart,

considerable feelings of resentment, but of this however Pao-ch'ai had

not the least inkling.

Pao Yü was, likewise, in the prime of his boyhood, and was, besides, as far as the bent of his natural disposition was concerned, in every respect absurd and perverse; regarding his cousins, whether male or female, one and all with one common sentiment, and without any distinction whatever between the degrees of distant or close relationship. Sitting and sleeping, as he now was under the same roof with Tai-yü in dowager lady Chia's suite of rooms, he naturally became comparatively more friendly with her than with his other cousins; and this friendliness led to greater intimacy and this intimacy once established, rendered unavoidable the occurrence of the blight of harmony from unforeseen slight pretexts.

These two had had on this very day, for some unknown reason, words between them more or less unfriendly, and Tai-yü was again sitting all alone in her room, giving way to tears. Pao Yü was once more within himself quite conscience-smitten for his ungraceful remarks, and coming forward, he humbly made advances, until, at length, Tai-yü little by little came round.

As the plum blossom, in the eastern part of the garden of the Ning mansion, was in full bloom, Chia Chen's spouse, Mrs. Yu, made preparations for a collation, (purposing) to send invitations to dowager lady Chia, mesdames Hsing, and Wang, and the other members of the family, to come and admire the flowers; and when the day arrived the first thing she did was to take Chia Jung and his wife, the two of them, and come and ask them round in person. Dowager lady Chia and the other inmates crossed over after their early meal; and they at once promenaded the Hui Fang (Concentrated Fragrance) Garden. First tea was served, and next wine; but the entertainment was no more than a family banquet of the kindred of the two mansions of Ning and Jung, so that there was a total lack of any novel or original recreation that could be put on record.

After a little time, Pao Yü felt tired and languid and inclined for his midday siesta. "Take good care," dowager lady Chia enjoined some of them, "and stay with him, while he rests for a while, when he can come back;" whereupon Chia Jung's wife, Mrs. Ch'in, smiled and said with eagerness: "We got ready in here a room for uncle Pao, so let your venerable

ladyship set your mind at ease. Just hand him over to my charge, and he will be quite safe. Mothers and sisters," she continued, addressing herself to Pao Yü's nurses and waiting maids, "invite uncle Pao to follow me in here."

Dowager lady Chia had always been aware of the fact that Mrs. Ch'in was a most trustworthy person, naturally courteous and scrupulous, and in every action likewise so benign and gentle; indeed the most estimable among the whole number of her great grandsons' wives, so that when she saw her

page 72

about to go and attend to Pao Yü, she felt that, for a certainty, everything would be well.

Mrs. Ch'in, there and then, led away a company of attendants, and came into the rooms inside the drawing room. Pao Yü, upon raising his head, and catching sight of a picture hung on the upper wall, representing a human figure, in perfect style, the subject of which was a portrait of Yen Li, speedily felt his heart sink within him.

There was also a pair of scrolls, the text of which was:

*A thorough insight into worldly matters arises from knowledge;
A clear perception of human nature emanates from literary lore.*

On perusal of these two sentences, albeit the room was sumptuous and beautifully laid out, he would on no account remain in it. "Let us go at once," he hastened to observe, "let us go at once."

Mrs. Ch'in upon hearing his objections smiled. "If this," she said, "is really not nice, where are you going? if you won't remain here, well then come into my room."

Pao Yü nodded his head and gave a faint grin.

"Where do you find the propriety," a nurse thereupon interposed, "of an uncle going to sleep in the room of a nephew's wife?"

“Ai ya!” exclaimed Mrs. Ch'in laughing, “I don't mind whether he gets angry or not (at what I say); but how old can he be as to reverentially shun all these things? Why my brother was with me here last month; didn't you see him? he's, true enough, of the same age as uncle Pao, but were the two of them to stand side by side, I suspect that he would be much higher in stature.”

“How is it,” asked Pao Yü, “that I didn't see him? Bring him along and let me have a look at him!”

“He's separated,” they all ventured as they laughed, “by a distance of twenty or thirty li, and how can he be brought along? but you'll see him some day.”

As they were talking, they reached the interior of Mrs. Ch'in's apartments. As soon as they got in, a very faint puff of sweet fragrance was wafted into their nostrils. Pao Yü readily felt his eyes itch and his bones grow weak. “What a fine smell!” he exclaimed several consecutive times.

Upon entering the apartments, and gazing at the partition wall, he saw a picture the handiwork of T'ang Po-hu, consisting of Begonias drooping in the spring time; on either side of which was one of a pair of scrolls,

page 73

written by Ch'in Tai-hsü, a Literary Chancellor of the Sung era, running as follows:

A gentle chill doth circumscribe the dreaming man, because the spring is cold.

The fragrant whiff, which wafts itself into man's nose, is the perfume of wine!

On the table was a mirror, one which had been placed, in days of yore, in the Mirror Palace of the Emperor Wu Tse-t'ien. On one side stood a gold platter, in which Fei Yen, who lived in the Ch'ao state, used to stand and dance. In this platter, was laid a quince, which An Lu-shan had flung at the Empress T'ai Chen, inflicting a wound on her breast. In the upper part of the room, stood a divan ornamented with gems, on which the

Emperor's daughter, Shou Ch'ang, was wont to sleep, in the Han Chang Palace Hanging, were curtains embroidered with strings of pearls, by T'ung Ch'ang, the Imperial Princess.

"It's nice in here, it's nice in here," exclaimed Pao Yü with a chuckle.

"This room of mine," observed Mrs. Ch'in smilingly, "is I think, good enough for even spirits to live in!" and, as she uttered these words, she with her own hands, opened a gauze coverlet, which had been washed by Hsi Shih, and removed a bridal pillow, which had been held in the arms of Hung Niang. Instantly, the nurses attended to Pao Yü, until he had laid down comfortably; when they quietly dispersed, leaving only the four waiting maids: Hsi Jen, Ch'iu Wen, Ch'ing Wen and She Yueh to keep him company.

"Mind be careful, as you sit under the eaves," Mrs. Ch'in recommended the young waiting maids, "that the cats do not start a fight!"

Pao Yü then closed his eyes, and, little by little, became drowsy, and fell asleep.

It seemed to him just as if Mrs. Ch'in was walking ahead of him. Forthwith, with listless and unsettled step, he followed Mrs. Ch'in to some spot or other, where he saw carnation-like railings, jade-like steps, verdant trees and limpid pools—a spot where actually no trace of any human being could be met with, where of the shifting mundane dust little had penetrated.

Pao Yü felt, in his dream, quite delighted. "This place," he mused, "is pleasant, and I may as well spend my whole lifetime in here! though I may have to lose my home, I'm quite ready for the sacrifice, for it's far better being here than being flogged, day after day, by father, mother, and teacher."

While he pondered in this erratic strain, he suddenly heard the voice of some human being at the back of the rocks, giving vent to this song:

*Like scattering clouds doth fleet a vernal dream;
The transient flowers pass like a running stream;*

*Maidens and youths bear this, ye all, in mind;
In useless grief what profit will ye find?*

page 74

Pao Yü perceived that the voice was that of a girl. The song was barely at an end, when he soon espied in the opposite direction, a beautiful girl advancing with majestic and elastic step; a girl quite unlike any ordinary mortal being. There is this poem, which gives an adequate description of her:

*Lo she just quits the willow bank; and sudden now she issues from the
flower-bedecked house;*

*As onward alone she speeds, she startles the birds perched in the
trees, by the pavilion; to which as she draws nigh, her shadow
flits by the verandah!*

*Her fairy clothes now flutter in the wind! a fragrant perfume like
unto musk or olea is wafted in the air; Her apparel lotus-like is
sudden wont to move; and the jingle of her ornaments strikes the
ear.*

*Her dimpled cheeks resemble, as they smile, a vernal peach; her
kingfisher coiffure is like a cumulus of clouds; her lips part
cherry-like; her pomegranate-like teeth conceal a fragrant
breath.*

*Her slender waist, so beauteous to look at, is like the skipping snow
wafted by a gust of wind; the sheen of her pearls and kingfisher
trinkets abounds with splendour, green as the feathers of a duck,
and yellow as the plumes of a goose;*

*Now she issues to view, and now is hidden among the flowers; beautiful
she is when displeased, beautiful when in high spirits; with
lissome step, she treads along the pond, as if she soars on wings
or sways in the air.*

*Her eyebrows are crescent moons, and knit under her smiles; she
speaks, and yet she seems no word to utter; her lotus-like feet
with ease pursue their course; she stops, and yet she seems still
to be in motion; the charms of her figure all vie with ice in
purity, and in splendour with precious gems; Lovely is her
brilliant attire, so full of grandeur and refined grace.*

Loveable her countenance, as if moulded from some fragrant

substance,

*or carved from white jade; elegant is her person, like a phoenix,
dignified like a dragon soaring high.*

*What is her chastity like? Like a white plum in spring with snow
nestling in its broken skin; Her purity? Like autumn orchids
bedecked with dewdrops.*

*Her modesty? Like a fir-tree growing in a barren plain; Her
comeliness? Like russet clouds reflected in a limpid pool.*

*Her gracefulness? Like a dragon in motion wriggling in a stream;
Her refinement? Like the rays of the moon shooting on to a cool
river.*

*Sure is she to put Hsi Tzu to shame! Bound to put Wang Ch'iang to the
blush! What a remarkable person! Where was she born? and whence
does she come?*

*One thing is true that in Fairy-land there is no second like her! that
in the Purple Courts of Heaven there is no one fit to be her peer!
Forsooth, who can it be, so surpassingly beautiful!*

Pao Yü, upon realising that she was a fairy, was much elated; and with eagerness advanced and made a bow.

“My divine sister,” he ventured, as he put on a smile. “I don't know whence you come, and whither you are going. Nor have I any idea what this place is, but I make bold to entreat that you would take my hand and lead me on.”

page 75

“My abode,” replied the Fairy, “is above the Heavens of Divested Animosity, and in the ocean of Discharged Sorrows. I'm the Fairy of Monitory Vision, of the cave of Drooping Fragrance, in the mount of Emitted Spring, within the confines of the Great Void. I preside over the voluptuous affections and sensual debts among the mortal race, and supervise in the dusty world, the envies of women and the lusts of man. It's because I've recently come to hear that the retribution for voluptuousness extends up to this place, that I betake myself here in order to find suitable opportunities of disseminating mutual affections. My encounter with you now is also not a matter of accident! This spot is not distant from my confines. I have nothing much there besides a cup of the

tender buds of tea plucked by my own hands, and a pitcher of luscious wine, fermented by me as well as several spritelike singing and dancing maidens of great proficiency, and twelve ballads of spiritual song, recently completed, on the Dream of the Red Chamber; but won't you come along with me for a stroll?"

Pao Yü, at this proposal, felt elated to such an extraordinary degree that he could skip from joy, and there and then discarding from his mind all idea of where Mrs. Ch'in was, he readily followed the Fairy.

They reached some spot, where there was a stone tablet, put up in a horizontal position, on which were visible the four large characters: "The confines of the Great Void," on either side of which was one of a pair of scrolls, with the two antithetical sentences:

*When falsehood stands for truth, truth likewise becomes false;
When naught be made to aught, aught changes into naught!*

Past the Portal stood the door of a Palace, and horizontally, above this door, were the four large characters: "The Sea of Retribution, the Heaven of Love." There were also a pair of scrolls, with the inscription in large characters:

*Passion, alas! thick as the earth, and lofty as the skies, from ages
past to the present hath held incessant sway;
How pitiful your lot! ye lustful men and women envious, that your
voluptuous debts should be so hard to pay!*

Pao Yü, after perusal, communed with his own heart. "Is it really so!" he thought, "but I wonder what implies the passion from old till now, and what are the voluptuous debts! Henceforward, I must enlighten myself!"

Pao Yü was bent upon this train of thoughts when he unwittingly attracted several evil spirits into his heart, and with speedy step he followed in the track of the fairy, and entered two rows of doors when he perceived that the Lateral Halls were, on both sides, full of tablets and scrolls, the number of which he could not in one moment ascertain. He however

discriminated in numerous places the inscriptions: The Board of Lustful Love; the Board of contracted grudges; The Board of Matutinal sobs; the Board of nocturnal tears; the Board of vernal affections; and the Board of autumnal anguish.

After he had perused these inscriptions, he felt impelled to turn round and address the Fairy. "May I venture to trouble my Fairy," he said, "to take me along for a turn into the interior of each of these Boards? May I be allowed, I wonder, to do so?"

"Inside each of these Boards," explained the Fairy, "are accumulated the registers with the records of all women of the whole world; of those who have passed away, as well as of those who have not as yet come into it, and you, with your mortal eyes and human body, could not possibly be allowed to know anything in anticipation."

But would Pao Yü, upon hearing these words, submit to this decree? He went on to implore her permission again and again, until the Fairy casting her eye upon the tablet of the board in front of her observed, "Well, all right! you may go into this board and reap some transient pleasure."

Pao Yü was indescribably joyous, and, as he raised his head, he perceived that the text on the tablet consisted of the three characters: the Board of Ill-fated lives; and that on each side was a scroll with the inscription:

*Upon one's self are mainly brought regrets in spring and autumn gloom;
A face, flowerlike may be and moonlike too; but beauty all for whom?*

Upon perusal of the scroll Pao Yü was, at once, the more stirred with admiration; and, as he crossed the door, and reached the interior, the only things that struck his eye were about ten large presses, the whole number of which were sealed with paper slips; on every one of these slips, he perceived that there were phrases peculiar to each province.

Pao Yü was in his mind merely bent upon discerning, from the rest, the slip referring to his own native village, when he espied, on the other side, a slip with the large characters: "the Principal Record of the Twelve Maidens of Chin Ling."

“What is the meaning,” therefore inquired Pao Yü, “of the Principal Record of the Twelve Maidens of Chin Ling?”

“As this is the record,” explained the Fairy, “of the most excellent and prominent girls in your honourable province, it is, for this reason, called the Principal Record.”

“I've often heard people say,” observed Pao Yü, “that Chin Ling is of vast extent; and how can there only be twelve maidens in it! why, at present, in our own family alone, there are more or less several hundreds of young girls!”

page 77

The Fairy gave a faint smile. “Through there be,” she rejoined, “so large a number of girls in your honourable province, those only of any note have been selected and entered in this record. The two presses, on the two sides, contain those who are second best; while, for all who remain, as they are of the ordinary run, there are, consequently, no registers to make any entry of them in.”

Pao Yü upon looking at the press below, perceived the inscription: “Secondary Record of the twelve girls of Chin Ling;” while again in another press was inscribed: “Supplementary Secondary Record of the Twelve girls of Chin Ling.” Forthwith stretching out his hand, Pao Yü opened first the doors of the press, containing the “supplementary secondary Record,” extracted a volume of the registers, and opened it. When he came to examine it, he saw on the front page a representation of something, which, though bearing no resemblance to a human being, presented, at the same time, no similitude to scenery; consisting simply of huge blotches made with ink. The whole paper was full of nothing else but black clouds and turbid mists, after which appeared the traces of a few characters, explaining that—

*A cloudless moon is rare forsooth to see,
And pretty clouds so soon scatter and flee!
Thy heart is deeper than the heavens are high,
Thy frame consists of base ignominy!
Thy looks and clever mind resentment will provoke,*

*And thine untimely death vile slander will evoke!
A loving noble youth in vain for love will yearn.*

After reading these lines, Pao Yü looked below, where was pictured a bouquet of fresh flowers and a bed covered with tattered matting. There were also several distiches running as follows:

*Thy self-esteem for kindly gentleness is but a fancy vain!
Thy charms that they can match the olea or orchid, but thoughts inane!
While an actor will, envious lot! with fortune's smiles be born,
A youth of noble birth will, strange to say, be luckless and forlorn.*

Pao Yü perused these sentences, but could not unfold their meaning, so, at once discarding this press, he went over and opened the door of the press of the "Secondary Records" and took out a book, in which, on examination, he found a representation of a twig of *Olea fragrans*. Below, was a pond, the water of which was parched up and the mud dry, the lotus flowers decayed, and even the roots dead. At the back were these lines:

*The lotus root and flower but one fragrance will give;
How deep alas! the wounds of thy life's span will be;
What time a desolate tree in two places will live,
Back to its native home the fragrant ghost will flee!*

Pao Yü read these lines, but failed to understand what they meant. He then went and fetched the "Principal Record," and set to looking it over.

page 78

He saw on the first page a picture of two rotten trees, while on these trees was suspended a jade girdle. There was also a heap of snow, and under this snow was a golden hair-pin. There were in addition these four lines in verse:

*Bitter thy cup will be, e'en were the virtue thine to stop the loom,
Thine though the gift the willow fluff to sing, pity who will thy doom?
High in the trees doth hang the girdle of white jade,
And lo! among the snow the golden pin is laid!*

To Pao Yü the meaning was again, though he read the lines over, quite unintelligible. He was, about to make inquiries, but he felt convinced that the Fairy would be both to divulge the decrees of Heaven; and though intent upon discarding the book, he could not however tear himself away from it. Forthwith, therefore, he prosecuted a further perusal of what came next, when he caught sight of a picture of a bow. On this bow hung a citron. There was also this ode:

*Full twenty years right and wrong to expound will be thy fate!
What place pomegranate blossoms come in bloom will face the Palace
Gate!
The third portion of spring, of the first spring in beauty short will
fall!
When tiger meets with hare thou wilt return to sleep perennial.*

Further on, was also a sketch of two persons flying a kite; a broad expanse of sea, and a large vessel; while in this vessel was a girl, who screened her face bedewed with tears. These four lines were likewise visible:

*Pure and bright will be thy gifts, thy purpose very high;
But born thou wilt be late in life and luck be passed by;
At the tomb feast thou wilt repine tearful along the stream,
East winds may blow, but home miles off will be, even in dream.*

After this followed a picture of several streaks of fleeting clouds, and of a creek whose waters were exhausted, with the text:

*Riches and honours too what benefit are they?
In swaddling clothes thou'lt be when parents pass away;
The rays will slant, quick as the twinkle of an eye;
The Hsiang stream will recede, the Ch'u clouds onward fly!*

Then came a picture of a beautiful gem, which had fallen into the mire, with the verse:

*Thine aim is chastity, but chaste thou wilt not be;
Abstraction is thy faith, but void thou may'st not see;*

*Thy precious, gemlike self will, pitiful to say,
Into the mundane mire collapse at length some day.*

A rough sketch followed of a savage wolf, in pursuit of a beautiful girl, trying to pounce upon her as he wished to devour her. This was the burden of the distich:

*Thy mate is like a savage wolf prowling among the hills;
His wish once gratified a haughty spirit his heart fills!
Though fair thy form like flowers or willows in the golden moon,
Upon the yellow beam to hang will shortly be its doom.*

page 79

Below, was an old temple, in the interior of which was a beautiful person, just in the act of reading the religious manuals, as she sat all alone; with this inscription:

*In light esteem thou hold'st the charms of the three springs for their
short-liv'd fate;
Thine attire of past years to lay aside thou chang'st, a Taoist dress
to don;
How sad, alas! of a reputed house and noble kindred the scion,
Alone, behold! she sleeps under a glimmering light, an old idol for mate.*

Next in order came a hill of ice, on which stood a hen-phoenix, while under it was this motto:

*When time ends, sure coincidence, the phoenix doth alight;
The talents of this human form all know and living see,
For first to yield she kens, then to control, and third genial to be;
But sad to say, things in Chin Ling are in more sorry plight.*

This was succeeded by a representation of a desolate village, and a dreary inn. A pretty girl sat in there, spinning thread. These were the sentiments affixed below:

*When riches will have flown will honours then avail?
When ruin breaks your home, e'en relatives will fail!*

*But sudden through the aid extended to Dame Liu,
A friend in need fortune will make to rise for you.*

Following these verses, was drawn a pot of Orchids, by the side of which, was a beautiful maiden in a phoenix-crown and cloudy mantle (bridal dress); and to this picture was appended this device:

*What time spring wanes, then fades the bloom of peach as well as
plum!*

Who ever can like a pot of the olea be winsome!

With ice thy purity will vie, vain their envy will be!

In vain a laughing-stock people will try to make of thee.

At the end of this poetical device, came the representation of a lofty edifice, on which was a beautiful girl, suspending herself on a beam to commit suicide; with this verse:

Love high as heav'n, love ocean-wide, thy lovely form will don;

What time love will encounter love, license must rise wanton;

Why hold that all impiety in Jung doth find its spring,

The source of trouble, verily, is centred most in Ning.

Pao Yü was still bent upon prosecuting his perusal, when the Fairy perceiving that his intellect was eminent and bright, and his natural talents quick-witted, and apprehending lest the decrees of heaven should be divulged, hastily closed the Book of Record, and addressed herself to Pao Yü. "Come along with me," she said smiling, "and see some wonderful scenery. What's the need of staying here and beating this gourd of ennui?"

In a dazed state, Pao Yü listlessly discarded the record, and again followed in the footsteps of the Fairy. On their arrival at the back, he saw

page 80

carnation portieres, and embroidered curtains, ornamented pillars, and carved eaves. But no words can adequately give an idea of the vermilion apartments glistening with splendour, of the floors garnished with gold, of the snow reflecting lustrous windows, of the palatial mansions made of

gems. He also saw fairyland flowers, beautiful and fragrant, and extraordinary vegetation, full of perfume. The spot was indeed elysian.

He again heard the Fairy observe with a smiling face: "Come out all of you at once and greet the honoured guest!"

These words were scarcely completed, when he espied fairies walk out of the mansion, all of whom were, with their dangling lotus sleeves, and their fluttering feather habiliments, as comely as spring flowers, and as winsome as the autumn moon. As soon as they caught sight of Pao Yü, they all, with one voice, resentfully reproached the Monitory Vision Fairy. "Ignorant as to who the honoured guest could be," they argued, "we hastened to come out to offer our greetings simply because you, elder sister, had told us that, on this day, and at this very time, there would be sure to come on a visit, the spirit of the younger sister of Chiang Chu. That's the reason why we've been waiting for ever so long; and now why do you, in lieu of her, introduce this vile object to contaminate the confines of pure and spotless maidens?"

As soon as Pao Yü heard these remarks, he was forthwith plunged in such a state of consternation that he would have retired, but he found it impossible to do so. In fact, he felt the consciousness of the foulness and corruption of his own nature quite intolerable. The Monitory Vision Fairy promptly took Pao Yü's hand in her own, and turning towards her younger sisters, smiled and explained: "You, and all of you, are not aware of the why and wherefore. To-day I did mean to have gone to the Jung mansion to fetch Chiang Chu, but as I went by the Ning mansion, I unexpectedly came across the ghosts of the two dukes of Jung and Ning, who addressed me in this wise: 'Our family has, since the dynasty established itself on the Throne, enjoyed merit and fame, which pervaded many ages, and riches and honours transmitted from generation to generation. One hundred years have already elapsed, but this good fortune has now waned, and this propitious luck is exhausted; so much so that they could not be retrieved! Our sons and grandsons may be many, but there is no one among them who has the means to continue the family estate, with the exception of our kindred grandson, Pao Yü alone, who, though perverse in disposition and wayward by nature, is nevertheless intelligent and quick-witted and qualified in a measure to give effect to our hopes. But alas! the good fortune of our family is

entirely decayed, so that we fear there is no person to incite him to enter the right way! Fortunately you worthy fairy come at an unexpected moment, and we venture to trust that you will, above all things, warn him against

page 81

the foolish indulgence of inordinate desire, lascivious affections and other such things, in the hope that he may, at your instigation, be able to escape the snares of those girls who will allure him with their blandishments, and to enter on the right track; and we two brothers will be ever grateful.'

“On language such as this being addressed to me, my feelings of commiseration naturally burst forth; and I brought him here, and bade him, first of all, carefully peruse the records of the whole lives of the maidens in his family, belonging to the three grades, the upper, middle and lower, but as he has not yet fathomed the import, I have consequently led him into this place to experience the vision of drinking, eating, singing and licentious love, in the hope, there is no saying, of his at length attaining that perception.”

Having concluded these remarks, she led Pao Yü by the hand into the apartment, where he felt a whiff of subtle fragrance, but what it was that reached his nostrils he could not tell.

To Pao Yü's eager and incessant inquiries, the Fairy made reply with a sardonic smile. “This perfume,” she said, “is not to be found in the world, and how could you discern what it is? This is made of the essence of the first sprouts of rare herbs, growing on all hills of fame and places of superior excellence, admixed with the oil of every species of splendid shrubs in precious groves, and is called the marrow of Conglomerated Fragrance.” At these words Pao Yü was, of course, full of no other feeling than wonder.

The whole party advanced and took their seats, and a young maidservant presented tea, which Pao Yü found of pure aroma, of excellent flavour and of no ordinary kind. “What is the name of this tea?” he therefore asked; upon which the Fairy explained. “This tea,” she added, “originates

from the Hills of Emitted Spring and the Valley of Drooping Fragrance, and is, besides, brewed in the night dew, found on spiritual plants and divine leaves. The name of this tea is 'one thousand red in one hole.'"

At these words Pao Yü nodded his head, and extolled its qualities. Espying in the room lutes, with jasper mountings, and tripods, inlaid with gems, antique paintings, and new poetical works, which were to be seen everywhere, he felt more than ever in a high state of delight. Below the windows, were also shreds of velvet sputtered about and a toilet case stained with the traces of time and smudged with cosmetic; while on the partition wall was likewise suspended a pair of scrolls, with the inscription:

*A lonesome, small, ethereal, beauteous nook!
What help is there, but Heaven's will to brook?*

Pao Yü having completed his inspection felt full of admiration, and proceeded to ascertain the names and surnames of the Fairies. One was called

page 82

the Fairy of Lustful Dreams; another "the High Ruler of Propagated Passion;" the name of one was "the Golden Maiden of Perpetuated Sorrow;" of another the "Intelligent Maiden of Transmitted Hatred." (In fact,) the respective Taoist appellations were not of one and the same kind.

In a short while, young maid-servants came in and laid the table, put the chairs in their places, and spread out wines and eatables. There were actually crystal tankards overflowing with luscious wines, and amber glasses full to the brim with pearly strong liquors. But still less need is there to give any further details about the sumptuousness of the refreshments.

Pao Yü found it difficult, on account of the unusual purity of the bouquet of the wine, to again restrain himself from making inquiries about it.

"This wine," observed the Monitory Dream Fairy, "is made of the twigs of

hundreds of flowers, and the juice of ten thousands of trees, with the addition of must composed of unicorn marrow, and yeast prepared with phoenix milk. Hence the name of 'Ten thousand Beauties in one Cup' was given to it."

Pao Yü sang its incessant praise, and, while he sipped his wine, twelve dancing girls came forward, and requested to be told what songs they were to sing.

"Take," suggested the Fairy, "the newly-composed Twelve Sections of the Dream of the Red Chamber, and sing them."

The singing girls signified their obedience, and forthwith they lightly clapped the castagnettes and gently thrummed the virginals. These were the words which they were heard to sing:

At the time of the opening of the heavens and the laying out of the earth chaos prevailed.

They had just sung this one line when the Fairy exclaimed: "This ballad is unlike the ballads written in the dusty world whose purport is to hand down remarkable events, in which the distinction of scholars, girls, old men and women, and fools is essential, and in which are furthermore introduced the lyrics of the Southern and Northern Palaces. These fairy songs consist either of elegaic effusions on some person or impressions of some occurrence or other, and are impromptu songs readily set to the music of wind or string instruments, so that any one who is not cognisant of their gist cannot appreciate the beauties contained in them. So you are not likely, I fear, to understand this lyric with any clearness; and unless you first peruse the text and then listen to the ballad, you will, instead of pleasure, feel as if you were chewing wax (devoid of any zest)."

After these remarks, she turned her head round, and directed a young maid-servant to fetch the text of the Dream of the Red Chamber, which

page 83

she handed to Pao Yü, who took it over; and as he followed the words with his eyes, with his ears he listened to the strains of this song:

Preface of the Bream of the Red Chamber.—When the Heavens were opened and earth was laid out chaos prevailed! What was the germ of love? It arises entirely from the strength of licentious love.

What day, by the will of heaven, I felt wounded at heart, and what time I was at leisure, I made an attempt to disburden my sad heart; and with this object in view I indited this Dream of the Bed Chamber, on the subject of a disconsolate gold trinket and an unfortunate piece of jade.

Waste of a whole Lifetime. All maintain that the match between gold and jade will be happy. All I can think of is the solemn oath contracted in days gone by by the plant and stone! Vain will I gaze upon the snow, Hsüeh, [Pao-ch'ai], pure as crystal and lustrous like a gem of the eminent priest living among the hills! Never will I forget the noiseless Fairy Grove, Lin [Tai-yü], beyond the confines of the mortal world!

Alas! now only have I come to believe that human happiness is incomplete; and that a couple may be bound by the ties of wedlock for life, but that after all their hearts are not easy to lull into contentment.

Vain knitting of the brows. The one is a spirit flower of Fairyland; the other is a beautiful jade without a blemish. Do you maintain that their union will not be remarkable? Why how then is it that he has come to meet her again in this existence? If the union will you say, be strange, how is it then that their love affair will be but empty words? The one in her loneliness will give way to useless sighs. The other in vain will yearn and crave. The one will be like the reflection of the moon in water; the other like a flower reflected in a mirror. Consider, how many drops of tears can there be in the eyes? and how could they continue to drop from autumn to winter and from spring to flow till summer time?

But to come to Pao Yü. After he had heard these ballads, so diffuse and vague, he failed to see any point of beauty in them; but the plaintive melody of the sound was nevertheless sufficient to drive away his spirit and exhilarate his soul. Hence it was that he did not make any inquiries about the arguments, and that he did not ask about the matter treated, but simply making these ballads the means for the time being of dispelling melancholy, he therefore went on with the perusal of what

came below.

Despicable Spirit of Death! You will be rejoicing that glory is at its height when hateful death will come once again, and with eyes wide with horror, you will discard all things, and dimly and softly the fragrant spirit will waste and dissolve! You will yearn for native home, but distant will be the way, and lofty the mountains. Hence it is that you will betake yourself in search of father and mother, while they lie under the influence of a dream, and hold discourse with them. "Your child," you will say, "has already trodden the path of death! Oh my parents, it behoves you to speedily retrace your steps and make good your escape!"

Separated from Relatives. You will speed on a journey of three thousand li at the mercy of wind and rain, and tear yourself from all your family ties and your native home! Your fears will be lest anguish should do any harm to your parents in their failing years! "Father and mother," you will bid them, "do not think with any anxiety of your child. From ages past poverty as well as success have both had a fixed destiny; and is it likely

page 84

that separation and reunion are not subject to predestination? Though we may now be far apart in two different places, we must each of us try and preserve good cheer. Your abject child has, it is true, gone from home, but abstain from distressing yourselves on her account!"

Sorrow in the midst of Joy. While wrapped as yet in swaddling clothes, father and mother, both alas! will depart, and dwell though you will in that mass of gauze, who is there who will know how to spoil you with any fond attention? Born you will be fortunately with ample moral courage, and high-minded and boundless resources, for your parents will not have, in the least, their child's secret feelings at heart! You will be like a moon appearing to view when the rain holds up, shedding its rays upon the Jade Hall; or a gentle breeze (wafting its breath upon it). Wedded to a husband, fairy like fair and accomplished, you will enjoy a happiness enduring as the earth and perennial as the Heavens! and you will be the means of snapping asunder the bitter fate of your youth! But, after all, the clouds will scatter in Kao T'ang and the waters of the Hsiang river will get parched! This is the inevitable destiny of dissolution and continuance

which prevails in the mortal world, and what need is there to indulge in useless grief?

Intolerable to the world. Your figure will be as winsome as an olea fragrans; your talents as ample as those of a Fairy! You will by nature be so haughty that of the whole human race few will be like you! You will look upon a meat diet as one of dirt, and treat splendour as coarse and loathsome! And yet you will not be aware that your high notions will bring upon you the excessive hatred of man! You will be very eager in your desire after chastity, but the human race will despise you! Alas, you will wax old in that antique temple hall under a faint light, where you will waste ungrateful for beauty, looks and freshness! But after all you will still be worldly, corrupt and unmindful of your vows; just like a spotless white jade you will be whose fate is to fall into the mire! And what need will there be for the grandson of a prince or the son of a duke to deplore that his will not be the good fortune (of winning your affections)?

The Voluptuary. You will resemble a wolf in the mountains! a savage beast devoid of all human feeling! Regardless in every way of the obligations of days gone by, your sole pleasure will be in the indulgence of haughtiness, extravagance, licentiousness and dissolute habits! You will be inordinate in your conjugal affections, and look down upon the beautiful charms of the child of a marquis, as if they were cat-tail rush or willow; trampling upon the honourable daughter of a ducal mansion, as if she were one of the common herd. Pitiful to say, the fragrant spirit and beauteous ghost will in a year softly and gently pass away!

The Perception that all things are transient like flowers. You will look lightly upon the three springs and regard the blush of the peach and the green of the willow as of no avail. You will beat out the fire of splendour, and treat solitary retirement as genial! What is it that you say about the delicate peaches in the heavens (marriage) being excellent, and the petals of the almond in the clouds being plentiful (children)? Let him who has after all seen one of them, (really a mortal being) go safely through the autumn, (wade safely through old age), behold the people in the white Poplar village groan and sigh; and the spirits under the green maple whine and moan! Still more wide in expanse than even the heavens is the dead vegetation which covers the graves! The moral is this, that the burden of man is poverty one day and affluence another;

that bloom in spring, and decay in autumn, constitute the doom of vegetable life! In the same way, this calamity of birth and the visitation of death, who is able to escape?

page 85

But I have heard it said that there grows in the western quarter a tree called the P'o So (Patient Bearing) which bears the fruit of Immortal life!

The bane of Intelligence. Yours will be the power to estimate, in a thorough manner, the real motives of all things, as yours will be intelligence of an excessive degree; but instead (of reaping any benefit) you will cast the die of your own existence! The heart of your previous life is already reduced to atoms, and when you shall have died, your nature will have been intelligent to no purpose! Your home will be in easy circumstances; your family will enjoy comforts; but your connexions will, at length, fall a prey to death, and the inmates of your family scatter, each one of you speeding in a different direction, making room for others! In vain, you will have harassed your mind with cankering thoughts for half a lifetime; for it will be just as if you had gone through the confused mazes of a dream on the third watch! Sudden a crash (will be heard) like the fall of a spacious palace, and a dusky gloominess (will supervene) such as is caused by a lamp about to spend itself! Alas! a spell of happiness will be suddenly (dispelled by) adversity! Woe is man in the world! for his ultimate doom is difficult to determine!

Leave behind a residue of happiness! Hand down an excess of happiness; hand down an excess of happiness! Unexpectedly you will come across a benefactor! Fortunate enough your mother, your own mother, will have laid by a store of virtue and secret meritorious actions! My advice to you, mankind, is to relieve the destitute and succour the distressed! Do not resemble those who will harp after lucre and show themselves unmindful of the ties of relationship: that wolflike maternal uncle of yours and that impostor of a brother! True it is that addition and subtraction, increase and decrease, (reward and punishment,) rest in the hands of Heaven above!

Splendour at last. Loving affection in a mirror will be still more ephemeral than fame in a dream. That fine splendour will fleet how soon! Make no

further allusion to embroidered curtain, to bridal coverlet; for though you may come to wear on your head a pearl-laden coronet, and, on your person, a jacket ornamented with phoenixes, yours will not nevertheless be the means to atone for the short life (of your husband)! Though the saying is that mankind should not have, in their old age, the burden of poverty to bear, yet it is also essential that a store of benevolent deeds should be laid up for the benefit of sons and grandsons! (Your son) may come to be dignified in appearance and wear on his head the official tassel, and on his chest may be suspended the gold seal resplendent in lustre; he may be imposing in his majesty, and he may rise high in status and emoluments, but the dark and dreary way which leads to death is short! Are the generals and ministers who have been from ages of old still in the flesh, forsooth? They exist only in a futile name handed down to posterity to reverence!

Death ensues when things propitious reign! Upon the ornamented beam will settle at the close of spring the fragrant dust! Your reckless indulgence of licentious love and your naturally moonlike face will soon be the source of the ruin of a family. The decadence of the family estate will emanate entirely from Ching; while the wane of the family affairs will be entirely attributable to the fault of Ning! Licentious love will be the main reason of the long-standing grudge.

The flying birds each perch upon the trees! The family estates of those in official positions will fade! The gold and silver of the rich and honoured will be scattered! those who will have conferred benefit will, even in death, find the means of escape! those devoid of human feelings will reap manifest retribution! Those indebted for a life will make, in due time,

page 86

payment with their lives; those indebted for tears have already (gone) to exhaust their tears! Mutual injuries will be revenged in no light manner! Separation and reunion will both alike be determined by predestination! You wish to know why your life will be short; look into your previous existence! Verily, riches and honours, which will come with old age, will likewise be a question of chance! Those who will hold the world in light esteem will retire within the gate of abstraction; while those who will be allured by enticement will have forfeited their lives (The Chia family will

fulfil its destiny) as surely as birds take to the trees after they have exhausted all they had to eat, and which as they drop down will pile up a hoary, vast and lofty heap of dust, (leaving) indeed a void behind!

When the maidens had finished the ballads, they went on to sing the "Supplementary Record;" but the Monitory Vision Fairy, perceiving the total absence of any interest in Pao Yü, heaved a sigh. "You silly brat!" she exclaimed. "What! haven't you, even now, attained perception!"

"There's no need for you to go on singing," speedily observed Pao Yü, as he interrupted the singing maidens; and feeling drowsy and dull, he pleaded being under the effects of wine, and begged to be allowed to lie down.

The Fairy then gave orders to clear away the remains of the feast, and escorted Pao Yü to a suite of female apartments, where the splendour of such objects as were laid out was a thing which he had not hitherto seen. But what evoked in him wonder still more intense, was the sight, at an early period, of a girl seated in the room, who, in the freshness of her beauty and winsomeness of her charms, bore some resemblance to Pao-ch'ai, while, in elegance and comeliness, on the other hand, to Tai-yu.

While he was plunged in a state of perplexity, the Fairy suddenly remarked: "All those female apartments and ladies' chambers in so many wealthy and honourable families in the world are, without exception, polluted by voluptuous opulent puppets and by all that bevy of profligate girls. But still more despicable are those from old till now numberless dissolute rouses, one and all of whom maintain that libidinous affections do not constitute lewdness; and who try, further, to prove that licentious love is not tantamount to lewdness. But all these arguments are mere apologies for their shortcomings, and a screen for their pollutions; for if libidinous affection be lewdness, still more does the perception of licentious love constitute lewdness. Hence it is that the indulgence of sensuality and the gratification of licentious affection originate entirely from a relish of lust, as well as from a hankering after licentious love. Lo you, who are the object of my love, are the most lewd being under the heavens from remote ages to the present time!"

Pao Yü was quite dumbstruck by what he heard, and hastily smiling, he said by way of reply: "My Fairy labours under a misapprehension. Simply because of my reluctance to read my books my parents have, on repeated occasions, extended to me injunction and reprimand, and would I have the

page 87

courage to go so far as to rashly plunge in lewd habits? Besides, I am still young in years, and have no notion what is implied by lewdness!"

"Not so!" exclaimed the Fairy; "lewdness, although one thing in principle is, as far as meaning goes, subject to different constructions; as is exemplified by those in the world whose heart is set upon lewdness. Some delight solely in faces and figures; others find insatiable pleasure in singing and dancing; some in dalliance and raillery; others in the incessant indulgence of their lusts; and these regret that all the beautiful maidens under the heavens cannot minister to their short-lived pleasure. These several kinds of persons are foul objects steeped skin and all in lewdness. The lustful love, for instance, which has sprung to life and taken root in your natural affections, I and such as myself extend to it the character of an abstract lewdness; but abstract lewdness can be grasped by the mind, but cannot be transmitted by the mouth; can be fathomed by the spirit, but cannot be divulged in words. As you now are imbued with this desire only in the abstract, you are certainly well fit to be a trustworthy friend in (Fairyland) inner apartments, but, on the path of the mortal world, you will inevitably be misconstrued and defamed; every mouth will ridicule you; every eye will look down upon you with contempt. After meeting recently your worthy ancestors, the two Dukes of Ning and Jung, who opened their hearts and made their wishes known to me with such fervour, (but I will not have you solely on account of the splendour of our inner apartments look down despisingly upon the path of the world), I consequently led you along, my son, and inebriated you with luscious wines, steeped you in spiritual tea, and admonished you with excellent songs, bringing also here a young sister of mine, whose infant name is Chien Mei, and her style K'o Ching, to be given to you as your wedded wife. To-night, the time will be propitious and suitable for the immediate consummation of the union, with the express object of letting

you have a certain insight into the fact that if the condition of the abode of spirits within the confines of Fairyland be still so (imperfect), how much the more so should be the nature of the affections which prevail in the dusty world; with the intent that from this time forth you should positively break loose from bondage, perceive and amend your former disposition, devote your attention to the works of Confucius and Mencius, and set your steady purpose upon the principles of morality.”

Having ended these remarks, she initiated him into the mysteries of licentious love, and, pushing Pao Yü into the room, she closed the door, and took her departure all alone. Pao Yü in a dazed state complied with the admonitions given him by the Fairy, and the natural result was, of course, a violent flirtation, the circumstances of which it would be impossible to recount.

page 88

When the next day came, he was by that time so attached to her by ties of tender love and their conversation was so gentle and full of charm that he could not brook to part from K'o Ching. Hand-in-hand, the two of them therefore, went out for a stroll, when they unexpectedly reached a place, where nothing else met their gaze than thorns and brambles, which covered the ground, and a wolf and a tiger walking side by side. Before them stretched the course of a black stream, which obstructed their progress; and over this stream there was, what is more, no bridge to enable one to cross it.

While they were exercising their minds with perplexity, they suddenly espied the Fairy coming from the back in pursuit of them. “Desist at once,” she exclaimed, “from making any advance into the stream; it is urgent that you should, with all speed, turn your faces round!”

Pao Yü lost no time in standing still. “What is this place?” he inquired.

“This is the Ford of Enticement,” explained the Fairy. “Its depth is ten thousand chang; its breadth is a thousand li; in its stream there are no boats or paddles by means of which to effect a passage. There is simply a raft, of which Mu Chu-shih directs the rudder, and which Hui Shih chen punts with the poles. They receive no compensation in the shape of gold

or silver, but when they come across any one whose destiny it is to cross, they ferry him over. You now have by accident strolled as far as here, and had you fallen into the stream you would have rendered quite useless the advice and admonition which I previously gave you.”

These words were scarcely concluded, when suddenly was heard from the midst of the Ford of Enticement, a sound like unto a peal of thunder, whereupon a whole crowd of goblins and sea-urchins laid hands upon Pao Yü and dragged him down.

This so filled Pao Yü with consternation that he fell into a perspiration as profuse as rain, and he simultaneously broke forth and shouted, “Rescue me, K'o Ching!”

These cries so terrified Hsi Jen and the other waiting-maids, that they rushed forward, and taking Pao Yü in their arms, “Don't be afraid, Pao Yü,” they said, “we are here.”

But we must observe that Mrs. Ch'in was just inside the apartment in the act of recommending the young waiting-maids to be mindful that the cats and dogs did not start a fight, when she unawares heard Pao Yü, in his dream, call her by her infant name. In a melancholy mood she therefore communed within herself, “As far as my infant name goes, there is, in this establishment, no one who has any idea what it is, and how is it that he has come to

page 89

know it, and that he utters it in his dream?” And she was at this period unable to fathom the reason. But, reader, listen to the explanations given in the chapter which follows.

CHAPTER VI.

*Chia Pao Yü reaps his first experience in licentious love.
Old Goody Liu pays a visit to the Jung Kuo Mansion.*

Mrs. Ch'in, to resume our narrative, upon hearing Pao Yü call her in his dream by her infant name, was at heart very exercised, but she did not however feel at liberty to make any minute inquiry.

Pao Yü was, at this time, in such a dazed state, as if he had lost something, and the servants promptly gave him a decoction of lunggan. After he had taken a few sips, he forthwith rose and tidied his clothes.

Hsi Jen put out her hand to fasten the band of his garment, and as soon as she did so, and it came in contact with his person, it felt so icy cold to the touch, covered as it was all over with perspiration, that she speedily withdrew her hand in utter surprise.

“What's the matter with you?” she exclaimed.

A blush suffused Pao Yü's face, and he took Hsi Jen's hand in a tight grip. Hsi Jen was a girl with all her wits about her; she was besides a couple of years older than Pao Yü and had recently come to know something of the world, so that at the sight of his state, she to a great extent readily accounted for the reason in her heart. From modest shame, she unconsciously became purple in the face, and not venturing to ask another question she continued adjusting his clothes. This task accomplished, she followed him over to old lady Chia's apartments; and after a hurry-scurry meal, they came back to this side, and Hsi Jen availed herself of the absence of the nurses and waiting-maids to hand Pao Yü another garment to change.

“Please, dear Hsi Jen, don't tell any one,” entreated Pao Yü, with concealed shame.

“What did you dream of?” inquired Hsi Jen, smiling, as she tried to stifle her blushes, “and whence comes all this perspiration?”

“It's a long story,” said Pao Yü, “which only a few words will not suffice to explain.”

He accordingly recounted minutely, for her benefit, the subject of his dream. When he came to where the Fairy had explained to him the mysteries of love, Hsi Jen was overpowered with modesty and covered her face with her hands; and as she bent down, she gave way to a fit of laughter.

page 90

Pao Yü had always been fond of Hsi Jen, on account of her gentleness, pretty looks and graceful and elegant manner, and he forthwith expounded to her all the mysteries he had been taught by the Fairy.

Hsi Jen was, of course, well aware that dowager lady Chia had given her over to Pao Yü, so that her present behaviour was likewise no transgression. And subsequently she secretly attempted with Pao Yü a violent flirtation, and lucky enough no one broke in upon them during their tete-a-tete. From this date, Pao Yü treated Hsi Jen with special regard, far more than he showed to the other girls, while Hsi Jen herself was still more demonstrative in her attentions to Pao Yü. But for a time we will make no further remark about them.

As regards the household of the Jung mansion, the inmates may, on adding up the total number, not have been found many; yet, counting the high as well as the low, there were three hundred persons and more. Their affairs may not have been very numerous, still there were, every day, ten and twenty matters to settle; in fact, the household resembled, in every way, ravelled hemp, devoid even of a clue-end, which could be used as an introduction.

Just as we were considering what matter and what person it would be best to begin writing of, by a lucky coincidence suddenly from a distance of a thousand li, a person small and insignificant as a grain of mustard seed happened, on account of her distant relationship with the Jung family, to come on this very day to the Jung mansion on a visit. We shall therefore readily commence by speaking of this family, as it after all

affords an excellent clue for a beginning.

The surname of this mean and humble family was in point of fact Wang. They were natives of this district. Their ancestor had filled a minor office in the capital, and had, in years gone by, been acquainted with lady Feng's grandfather, that is madame Wang's father. Being covetous of the influence and affluence of the Wang family, he consequently joined ancestors with them, and was recognised by them as a nephew. At that time, there were only madame Wang's eldest brother, that is lady Feng's father, and madame Wang herself, who knew anything of these distant relations, from the fact of having followed their parents to the capital. The rest of the family had one and all no idea about them.

This ancestor had, at this date, been dead long ago, leaving only one son called Wang Ch'eng. As the family estate was in a state of ruin, he once more moved outside the city walls and settled down in his native village. Wang Ch'eng also died soon after his father, leaving a son, known in his infancy as Kou Erh, who married a Miss Liu, by whom he had a son called

page 91

by the infant name of Pan Erh, as well as a daughter, Ch'ing Erh. His family consisted of four, and he earned a living from farming.

As Kou Erh was always busy with something or other during the day and his wife, dame Liu, on the other hand, drew the water, pounded the rice and attended to all the other domestic concerns, the brother and sister, Ch'ing Erh and Pan Erh, the two of them, had no one to look after them. (Hence it was that) Kou Erh brought over his mother-in-law, old goody Liu, to live with them.

This goody Liu was an old widow, with a good deal of experience. She had besides no son round her knees, so that she was dependent for her maintenance on a couple of acres of poor land, with the result that when her son-in-law received her in his home, she naturally was ever willing to exert heart and mind to help her daughter and her son-in-law to earn their living.

This year, the autumn had come to an end, winter had commenced, and the weather had begun to be quite cold. No provision had been made in the household for the winter months, and Kou Erh was, inevitably, exceedingly exercised in his heart. Having had several cups of wine to dispel his distress, he sat at home and tried to seize upon every trifle to give vent to his displeasure. His wife had not the courage to force herself in his way, and hence goody Liu it was who encouraged him, as she could not bear to see the state of the domestic affairs.

“Don't pull me up for talking too much,” she said; “but who of us country people isn't honest and open-hearted? As the size of the bowl we hold, so is the quantity of the rice we eat. In your young days, you were dependent on the support of your old father, so that eating and drinking became quite a habit with you; that's how, at the present time, your resources are quite uncertain; when you had money, you looked ahead, and didn't mind behind; and now that you have no money, you blindly fly into huffs. A fine fellow and a capital hero you have made! Living though we now be away from the capital, we are after all at the feet of the Emperor; this city of Ch'ang Ngan is strewn all over with money, but the pity is that there's no one able to go and fetch it away; and it's no use your staying at home and kicking your feet about.”

“All you old lady know,” rejoined Kou Erh, after he had heard what she had to say, “is to sit on the couch and talk trash! Is it likely you would have me go and play the robber?”

“Who tells you to become a robber?” asked goody Liu. “But it would be well, after all, that we should put our heads together and devise some means; for otherwise, is the money, pray, able of itself to run into our house?”

page 92

“Had there been a way,” observed Kou Erh, smiling sarcastically, “would I have waited up to this moment? I have besides no revenue collectors as relatives, or friends in official positions; and what way could we devise? 'But even had I any, they wouldn't be likely, I fear, to pay any heed to such as ourselves!”

“That, too, doesn't follow,” remarked goody Liu; “the planning of affairs rests with man, but the accomplishment of them rests with Heaven. After we have laid our plans, we may, who can say, by relying on the sustenance of the gods, find some favourable occasion. Leave it to me, I'll try and devise some lucky chance for you people! In years gone by, you joined ancestors with the Wang family of Chin Ling, and twenty years back, they treated you with consideration; but of late, you've been so high and mighty, and not condescended to go and bow to them, that an estrangement has arisen. I remember how in years gone by, I and my daughter paid them a visit. The second daughter of the family was really so pleasant and knew so well how to treat people with kindness, and without in fact any high airs! She's at present the wife of Mr. Chia, the second son of the Jung Kuo mansion; and I hear people say that now that she's advanced in years, she's still more considerate to the poor, regardful of the old, and very fond of preparing vegetable food for the bonzes and performing charitable deeds. The head of the Wang mansion has, it is true, been raised to some office on the frontier, but I hope that this lady Secunda will anyhow notice us. How is it then that you don't find your way as far as there; for she may possibly remember old times, and some good may, no one can say, come of it? I only wish that she would display some of her kind-heartedness, and pluck one hair from her person which would be, yea thicker than our waist.”

“What you suggest, mother, is quite correct,” interposed Mrs. Liu, Kou Erh's wife, who stood by and took up the conversation, “but with such mouth and phiz as yours and mine, how could we present ourselves before her door? Why I fear that the man at her gate won't also like to go and announce us! and we'd better not go and have our mouths slapped in public!”

Kou Erh, who would have thought it, prized highly both affluence and fame, so that when he heard these remarks, he forthwith began to feel at heart a little more at ease. When he furthermore heard what his wife had to say, he at once caught up the word as he smiled.

“Old mother,” he rejoined; “since that be your idea, and what's more, you have in days gone by seen this lady on one occasion, why shouldn't you, old lady, start to-morrow on a visit to her and first ascertain how the wind blows!”

“It may be very well said that Ai Ya!” exclaimed old Goody, “It may very well be said that the marquis' door is like the wide ocean! what sort of thing am I? why the servants of that family wouldn't even recognise me! even were I to go, it would be on a wild goose chase.”

“No matter about that,” observed Kou Erh; “I'll tell you a good way; you just take along with you, your grandson, little Pan Erh, and go first and call upon Chou Jui, who is attached to that household; and when once you've seen him, there will be some little chance. This Chou Jui, at one time, was connected with my father in some affair or other, and we were on excellent terms with him.”

“That I too know,” replied goody Liu, “but the thing is that you've had no dealings with him for so long, that who knows how he's disposed towards us now? this would be hard to say. Besides, you're a man, and with a mouth and phiz like that of yours, you couldn't, on any account, go on this errand. My daughter is a young woman, and she too couldn't very well go and expose herself to public gaze. But by my sacrificing this old face of mine, and by going and knocking it (against the wall) there may, after all, be some benefit and all of us might reap profit.”

That very same evening, they laid their plans, and the next morning before the break of day, old goody Liu speedily got up, and having performed her toilette, she gave a few useful hints to Pan Erh; who, being a child of five or six years of age, was, when he heard that he was to be taken into the city, at once so delighted that there was nothing that he would not agree to.

Without further delay, goody Liu led off Pan Erh, and entered the city, and reaching the Ning Jung street, she came to the main entrance of the Jung mansion, where, next to the marble lions, were to be seen a crowd of chairs and horses. Goody Liu could not however muster the courage to go by, but having shaken her clothes, and said a few more seasonable words to Pan Erh, she subsequently squatted in front of the side gate, whence she could see a number of servants, swelling out their chests, pushing out their stomachs, gesticulating with their hands and kicking

their feet about, while they were seated at the main entrance chattering about one thing and another.

Goody Liu felt constrained to edge herself forward. "Gentlemen," she ventured, "may happiness betide you!"

The whole company of servants scrutinised her for a time. "Where do you come from?" they at length inquired.

"I've come to look up Mr. Chou, an attendant of my lady's," remarked goody Liu, as she forced a smile; "which of you, gentlemen, shall I trouble to do me the favour of asking him to come out?"

page 94

The servants, after hearing what she had to say, paid, the whole number of them, no heed to her; and it was after the lapse of a considerable time that they suggested: "Go and wait at a distance, at the foot of that wall; and in a short while, the visitors, who are in their house, will be coming out."

Among the party of attendants was an old man, who interposed,

"Don't baffle her object," he expostulated; "why make a fool of her?" and turning to goody Liu: "This Mr. Chou," he said, "is gone south: his house is at the back row; his wife is anyhow at home; so go round this way, until you reach the door, at the back street, where, if you will ask about her, you will be on the right track."

Goody Liu, having expressed her thanks, forthwith went, leading Pan Erh by the hand, round to the back door, where she saw several pedlars resting their burdens. There were also those who sold things to eat, and those who sold playthings and toys; and besides these, twenty or thirty boys bawled and shouted, making quite a noise.

Goody Liu readily caught hold of one of them. "I'd like to ask you just a word, my young friend," she observed; "there's a Mrs. Chou here; is she at home?"

“Which Mrs. Chou?” inquired the boy; “we here have three Mrs. Chous; and there are also two young married ladies of the name of Chou. What are the duties of the one you want, I wonder?”

“She's a waiting-woman of my lady,” replied goody Liu.

“It's easy to get at her,” added the boy; “just come along with me.”

Leading the way for goody Liu into the backyard, they reached the wall of a court, when he pointed and said, “This is her house.—Mother Chou!” he went on to shout with alacrity; “there's an old lady who wants to see you.”

Chou Jui's wife was at home, and with all haste she came out to greet her visitor. “Who is it?” she asked.

Goody Liu advanced up to her. “How are you,” she inquired, “Mrs. Chou?”

Mrs. Chou looked at her for some time before she at length smiled and replied, “Old goody Liu, are you well? How many years is it since we've seen each other; tell me, for I forget just now; but please come in and sit.”

“You're a lady of rank,” answered goody Liu smiling, as she walked along, “and do forget many things. How could you remember such as ourselves?”

page 95

With these words still in her mouth, they had entered the house, whereupon Mrs. Chou ordered a hired waiting-maid to pour the tea. While they were having their tea she remarked, “How Pan Erh has managed to grow!” and then went on to make inquiries on the subject of various matters, which had occurred after their separation.

“To-day,” she also asked of goody Liu, “were you simply passing by? or did you come with any express object?”

“I've come, the fact is, with an object!” promptly replied goody Liu; “(first

of all) to see you, my dear sister-in-law; and, in the second place also, to inquire after my lady's health. If you could introduce me to see her for a while, it would be better; but if you can't, I must readily borrow your good offices, my sister-in-law, to convey my message.”

Mr. Chou Jui's wife, after listening to these words, at once became to a great extent aware of the object of her visit. Her husband had, however, in years gone by in his attempt to purchase some land, obtained considerably the support of Kou Erh, so that when she, on this occasion, saw goody Liu in such a dilemma, she could not make up her mind to refuse her wish. Being in the second place keen upon making a display of her own respectability, she therefore said smilingly:

“Old goody Liu, pray compose your mind! You've come from far off with a pure heart and honest purpose, and how can I ever not show you the way how to see this living Buddha? Properly speaking, when people come and guests arrive, and verbal messages have to be given, these matters are not any of my business, as we all here have each one kind of duties to carry out. My husband has the special charge of the rents of land coming in, during the two seasons of spring and autumn, and when at leisure, he takes the young gentlemen out of doors, and then his business is done. As for myself, I have to accompany my lady and young married ladies on anything connected with out-of-doors; but as you are a relative of my lady and have besides treated me as a high person and come to me for help, I'll, after all, break this custom and deliver your message. There's only one thing, however, and which you, old lady, don't know. We here are not what we were five years before. My lady now doesn't much worry herself about anything; and it's entirely lady Secunda who looks after the menage. But who do you presume is this lady Secunda? She's the niece of my lady, and the daughter of my master, the eldest maternal uncle of by-gone days. Her infant name was Feng Ko.”

“Is it really she?” inquired promptly goody Liu, after this explanation. “Isn't it strange? what I said about her years back has come out quite correct; but from all you say, shall I to-day be able to see her?”

“That goes without saying,” replied Chou Jui's wife; “when any visitors come now-a-days, it's always lady Feng who does the honours and entertains them, and it's better to-day that you should see her for a while, for then you will not have walked all this way to no purpose.”

“O mi to fu!” exclaimed old goody Liu; “I leave it entirely to your convenience, sister-in-law.”

“What's that you're saying?” observed Chou Jui's wife. “The proverb says: 'Our convenience is the convenience of others.' All I have to do is to just utter one word, and what trouble will that be to me.”

Saying this, she bade the young waiting maid go to the side pavilion, and quietly ascertain whether, in her old ladyship's apartment, table had been laid.

The young waiting-maid went on this errand, and during this while, the two of them continued a conversation on certain irrelevant matters.

“This lady Feng,” observed goody Liu, “can this year be no older than twenty, and yet so talented as to manage such a household as this! the like of her is not easy to find!”

“Hai! my dear old goody,” said Chou Jui's wife, after listening to her, “it's not easy to explain; but this lady Feng, though young in years, is nevertheless, in the management of affairs, superior to any man. She has now excelled the others and developed the very features of a beautiful young woman. To say the least, she has ten thousand eyes in her heart, and were they willing to wager their mouths, why ten men gifted with eloquence couldn't even outdo her! But by and bye, when you've seen her, you'll know all about her! There's only this thing, she can't help being rather too severe in her treatment of those below her.”

While yet she spake, the young waiting-maid returned. “In her venerable lady's apartment,” she reported, “repast has been spread, and already finished; lady Secunda is in madame Wang's chamber.”

As soon as Chou Jui's wife heard this news, she speedily got up and pressed goody Liu to be off at once. “This is,” she urged, “just the hour

for her meal, and as she is free we had better first go and wait for her; for were we to be even one step too late, a crowd of servants will come with their reports, and it will then be difficult to speak to her; and after her siesta, she'll have still less time to herself."

As she passed these remarks, they all descended the couch together. Goody Liu adjusted their dresses, and, having impressed a few more words of advice on Pan Erh, they followed Chou Jui's wife through winding passages to Chia Lien's house. They came in the first instance into the side pavilion, where Chou Jui's wife placed old goody Liu to wait a little, while she herself went ahead, past the screen-wall and into the entrance of the court.

page 97

Hearing that lady Feng had not come out, she went in search of an elderly waiting-maid of lady Feng, P'ing Erh by name, who enjoyed her confidence, to whom Chou Jui's wife first recounted from beginning to end the history of old goody Liu.

"She has come to-day," she went on to explain, "from a distance to pay her obeisance. In days gone by, our lady used often to meet her, so that, on this occasion, she can't but receive her; and this is why I've brought her in! I'll wait here for lady Feng to come down, and explain everything to her; and I trust she'll not call me to task for officious rudeness."

P'ing Erh, after hearing what she had to say, speedily devised the plan of asking them to walk in, and to sit there pending (lady Feng's arrival), when all would be right.

Chou Jui's wife thereupon went out and led them in. When they ascended the steps of the main apartment, a young waiting-maid raised a red woollen portiere, and as soon as they entered the hall, they smelt a whiff of perfume as it came wafted into their faces: what the scent was they could not discriminate; but their persons felt as if they were among the clouds.

The articles of furniture and ornaments in the whole room were all so brilliant to the sight, and so vying in splendour that they made the head to

swim and the eyes to blink, and old goody Liu did nothing else the while than nod her head, smack her lips and invoke Buddha. Forthwith she was led to the eastern side into the suite of apartments, where was the bedroom of Chia Lien's eldest daughter. P'ing Erh, who was standing by the edge of the stove-couch, cast a couple of glances at old goody Liu, and felt constrained to inquire how she was, and to press her to have a seat.

Goody Liu, noticing that P'ing Erh was entirely robed in silks, that she had gold pins fixed in her hair, and silver ornaments in her coiffure, and that her countenance resembled a flower or the moon (in beauty), readily imagined her to be lady Feng, and was about to address her as my lady; but when she heard Mrs. Chou speak to her as Miss P'ing, and P'ing Erh promptly address Chou Jui's wife as Mrs. Chou, she eventually became aware that she could be no more than a waiting-maid of a certain respectability.

She at once pressed old goody Liu and Pan Erh to take a seat on the stove-couch. P'ing Erh and Chou Jui's wife sat face to face, on the edges of the couch. The waiting-maids brought the tea. After they had partaken of it, old goody Liu could hear nothing but a "lo tang, lo tang" noise, resembling very much the sound of a bolting frame winnowing flour, and she could not resist looking now to the East, and now to the West. Suddenly

page 98

in the great Hall, she espied, suspended on a pillar, a box at the bottom of which hung something like the weight of a balance, which incessantly wagged to and fro.

"What can this thing be?" communed goody Liu in her heart, "What can be its use?" While she was aghast, she unexpectedly heard a sound of "tang" like the sound of a golden bell or copper cymbal, which gave her quite a start. In a twinkle of the eyes followed eight or nine consecutive strokes; and she was bent upon inquiring what it was, when she caught sight of several waiting-maids enter in a confused crowd. "Our lady has come down!" they announced.

P'ing Erh, together with Chou Jui's wife, rose with all haste. "Old goody Liu," they urged, "do sit down and wait till it's time, when we'll come and ask you in."

Saying this, they went out to meet lady Feng.

Old goody Liu, with suppressed voice and ear intent, waited in perfect silence. She heard at a distance the voices of some people laughing, whereupon about ten or twenty women, with rustling clothes and petticoats, made their entrance, one by one, into the hall, and thence into the room on the other quarter. She also detected two or three women, with red-lacquered boxes in their hands, come over on this part and remain in waiting.

"Get the repast ready!" she heard some one from the offside say.

The servants gradually dispersed and went out; and there only remained in attendance a few of them to bring in the courses. For a long time, not so much as the caw of a crow could be heard, when she unexpectedly perceived two servants carry in a couch-table, and lay it on this side of the divan. Upon this table were placed bowls and plates, in proper order replete, as usual, with fish and meats; but of these only a few kinds were slightly touched.

As soon as Pan Erh perceived (all these delicacies), he set up such a noise, and would have some meat to eat, but goody Liu administered to him such a slap, that he had to keep away.

Suddenly, she saw Mrs. Chou approach, full of smiles, and as she waved her hand, she called her. Goody Liu understood her meaning, and at once pulling Pan Erh off the couch, she proceeded to the centre of the Hall; and after Mrs. Chou had whispered to her again for a while, they came at length with slow step into the room on this side, where they saw on the outside of the door, suspended by brass hooks, a deep red flowered soft portiere. Below the window, on the southern side, was a stove-couch, and on this couch was spread a crimson carpet. Leaning against the wooden partition wall, on the east side, stood a chain-embroidered back-cushion and a reclining pillow.

There was also spread a large watered satin sitting cushion with a gold embroidered centre, and on the side stood cuspidores made of silver.

Lady Feng, when at home, usually wore on her head a front-piece of dark martin a la Chao Chün, surrounded with tassels of strung pearls. She had on a robe of peach-red flowered satin, a short pelisse of slate-blue stiff silk, lined with squirrel, and a jupe of deep red foreign crepe, lined with ermine. Resplendent with pearl-powder and with cosmetics, she sat in there, stately and majestic, with a small brass poker in her hands, with which she was stirring the ashes of the hand-stove. P'ing Erh stood by the side of the couch, holding a very small lacquered tea-tray. In this tray was a small tea-cup with a cover. Lady Feng neither took any tea, nor did she raise her head, but was intent upon stirring the ashes of the hand-stove.

“How is it you haven't yet asked her to come in?” she slowly inquired; and as she spoke, she turned herself round and was about to ask for some tea, when she perceived that Mrs. Chou had already introduced the two persons and that they were standing in front of her.

She forthwith pretended to rise, but did not actually get up, and with a face radiant with smiles, she ascertained about their health, after which she went in to chide Chou Jui's wife. “Why didn't you tell me they had come before?” she said.

Old goody Liu was already by this time prostrated on the ground, and after making several obeisances, “How are you, my lady?” she inquired.

“Dear Mrs. Chou,” lady Feng immediately observed, “do pull her up, and don't let her prostrate herself! I'm yet young in years and don't know her much; what's more, I've no idea what's the degree of the relationship between us, and I daren't speak directly to her.”

“This is the old lady about whom I spoke a short while back,” speedily explained Mrs. Chou.

Lady Feng nodded her head assentingly.

By this time old goody Liu had taken a seat on the edge of the stove-couch. As for Pan Erh, he had gone further, and taken refuge behind her back; and though she tried, by every means, to coax him to come forward and make a bow, he would not, for the life of him, consent.

“Relatives though we be,” remarked lady Feng, as she smiled, “we haven't seen much of each other, so that our relations have been quite distant. But those who know how matters stand will assert that you all despise us, and won't often come to look us up; while those mean people, who don't know the truth, will imagine that we have no eyes to look at any one.”

page 100

Old goody Liu promptly invoked Buddha. “We are at home in great straits,” she pleaded, “and that's why it wasn't easy for us to manage to get away and come! Even supposing we had come as far as this, had we not given your ladyship a slap on the mouth, those gentlemen would also, in point of fact, have looked down upon us as a mean lot.”

“Why, language such as this,” exclaimed lady Feng smilingly, “cannot help making one's heart full of displeasure! We simply rely upon the reputation of our grandfather to maintain the status of a penniless official; that's all! Why, in whose household is there anything substantial? we are merely the denuded skeleton of what we were in days of old, and no more! As the proverb has it: The Emperor himself has three families of poverty-stricken relatives; and how much more such as you and I?”

Having passed these remarks, she inquired of Mrs. Chou, “Have you let madame know, yes or no?”

“We are now waiting,” replied Mrs. Chou, “for my lady's orders.”

“Go and have a look,” said lady Feng; “but, should there be any one there, or should she be busy, then don't make any mention; but wait until she's free, when you can tell her about it and see what she says.”

Chou Jui's wife, having expressed her compliance, went off on this

errand. During her absence, lady Feng gave orders to some servants to take a few fruits and hand them to Pan Erh to eat; and she was inquiring about one thing and another, when there came a large number of married women, who had the direction of affairs in the household, to make their several reports.

P'ing Erh announced their arrival to lady Feng, who said: "I'm now engaged in entertaining some guests, so let them come back again in the evening; but should there be anything pressing then bring it in and I'll settle it at once."

P'ing Erh left the room, but she returned in a short while. "I've asked them," she observed, "but as there's nothing of any urgency, I told them to disperse." Lady Feng nodded her head in token of approval, when she perceived Chou Jui's wife come back. "Our lady," she reported, as she addressed lady Feng, "says that she has no leisure to-day, that if you, lady Secunda, will entertain them, it will come to the same thing; that she's much obliged for their kind attention in going to the trouble of coming; that if they have come simply on a stroll, then well and good, but that if they have aught to say, they should tell you, lady Secunda, which will be tantamount to their telling her."

"I've nothing to say," interposed old goody Liu. "I simply come to see our elder and our younger lady, which is a duty on my part, a relative as I am."

page 101

"Well, if there's nothing particular that you've got to say, all right," Mrs. Chou forthwith added, "but if you do have anything, don't hesitate telling lady Secunda, and it will be just as if you had told our lady."

As she uttered these words, she winked at goody Liu. Goody Liu understood what she meant, but before she could give vent to a word, her face got scarlet, and though she would have liked not to make any mention of the object of her visit, she felt constrained to suppress her shame and to speak out.

"Properly speaking," she observed, "this being the first time I see you, my

lady, I shouldn't mention what I've to say, but as I come here from far off to seek your assistance, my old friend, I have no help but to mention it."

She had barely spoken as much as this, when she heard the youths at the inner-door cry out: "The young gentleman from the Eastern Mansion has come."

Lady Feng promptly interrupted her. "Old goody Liu," she remarked, "you needn't add anything more." She, at the same time, inquired, "Where's your master, Mr. Jung?" when became audible the sound of footsteps along the way, and in walked a young man of seventeen or eighteen. His appearance was handsome, his person slender and graceful. He had on light furs, a girdle of value, costly clothes and a beautiful cap.

At this stage, goody Liu did not know whether it was best to sit down or to stand up, neither could she find anywhere to hide herself.

"Pray sit down," urged lady Feng, with a laugh; "this is my nephew!" Old goody Liu then wriggled herself, now one way, and then another, on to the edge of the couch, where she took a seat.

"My father," Chia Jung smilingly ventured, "has sent me to ask a favour of you, aunt. On some previous occasion, our grand aunt gave you, dear aunt, a stove-couch glass screen, and as to-morrow father has invited some guests of high standing, he wishes to borrow it to lay it out for a little show; after which he purposes sending it back again."

"You're late by a day," replied lady Feng. "It was only yesterday that I gave it to some one."

Chia Jung, upon hearing this, forthwith, with giggles and smiles, made, near the edge of the couch, a sort of genuflexion. "Aunt," he went on, "if you don't lend it, father will again say that I don't know how to speak, and I shall get another sound thrashing. You must have pity upon your nephew, aunt."

"I've never seen anything like this," observed lady Feng sneeringly; "the things belonging to the Wang family are all good, but where have you

put all those things of yours? the only good way is that you shouldn't see anything of ours, for as soon as you catch sight of anything, you at once entertain a wish to carry it off."

"Pray, aunt," entreated Chia Jung with a smile, "do show me some compassion."

"Mind your skin!" lady Feng warned him, "if you do chip or spoil it in the least."

She then bade P'ing Erh take the keys of the door of the upstairs room and send for several trustworthy persons to carry it away.

Chia Jung was so elated that his eyebrows dilated and his eyes smiled. "I've brought myself," he added, with vehemence, "some men to take it away; I won't let them recklessly bump it about."

Saying this, he speedily got up and left the room.

Lady Feng suddenly bethought herself of something, and turning towards the window, she called out, "Jung Erh, come back." Several servants who stood outside caught up her words: "Mr. Jung," they cried, "you're requested to go back;" whereupon Chia Jung turned round and retraced his steps; and with hands drooping respectfully against his sides, he stood ready to listen to his aunt's wishes.

Lady Feng was however intent upon gently sipping her tea, and after a good long while of abstraction, she at last smiled: "Never mind," she remarked; "you can go. But come after you've had your evening meal, and I'll then tell you about it. Just now there are visitors here; and besides, I don't feel in the humour."

Chia Jung thereupon retired with gentle step.

Old goody Liu, by this time, felt more composed in body and heart. "I've to-day brought your nephew," she then explained, "not for anything else, but because his father and mother haven't at home so much as anything

to eat; the weather besides is already cold, so that I had no help but to take your nephew along and come to you, old friend, for assistance!”

As she uttered these words, she again pushed Pan Erh forward. “What did your father at home tell you to say?” she asked of him; “and what did he send us over here to do? Was it only to give our minds to eating fruit?”

Lady Feng had long ago understood what she meant to convey, and finding that she had no idea how to express herself in a decent manner, she readily interrupted her with a smile. “You needn't mention anything,” she observed, “I'm well aware of how things stand;” and addressing herself to Mrs. Chou, she inquired, “Has this old lady had breakfast, yes or no?”

page 103

Old goody Liu hurried to explain. “As soon as it was daylight,” she proceeded, “we started with all speed on our way here, and had we even so much as time to have any breakfast?”

Lady Feng promptly gave orders to send for something to eat. In a short while Chou Jui's wife had called for a table of viands for the guests, which was laid in the room on the eastern side, and then came to take goody Liu and Pan Erh over to have their repast.

“My dear Mrs. Chou,” enjoined lady Feng, “give them all they want, as I can't attend to them myself;” which said, they hastily passed over into the room on the eastern side.

Lady Feng having again called Mrs. Chou, asked her: “When you first informed madame about them, what did she say?” “Our Lady observed,” replied Chou Jui's wife, “that they don't really belong to the same family; that, in former years, their grandfather was an official at the same place as our old master; that hence it came that they joined ancestors; that these few years there hasn't been much intercourse (between their family and ours); that some years back, whenever they came on a visit, they were never permitted to go empty-handed, and that as their coming on this occasion to see us is also a kind attention on their part, they shouldn't be slighted. If they've anything to say,” (our lady continued), “tell

lady Secunda to do the necessary, and that will be right.”

“Isn't it strange!” exclaimed lady Feng, as soon as she had heard the message; “since we are all one family, how is it I'm not familiar even with so much as their shadow?”

While she was uttering these words, old goody Liu had had her repast and come over, dragging Pan Erh; and, licking her lips and smacking her mouth, she expressed her thanks.

Lady Feng smiled. “Do pray sit down,” she said, “and listen to what I'm going to tell you. What you, old lady, meant a little while back to convey, I'm already as much as yourself well acquainted with! Relatives, as we are, we shouldn't in fact have waited until you came to the threshold of our doors, but ought, as is but right, to have attended to your needs. But the thing is that, of late, the household affairs are exceedingly numerous, and our lady, advanced in years as she is, couldn't at a moment, it may possibly be, bethink herself of you all! What's more, when I took over charge of the management of the menage, I myself didn't know of all these family connections! Besides, though to look at us from outside everything has a grand and splendid aspect, people aren't aware that large establishments have such great hardships, which, were we to recount to others, they would hardly like to credit as true. But since you've now come from a great distance, and

page 104

this is the first occasion that you open your mouth to address me, how can I very well allow you to return to your home with empty hands! By a lucky coincidence our lady gave, yesterday, to the waiting-maids, twenty taels to make clothes with, a sum which they haven't as yet touched, and if you don't despise it as too little, you may take it home as a first instalment, and employ it for your wants.”

When old goody Liu heard the mention made by lady Feng of their hardships, she imagined that there was no hope; but upon hearing her again speak of giving her twenty taels, she was exceedingly delighted, so much so that her eyebrows dilated and her eyes gleamed with smiles.

"We too know," she smilingly remarked, "all about difficulties! but the proverb says, 'A camel dying of leanness is even bigger by much than a horse!' No matter what those distresses may be, were you yet to pluck one single hair from your body, my old friend, it would be stouter than our own waist."

Chou Jui's wife stood by, and on hearing her make these coarse utterances, she did all she could to give her a hint by winking, and make her desist. Lady Feng laughed and paid no heed; but calling P'ing Erh, she bade her fetch the parcel of money, which had been given to them the previous day, and to also bring a string of cash; and when these had been placed before goody Liu's eyes: "This is," said lady Feng, "silver to the amount of twenty taels, which was for the time given to these young girls to make winter clothes with; but some other day, when you've nothing to do, come again on a stroll, in evidence of the good feeling which should exist between relatives. It's besides already late, and I don't wish to detain you longer and all for no purpose; but, on your return home, present my compliments to all those of yours to whom I should send them."

As she spake, she stood up. Old goody Liu gave utterance to a thousand and ten thousand expressions of gratitude, and taking the silver and cash, she followed Chou Jui's wife on her way to the out-houses. "Well, mother dear," inquired Mrs. Chou, "what did you think of my lady that you couldn't speak; and that whenever you opened your mouth it was all 'your nephew.' I'll make just one remark, and I don't mind if you do get angry. Had he even been your kindred nephew, you should in fact have been somewhat milder in your language; for that gentleman, Mr. Jung, is her kith and kin nephew, and whence has appeared such another nephew of hers (as Pan Erh)?"

Old goody Liu smiled. "My dear sister-in-law," she replied, "as I gazed upon her, were my heart and eyes, pray, full of admiration or not? and how then could I speak as I should?"

page 105

As they were chatting, they reached Chou Jui's house. They had been sitting for a while, when old goody Liu produced a piece of silver, which

she was purposing to leave behind, to be given to the young servants in Chou Jui's house to purchase fruit to eat; but how could Mrs. Chou satiate her eye with such a small piece of silver? She was determined in her refusal to accept it, so that old goody Liu, after assuring her of her boundless gratitude, took her departure out of the back gate she had come in from.

Reader, you do not know what happened after old goody Liu left, but listen to the explanation which will be given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VII.

*Presentation of artificial flowers made in the Palace.
Chia Lien disports himself with Hsi-feng.
Pao Yü meets Ch'in Chung at a family party.*

To resume our narrative. Chou Jui's wife having seen old goody Liu off, speedily came to report the visit to madame Wang; but, contrary to her expectation, she did not find madame Wang in the drawing-room; and it was after inquiring of the waiting-maids that she eventually learnt that she had just gone over to have a chat with "aunt" Hsüeh. Mrs. Chou, upon hearing this, hastily went out by the eastern corner door, and through the yard on the east, into the Pear Fragrance Court.

As soon as she reached the entrance, she caught sight of madame Wang's waiting-maid, Chin Ch'uan-erh, playing about on the terrace steps, with a young girl, who had just let her hair grow. When they saw Chou Jui's wife approach, they forthwith surmised that she must have some message to deliver, so they pursed up their lips and directed her to the inner-room. Chou Jui's wife gently raised the curtain-screen, and upon entering discovered madame Wang, in voluble conversation with "aunt" Hsüeh, about family questions and people in general.

Mrs. Chou did not venture to disturb them, and accordingly came into the inner room, where she found Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai in a house dress, with her hair simply twisted into a knot round the top of the head, sitting on the inner edge of the stove-couch, leaning on a small divan table, in the act of copying a pattern for embroidery, with the waiting-maid Ying Erh. When she saw her enter, Pao Ch'ai hastily put down her pencil, and turning round with a face beaming with smiles, "Sister Chou," she said, "take a seat."

Chou Jui's wife likewise promptly returned the smile.

"How is my young lady?" she inquired, as she sat down on the edge of the couch. "I haven't seen you come over on the other side for two or three days! Has Mr. Pao Yü perhaps given you offence?"

“What an idea!” exclaimed Pao Ch'ai, with a smile. “It's simply that I've had for the last couple of days my old complaint again, and that I've in consequence kept quiet all this time, and looked after myself.”

“Is that it?” asked Chou Jui's wife; “but after all, what rooted kind of complaint are you subject to, miss? you should lose really no time in sending for a doctor to diagnose it, and give you something to make you all right. With your tender years, to have an organic ailment is indeed no trifle!”

Pao Ch'ai laughed when she heard these remarks.

“Pray,” she said, “don't allude to this again; for this ailment of mine I've seen, I can't tell you, how many doctors; taken no end of medicine and spent I don't know how much money; but the more we did so, not the least little bit of relief did I see. Lucky enough, we eventually came across a bald-pated bonze, whose speciality was the cure of nameless illnesses. We therefore sent for him to see me, and he said that I had brought this along with me from the womb as a sort of inflammatory virus, that luckily I had a constitution strong and hale so that it didn't matter; and that it would be of no avail if I took pills or any medicines. He then told me a prescription from abroad, and gave me also a packet of a certain powder as a preparative, with a peculiar smell and strange flavour. He advised me, whenever my complaint broke out, to take a pill, which would be sure to put me right again. And this has, after all, strange to say, done me a great deal of good.”

“What kind of prescription is this one from abroad, I wonder,” remarked Mrs. Chou; “if you, miss, would only tell me, it would be worth our while bearing it in mind, and recommending it to others: and if ever we came across any one afflicted with this disease, we would also be doing a charitable deed.”

“You'd better not ask for the prescription,” rejoined Pao Ch'ai smiling. “Why, its enough to wear one out with perplexity! the necessaries and ingredients are few, and all easy to get, but it would be difficult to find the lucky moment! You want twelve ounces of the pollen of the white peone, which flowers in spring, twelve ounces of the pollen of the white summer lily, twelve ounces of the pollen of the autumn hibiscus flower, and twelve

ounces of the white plum in bloom in the winter. You take the four kinds of pollen, and put them in the sun, on the very day of the vernal equinox of the succeeding year to get dry, and then you mix them with the powder and pound them well together. You again want twelve mace of water, fallen on 'rain water' day.....”

“Good gracious!” exclaimed Mrs. Chou promptly, as she laughed. “From all you say, why you want three years' time! and what if no rain falls on 'rain water' day! What would one then do?”

page 107

“Quite so!” Pao Ch'ai remarked smilingly; “how can there be such an opportune rain on that very day! but to wait is also the best thing, there's nothing else to be done. Besides, you want twelve mace of dew, collected on 'White Dew' day, and twelve mace of the hoar frost, gathered on 'Frost Descent' day, and twelve mace of snow, fallen on 'Slight Snow' day! You next take these four kinds of waters and mix them with the other ingredients, and make pills of the size of a lungngan. You keep them in an old porcelain jar, and bury them under the roots of some flowers; and when the ailment betrays itself, you produce it and take a pill, washing it down with two candareens of a yellow cedar decoction.”

“O-mi-to-fu!” cried Mrs. Chou, when she heard all this, bursting out laughing. “It's really enough to kill one! you might wait ten years and find no such lucky moments!”

“Fortunate for me, however,” pursued Pao Ch'ai, “in the course of a year or two, after the bonze had told me about this prescription, we got all the ingredients; and, after much trouble, we compounded a supply, which we have now brought along with us from the south to the north; and lies at present under the pear trees.”

“Has this medicine any name or other of its own?” further inquired Mrs. Chou.

“It has a name,” replied Pao Ch'ai; “the mangy-headed bonze also told it me; he called it 'cold fragrance' pill.”

Chou Jui's wife nodded her head, as she heard these words. "What do you feel like after all when this complaint manifests itself?" she went on to ask.

"Nothing much," replied Pao Ch'ai; "I simply pant and cough a bit; but after I've taken a pill, I get over it, and it's all gone."

Mrs. Chou was bent upon making some further remark, when madame Wang was suddenly heard to enquire, "Who is in here?"

Mrs. Chou went out hurriedly and answered; and forthwith told her all about old goody Liu's visit. Having waited for a while, and seeing that madame Wang had nothing to say, she was on the point of retiring, when "aunt" Hsueh unexpectedly remarked smiling: "Wait a bit! I've something to give you to take along with you."

And as she spoke, she called for Hsiang Ling. The sound of the screen-board against the sides of the door was heard, and in walked the waiting-maid, who had been playing with Chin Ch'uan-erh. "Did my lady call?" she asked.

"Bring that box of flowers," said Mrs. Hsueh.

page 108

Hsiang Ling assented, and brought from the other side a small embroidered silk box.

"These," explained "aunt" Hsüeh, "are a new kind of flowers, made in the palace. They consist of twelve twigs of flowers of piled gauze. I thought of them yesterday, and as they will, the pity is, only get old, if uselessly put away, why not give them to the girls to wear them in their hair! I meant to have sent them over yesterday, but I forgot all about them. You come today most opportunely, and if you will take them with you, I shall have got them off my hands. To the three young ladies in your family give two twigs each, and of the six that will remain give a couple to Miss Lin, and the other four to lady Feng."

"Better keep them and give them to your daughter Pao Ch'ai to wear,"

observed madame Wang, "and have done with it; why think of all the others?"

"You don't know, sister," replied "aunt" Hsüeh, "what a crotchety thing Pao Ch'ai is! she has no liking for flower or powder."

With these words on her lips, Chou Jui's wife took the box and walked out of the door of the room. Perceiving that Chin Ch'uan-erh was still sunning herself outside, Chou Jui's wife asked her: "Isn't this Hsiang Ling, the waiting-maid that we've often heard of as having been purchased just before the departure of the Hsüeh family for the capital, and on whose account there occurred some case of manslaughter or other?"

"Of course it's she," replied Chin Ch'uan. But as they were talking, they saw Hsiang Ling draw near smirkingly, and Chou Jui's wife at once seized her by the hand, and after minutely scrutinizing her face for a time, she turned round to Chin Ch'uan-erh and smiled. "With these features she really resembles slightly the style of lady Jung of our Eastern Mansion."

"So I too maintain!" said Chin Ch'uan-erh.

Chou Jui's wife then asked Hsiang Ling, "At what age did you enter this family? and where are your father and mother at present?" and also inquired, "In what year of your teens are you? and of what place are you a native?"

But Hsiang Ling, after listening to all these questions, simply nodded her head and replied, "I can't remember."

When Mrs. Chou and Chin Ch'uan-erh heard these words, their spirits changed to grief, and for a while they felt affected and wounded at heart; but in a short time, Mrs. Chou brought the flowers into the room at the back of madame Wang's principal apartment.

The fact is that dowager lady Chia had explained that as her granddaughters were too numerous, it would not be convenient to crowd them

together in one place, that Pao Yü and Tai-yü should only remain with her in this part to break her loneliness, but that Ying Ch'un, T'an Ch'un, and Hsi Ch'un, the three of them, should move on this side in the three rooms within the antechamber, at the back of madame lady Wang's quarters; and that Li Wan should be told off to be their attendant and to keep an eye over them.

Chou Jui's wife, therefore, on this occasion came first to these rooms as they were on her way, but she only found a few waiting-maids assembled in the antechamber, waiting silently to obey a call.

Ying Ch'un's waiting-maid, Ssu Chi, together with Shih Shu, T'an Ch'un's waiting-maid, just at this moment raised the curtain, and made their egress, each holding in her hand a tea-cup and saucer; and Chou Jui's wife readily concluding that the young ladies were sitting together also walked into the inner room, where she only saw Ying Ch'un and T'an Ch'un seated near the window, in the act of playing chess. Mrs. Chou presented the flowers and explained whence they came, and what they were.

The girls forthwith interrupted their game, and both with a curtsy, expressed their thanks, and directed the waiting-maids to put the flowers away.

Mrs. Chou complied with their wishes (and handing over the flowers); "Miss Hsi Ch'un," she remarked, "is not at home; and possibly she's over there with our old lady."

"She's in that room, isn't she?" inquired the waiting-maids.

Mrs. Chou at these words readily came into the room on this side, where she found Hsi Ch'un, in company with a certain Chih Neng, a young nun of the "moon reflected on water" convent, talking and laughing together. On seeing Chou Jui's wife enter, Hsi Ch'un at once asked what she wanted, whereupon Chou Jui's wife opened the box of flowers, and explained who had sent them.

"I was just telling Chih Neng," remarked Hsi Ch'un laughing, "that I also purpose shortly shaving my head and becoming a nun; and strange enough, here you again bring me flowers; but supposing I shave my head, where can I wear them?"

They were all very much amused for a time with this remark, and Hsi Ch'un told her waiting-maid, Ju Hua, to come and take over the flowers.

"What time did you come over?" then inquired Mrs. Chou of Chih Neng. "Where is that bald-pated and crotchety superior of yours gone?"

"We came," explained Chih Neng, "as soon as it was day; after calling upon madame Wang, my superior went over to pay a visit in the mansion of Mr. Yü, and told me to wait for her here."

page 110

"Have you received," further asked Mrs. Chou, "the monthly allowance for incense offering due on the fifteenth or not?"

"I can't say," replied Chih Neng.

"Who's now in charge of the issue of the monthly allowances to the various temples?" interposed Hsi Ch'un, addressing Mrs. Chou, as soon as she heard what was said.

"It's Yü Hsin," replied Chou Jui's wife, "who's intrusted with the charge."

"That's how it is," observed Hsi Ch'un with a chuckle; "soon after the arrival of the Superior, Yü Hsin's wife came over and kept on whispering with her for some time; so I presume it must have been about this allowance."

Mrs. Chou then went on to bandy a few words with Chih Neng, after which she came over to lady Feng's apartments. Proceeding by a narrow passage, she passed under Li Wan's back windows, and went along the wall ornamented with creepers on the west. Going out of the western side gate, she entered lady Feng's court, and walked over into the Entrance Hall, where she only found the waiting-girl Feng Erh, sitting on the

doorsteps of lady Feng's apartments.

When she caught sight of Mrs. Chou approaching, she at once waved her hand, bidding her go to the eastern room. Chou Jui's wife understood her meaning, and hastily came on tiptoe to the chamber on the east, where she saw a nurse patting lady Feng's daughter to sleep.

Mrs. Chou promptly asked the nurse in a low tone of voice: "Is the young lady asleep at this early hour? But if even she is I must wake her up."

The nurse nodded her head in assent, but as these inquiries were being made, a sound of laughter came from over the other side, in which lady Feng's voice could be detected; followed, shortly after, by the sound of a door opening, and out came P'ing Erh, with a large brass basin in her hands, which she told Feng Erh to fill with water and take inside.

P'ing Erh forthwith entered the room on this side, and upon perceiving Chou Jui's wife: "What have you come here again for, my old lady?" she readily inquired.

Chou Jui's wife rose without any delay, and handed her the box. "I've come," said she, "to bring you a present of flowers."

Upon hearing this, P'ing Erh opened the box, and took out four sprigs, and, turning round, walked out of the room. In a short while she came from the inner room with two sprigs in her hand, and calling first of all Ts'ai

page 111

Ming, she bade her take the flowers over to the mansion on the other side and present them to "madame" Jung, after which she asked Mrs. Chou to express her thanks on her return.

Chou Jui's wife thereupon came over to dowager lady Chia's room on this side of the compound, and as she was going through the Entrance Hall, she casually came, face to face, with her daughter, got up in gala dress, just coming from the house of her mother-in-law.

“What are you running over here for at this time?” promptly inquired Mrs. Chou.

“Have you been well of late, mother?” asked her daughter. “I've been waiting for ever so long at home, but you never come out! What's there so pressing that has prevented you from returning home? I waited till I was tired, and then went on all alone, and paid my respects to our venerable lady; I'm now, on my way to inquire about our lady Wang. What errand haven't you delivered as yet, ma; and what is it you're holding?”

“Ai! as luck would have it,” rejoined Chou Jui's wife smilingly, “old goody Liu came over to-day, so that besides my own hundred and one duties, I've had to run about here and there ever so long, and all for her! While attending to these, Mrs. Hsueh came across me, and asked me to take these flowers to the young ladies, and I've been at it up to this very moment, and haven't done yet! But coming at this time, you must surely have something or other that you want me to do for you! what's it?”

“Really ma, you're quick at guessing!” exclaimed her daughter with a smile; “I'll tell you what it's all about. The day before yesterday, your son-in-law had a glass of wine too many, and began altercating with some person or other; and some one, I don't know why, spread some evil report, saying that his antecedents were not clear, and lodged a charge against him at the Yamen, pressing the authorities to deport him to his native place. That's why I've come over to consult with you, as to whom we should appeal to, to do us this favour of helping us out of our dilemma!”

“I knew at once,” Mrs. Chou remarked after listening, “that there was something wrong; but this is nothing hard to settle! Go home and wait for me and I'll come straightway, as soon as I've taken these flowers to Miss Lin; our madame Wang and lady Secunda have both no leisure (to attend to you now,) so go back and wait for me! What's the use of so much hurry!”

Her daughter, upon hearing this, forthwith turned round to go back, when she added as she walked away, “Mind, mother, and make haste.”

“All right,” replied Chou Jui's wife, “of course I will; you are young yet, and without experience, and that's why you are in this flurry.”

page 112

As she spoke, she betook herself into Tai-yü's apartments. Contrary to her expectation Tai-yü was not at this time in her own room, but in Pao Yü's; where they were amusing themselves in trying to solve the “nine strung rings” puzzle. On entering Mrs. Chou put on a smile. “Aunt' Hsüeh,” she explained, “has told me to bring these flowers and present them to you to wear in your hair.”

“What flowers?” exclaimed Pao Yü. “Bring them here and let me see them.”

As he uttered these words, he readily stretched out his hands and took them over, and upon opening the box and looking in, he discovered, in fact, two twigs of a novel and artistic kind of artificial flowers, of piled gauze, made in the palace.

Tai-yü merely cast a glance at them, as Pao Yü held them. “Have these flowers,” she inquired eagerly, “been sent to me alone, or have all the other girls got some too?”

“Each one of the young ladies has the same,” replied Mrs. Chou; “and these two twigs are intended for you, miss.”

Tai-yü forced a smile. “Oh! I see,” she observed. “If all the others hadn't chosen, even these which remain over wouldn't have been given to me.”

Chou Jui's wife did not utter a word in reply.

“Sister Chou, what took you over on the other side?” asked Pao Yü.

“I was told that our madame Wang was over there,” explained Mrs. Chou, “and as I went to give her a message, 'aunt' Hsüeh seized the opportunity to ask me to bring over these flowers.”

“What was cousin Pao Ch'ai doing at home?” asked Pao Yü. “How is it

she's not even been over for these few days?"

"She's not quite well," remarked Mrs. Chou.

When Pao Yü heard this news, "Who'll go," he speedily ascertained of the waiting-maids, "and inquire after her? Tell her that cousin Lin and I have sent round to ask how our aunt and cousin are getting on! ask her what she's ailing from and what medicines she's taking, and explain to her that I know I ought to have gone over myself, but that on my coming back from school a short while back, I again got a slight chill; and that I'll go in person another day."

While Pao Yü was yet speaking, Hsi Hsüeh volunteered to take the message, and went off at once; and Mrs. Chou herself took her leave without another word.

page 113

Mrs. Chou's son-in-law was, in fact, Leng Tzu-hsing, the intimate friend of Yü-ts'un. Having recently become involved with some party in a lawsuit, on account of the sale of some curios, he had expressly charged his wife to come and sue for the favour (of a helping hand). Chou Jui's wife, relying upon her master's prestige, did not so much as take the affair to heart; and having waited till evening, she simply went over and requested lady Feng to befriend her, and the matter was forthwith ended.

When the lamps were lit, lady Feng came over, after having disrobed herself, to see madame Wang. "I've already taken charge," she observed, "of the things sent round to-day by the Chen family. As for the presents from us to them, we should avail ourselves of the return of the boats, by which the fresh delicacies for the new year were forwarded, to hand them to them to carry back."

Madame Wang nodded her head in token of approval.

"The birthday presents," continued lady Feng, "for lady Ling Ngan, the mother of the Earl of Ling Ngan, have already been got together, and whom will you depute to take them over?"

“See,” suggested madame Wang, “who has nothing to do; let four maids go and all will be right! why come again and ask me?”

“Our eldest sister-in-law Chen,” proceeded lady Feng, “came over to invite me to go to-morrow to their place for a little change. I don't think there will be anything for me to do to-morrow.”

“Whether there be or not,” replied madame Wang, “it doesn't matter; you must go, for whenever she comes with an invitation, it includes us, who are your seniors, so that, of course, it isn't such a pleasant thing for you; but as she doesn't ask us this time, but only asks you, it's evident that she's anxious that you should have a little distraction, and you mustn't disappoint her good intention. Besides it's certainly right that you should go over for a change.”

Lady Feng assented, and presently Li Wan, Ying Ch'un and the other cousins, likewise paid each her evening salutation and retired to their respective rooms, where nothing of any notice transpired.

The next day lady Feng completed her toilette, and came over first to tell madame Wang that she was off, and then went to say good-bye to dowager lady Chia; but when Pao Yü heard where she was going, he also wished to go; and as lady Feng had no help but to give in, and to wait until he had changed his clothes, the sister and brother-in-law got into a carriage, and in a short while entered the Ning mansion.

Mrs. Yu, the wife of Chia Chen, and Mrs. Ch'in, the wife of Mr. Chia Jung, the two sisters-in-law, had, along with a number of maids, waiting-girls,

page 114

and other servants, come as far as the ceremonial gate to receive them, and Mrs. Yu, upon meeting lady Feng, for a while indulged, as was her wont, in humorous remarks, after which, leading Pao Yü by the hand, they entered the drawing room and took their seats, Mrs. Ch'in handed tea round.

“What have you people invited me to come here for?” promptly asked lady Feng; “if you have anything to present me with, hand it to me at once, for I've other things to attend to.”

Mrs. Yu and Mrs. Ch'in had barely any time to exchange any further remarks, when several matrons interposed, smilingly: "Had our lady not come to-day, there would have been no help for it, but having come, you can't have it all your own way."

While they were conversing about one thing and another, they caught sight of Chia Jung come in to pay his respects, which prompted Pao Yü to inquire, "Isn't my elder brother at home to-day?"

"He's gone out of town to-day," replied Mrs. Yu, "to inquire after his grandfather. You'll find sitting here," she continued, "very dull, and why not go out and have a stroll?"

"A strange coincidence has taken place to-day," urged Mrs. Ch'in, with a smile; "some time back you, uncle Pao, expressed a wish to see my brother, and to-day he too happens to be here at home. I think he's in the library; but why not go and see for yourself, uncle Pao?"

Pao Yü descended at once from the stove-couch, and was about to go, when Mrs. Yu bade the servants to mind and go with him. "Don't you let him get into trouble," she enjoined. "It's a far different thing when he comes over under the charge of his grandmother, when he's all right."

"If that be so," remarked lady Feng, "why not ask the young gentleman to come in, and then I too can see him. There isn't, I hope, any objection to my seeing him?"

"Never mind! never mind!" observed Mrs. Yu, smilingly; "it's as well that you shouldn't see him. This brother of mine is not, like the boys of our Chia family, accustomed to roughly banging and knocking about. Other people's children are brought up politely and properly, and not in this vixenish style of yours. Why, you'd ridicule him to death!"

"I won't laugh at him then, that's all," smiled lady Feng; "tell them to bring him in at once."

"He's shy," proceeded Mrs. Ch'in, "and has seen nothing much of the world, so that you are sure to be put out when you see him, sister."

“What an idea!” exclaimed lady Feng. “Were he even No Cha himself, I'd like to see him; so don't talk trash; if, after all, you don't bring him round at once, I'll give you a good slap on the mouth.”

page 115

“I daren't be obstinate,” answered Mrs. Ch'in smiling; “I'll bring him round!”

In a short while she did in fact lead in a young lad, who, compared with Pao Yü, was somewhat more slight but, from all appearances, superior to Pao Yü in eyes and eyebrows, (good looks), which were so clear and well-defined, in white complexion and in ruddy lips, as well as graceful appearance and pleasing manners. He was however bashful and timid, like a girl.

In a shy and demure way, he made a bow to lady Feng and asked after her health.

Lady Feng was simply delighted with him. “You take a low seat next to him!” she ventured laughingly as she first pushed Pao Yü back. Then readily stooping forward, she took this lad by the hand and asked him to take a seat next to her. Presently she inquired about his age, his studies and such matters, when she found that at school he went under the name of Ch'in Chung.

The matrons and maids in attendance on lady Feng, perceiving that this was the first time their mistress met Ch'in Chung, (and knowing) that she had not at hand the usual presents, forthwith ran over to the other side and told P'ing Erh about it.

P'ing Erh, aware of the close intimacy that existed between lady Feng and Mrs. Ch'in, speedily took upon herself to decide, and selecting a piece of silk, and two small gold medals, (bearing the wish that he should attain) the highest degree, the senior wranglership, she handed them to the servants who had come over, to take away.

Lady Feng, however, explained that her presents were too mean by far,

but Mrs. Ch'in and the others expressed their appreciation of them; and in a short time the repast was over, and Mrs. Yu, lady Feng and Mrs. Ch'in played at dominoes, but of this no details need be given; while both Pao Yü and Ch'in Chung sat down, got up and talked, as they pleased.

Since he had first glanced at Ch'in Chung, and seen what kind of person he was, he felt at heart as if he had lost something, and after being plunged in a dazed state for a time, he began again to give way to foolish thoughts in his mind.

“There are then such beings as he in the world!” he reflected. “I now see there are! I'm however no better than a wallowing pig or a mangy cow! Despicable destiny! why was I ever born in this household of a marquis and in the mansion of a duke? Had I seen the light in the home of some penniless scholar, or poverty-stricken official, I could long ago have enjoyed the communion of his friendship, and I would not have lived my whole existence in vain! Though more honourable than he, it is indeed evident

page 116

that silk and satins only serve to swathe this rotten trunk of mine, and choice wines and rich meats only to gorge the filthy drain and miry sewer of this body of mine! Wealth! and splendour! ye are no more than contaminated with pollution by me!”

Ever since Ch'in Chung had noticed Pao Yü's unusual appearance, his sedate deportment, and what is more, his hat ornamented with gold, and his dress full of embroidery, attended by beautiful maids and handsome youths, he did not indeed think it a matter of surprise that every one was fond of him.

“Born as I have had the misfortune to be,” he went on to commune within himself, “in an honest, though poor family, how can I presume to enjoy his companionship! This is verily a proof of what a barrier poverty and wealth set between man and man. What a serious misfortune is this too in this mortal world!”

In wild and inane ideas of the same strain, indulged these two youths!

Pao Yü by and by further asked of him what books he was reading, and Ch'in Chung, in answer to these inquiries, told him the truth. A few more questions and answers followed; and after about ten remarks, a greater intimacy sprang up between them.

Tea and fruits were shortly served, and while they were having their tea, Pao Yü suggested, "We two don't take any wine, and why shouldn't we have our fruit served on the small couch inside, and go and sit there, and thus save you all the trouble?"

The two of them thereupon came into the inner apartment to have their tea; and Mrs. Ch'in attended to the laying out of fruit and wines for lady Feng, and hurriedly entered the room and hinted to Pao Yü: "Dear uncle Pao, your nephew is young, and should he happen to say anything disrespectful, do please overlook it, for my sake, for though shy, he's naturally of a perverse and wilful disposition, and is rather given to having his own way."

"Off with you!" cried Pao Yü laughing; "I know it all." Mrs. Ch'in then went on to give a bit of advice to her brother, and at length came to keep lady Feng company. Presently lady Feng and Mrs. Yu sent another servant to tell Pao Yü that there was outside of everything they might wish to eat and that they should mind and go and ask for it; and Pao Yü simply signified that they would; but his mind was not set upon drinking or eating; all he did was to keep making inquiries of Ch'in Chung about recent family concerns.

Ch'in Chung went on to explain that his tutor had last year relinquished his post, that his father was advanced in years and afflicted with disease, and had multifarious public duties to preoccupy his mind, so that he

page 117

had as yet had no time to make arrangements for another tutor, and that all he did was no more than to keep up his old tasks; that as regards study, it was likewise necessary to have the company of one or two intimate friends, as then only, by dint of a frequent exchange of ideas and opinions, one could arrive at progress; and Pao Yü gave him no time to

complete, but eagerly urged, "Quite so! But in our household, we have a family school, and those of our kindred who have no means sufficient to engage the services of a tutor are at liberty to come over for the sake of study, and the sons and brothers of our relatives are likewise free to join the class. As my own tutor went home last year, I am now also wasting my time doing nothing; my father's intention was that I too should have gone over to this school, so that I might at least temporarily keep up what I have already read, pending the arrival of my tutor next year, when I could again very well resume my studies alone at home. But my grandmother raised objections; maintaining first of all, that the boys who attend the family classes being so numerous, she feared we would be sure to be up to mischief, which wouldn't be at all proper; and that, in the second place, as I had been ill for some time, the matter should be dropped, for the present. But as, from what you say, your worthy father is very much exercised on this score, you should, on your return, tell him all about it, and come over to our school. I'll also be there as your schoolmate; and as you and I will reap mutual benefit from each other's companionship, won't it be nice!"

"When my father was at home the other day," Ch'in Chung smiled and said, "he alluded to the question of a tutor, and explained that the free schools were an excellent institution. He even meant to have come and talked matters over with his son-in-law's father about my introduction, but with the urgent concerns here, he didn't think it right for him to come about this small thing, and make any trouble. But if you really believe that I might be of use to you, in either grinding the ink, or washing the slab, why shouldn't you at once make the needful arrangements, so that neither you nor I may idle our time? And as we shall be able to come together often and talk matters over, and set at the same time our parents' minds at ease, and to enjoy the pleasure of friendship, won't it be a profitable thing!"

"Compose your mind!" suggested Pao Yü. "We can by and by first of all, tell your brother-in-law, and your sister as well as sister-in-law Secunda Lien; and on your return home to-day, lose no time in explaining all to your worthy father, and when I get back, I'll speak to my grandmother; and I can't see why our wishes shouldn't speedily be accomplished."

By the time they had arrived at this conclusion, the day was far

advanced, and the lights were about to be lit; and they came out and watch-

page 118

ed them once more for a time as they played at dominoes. When they came to settle their accounts Mrs. Ch'in and Mrs. Yu were again the losers and had to bear the expense of a theatrical and dinner party; and while deciding that they should enjoy this treat the day after the morrow, they also had the evening repast.

Darkness having set in, Mrs. Yu gave orders that two youths should accompany Mr. Ch'in home. The matrons went out to deliver the directions, and after a somewhat long interval, Ch'in Chung said goodbye and was about to start on his way.

"Whom have you told off to escort him?" asked Mrs. Yu.

"Chiao Ta," replied the matrons, "has been told to go, but it happens that he's under the effects of drink and making free use again of abusive language."

Mrs. Yu and Mrs. Chin remonstrated. "What's the use," they said, "of asking him? that mean fellow shouldn't be chosen, but you will go again and provoke him."

"People always maintain," added lady Feng, "that you are far too lenient. But fancy allowing servants in this household to go on in this way; why, what will be the end of it?"

"You don't mean to tell me," observed Mrs. Yu, "that you don't know this Chiao Ta? Why, even the gentlemen one and all pay no heed to his doings! your eldest brother, Chia Cheng, he too doesn't notice him. It's all because when he was young he followed our ancestor in three or four wars, and because on one occasion, by extracting our senior from the heap of slain and carrying him on his back, he saved his life. He himself suffered hunger and stole food for his master to eat; they had no water for two days; and when he did get half a bowl, he gave it to his master, while he himself had sewage water. He now simply presumes upon the

sentimental obligations imposed by these services. When the seniors of the family still lived, they all looked upon him with exceptional regard; but who at present ventures to interfere with him? He is also advanced in years, and doesn't care about any decent manners; his sole delight is wine; and when he gets drunk, there isn't a single person whom he won't abuse. I've again and again told the stewards not to henceforward ask Chiao Ta to do any work whatever, but to treat him as dead and gone; and here he's sent again to-day."

"How can I not know all about this Chiao Ta?" remarked lady Feng; "but the secret of all this trouble is, that you won't take any decisive step. Why not pack him off to some distant farm, and have done with him?" And as she spoke, "Is our carriage ready?" she went on to inquire.

"All ready and waiting," interposed the married women.

page 119

Lady Feng also got up, said good-bye, and hand in hand with Pao Yü, they walked out of the room, escorted by Mrs. Yu and the party, as far as the entrance of the Main Hall, where they saw the lamps shedding a brilliant light and the attendants all waiting on the platforms. Chiao Ta, however, availing himself of Chia Chen's absence from home, and elated by wine, began to abuse the head steward Lai Erh for his injustice.

"You bully of the weak and coward with the strong," he cried, "when there's any pleasant charge, you send the other servants, but when it's a question of seeing any one home in the dark, then you ask me, you disorderly clown! a nice way you act the steward, indeed! Do you forget that if Mr. Chiao Ta chose to raise one leg, it would be a good deal higher than your head! Remember please, that twenty years ago, Mr. Chiao Ta wouldn't even so much as look at any one, no matter who it was; not to mention a pack of hybrid creatures like yourselves!"

While he went on cursing and railing with all his might, Chia Jung appeared walking by lady Feng's carriage. All the servants having tried to hush him and not succeeding, Chia Jung became exasperated; and forthwith blew him up for a time. "Let some one bind him up," he cried, "and tomorrow, when he's over the wine, I'll call him to task, and we'll see

if he won't seek death.”

Chiao Ta showed no consideration for Chia Jung. On the contrary, he shouted with more vigour. Going up to Chia Jung: “Brother Jung,” he said, “don't put on the airs of a master with Chiao Ta. Not to speak of a man such as you, why even your father and grandfather wouldn't presume to display such side with Chiao Ta. Were it not for Chiao Ta, and him alone, where would your office, honours, riches and dignity be? Your ancestor, whom I brought back from the jaws of death, heaped up all this estate, but up to this very day have I received no thanks for the services I rendered! on the contrary, you come here and play the master; don't say a word more, and things may come right; but if you do, I'll plunge the blade of a knife white in you and extract it red.”

Lady Feng, from inside the carriage, remarked to Chia Jung: “Don't you yet pack off this insolent fellow! Why, if you keep him in your house, won't he be a source of mischief? Besides, were relatives and friends to hear about these things, won't they have a laugh at our expense, that a household like ours should be so devoid of all propriety?”

Chia Jung assented. The whole band of servants finding that Chiao Ta was getting too insolent had no help but to come up and throw him over, and binding him up, they dragged him towards the stables. Chiao Ta abused even Chia Chen with still more vehemence, and shouted in a boisterous manner. “I want to go,” he cried, “to the family Ancestral Temple

page 120

and mourn my old master. Who would have ever imagined that he would leave behind such vile creatures of descendants as you all, day after day indulging in obscene and incestuous practices, 'in scraping of the ashes' and in philandering with brothers-in-law. I know all about your doings; the best thing is to hide one's stump of an arm in one's sleeve!” (wash one's dirty clothes at home).

The servants who stood by, upon hearing this wild talk, were quite at their wits' end, and they at once seized him, tied him up, and filled his mouth to the fullest extent with mud mixed with some horse refuse.

Lady Feng and Chia Jung heard all he said from a distance, but pretended not to hear; but Pao Yü, seated in the carriage as he was, also caught this extravagant talk and inquired of lady Feng: "Sister, did you hear him say something about 'scraping of the ashes?' What's it?"

"Don't talk such rubbish!" hastily shouted lady Feng; "it was the maudlin talk of a drunkard! A nice boy you are! not to speak of your listening, but you must also inquire! wait and I'll tell your mother and we'll see if she doesn't seriously take you to task."

Pao Yü was in such a state of fright that he speedily entreated her to forgive him. "My dear sister," he craved, "I won't venture again to say anything of the kind"

"My dear brother, if that be so, it's all right!" rejoined lady Feng reassuringly; "on our return we'll speak to her venerable ladyship and ask her to send some one to arrange matters in the family school, and invite Ch'in Chung to come to school for his studies."

While yet this conversation was going on, they arrived at the Jung Mansion.

Reader, do you wish to know what follows? if you do, the next chapter will unfold it.

CHAPTER VIII.

By a strange coincidence, Chia Pao Yü becomes acquainted with the golden clasp.

In an unexpected meeting, Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai sees the jade of spiritual perception.

Pao Yü and lady Feng, we will now explain, paid, on their return home, their respects to all the inmates, and Pao Yü availed himself of the first occasion to tell dowager lady Chia of his wish that Ch'in Chung should come over to the family school. "The presence for himself of a friend as school-

page 121

mate would," he argued, "be fitly excellent to stir him to zeal," and he went on to speak in terms of high praise of Ch'in Chung, his character and his manners, which most of all made people esteem him.

Lady Feng besides stood by him and backed his request. "In a day or two," she added, "Ch'in Chung will be coming to pay his obeisance to your venerable ladyship."

This bit of news greatly rejoiced the heart of dowager lady Chia, and lady Feng likewise did not let the opportunity slip, without inviting the old lady to attend the theatrical performance to come off the day after the morrow. Dowager lady Chia was, it is true, well on in years, but was, nevertheless, very fond of enjoyment, so that when the day arrived and Mrs. Yu came over to invite her round, she forthwith took madame Wang, Lin Tai-yü, Pao Yü and others along and went to the play.

It was about noon, when dowager lady Chia returned to her apartments for her siesta; and madame Wang, who was habitually partial to a quiet life, also took her departure after she had seen the old lady retire. Lady Feng subsequently took the seat of honour; and the party enjoyed themselves immensely till the evening, when they broke up.

But to return to Pao Yü. Having accompanied his grandmother Chia back home, and waited till her ladyship was in her midday sleep, he had in fact

an inclination to return to the performance, but he was afraid lest he should be a burden to Mrs. Ch'in and the rest and lest they should not feel at ease. Remembering therefore that Pao Ch'ai had been at home unwell for the last few days, and that he had not been to see her, he was anxious to go and look her up, but he dreaded that if he went by the side gate, at the back of the drawing-room, he would be prevented by something or other, and fearing, what would be making matters worse, lest he should come across his father, he consequently thought it better to go on his way by a detour. The nurses and waiting-maids thereupon came to help him to change his clothes; but they saw him not change, but go out again by the second door. These nurses and maids could not help following him out; but they were still under the impression that he was going over to the other mansion to see the theatricals. Contrary to their speculations, upon reaching the entrance hall, he forthwith went to the east, then turned to the north, and walking round by the rear of the hall, he happened to come face to face with two of the family companions, Mr. Ch'an Kuang, and Mr. Tan T'ing-jen. As soon as they caught sight of Pao Yü, they both readily drew up to him, and as they smiled, the one put his arm round his waist, while the other grasped him by the hand.

“Oh divine brother!” they both exclaimed, “this we call dreaming a pleasant dream, for it's no easy thing to come across you!”

page 122

While continuing their remarks they paid their salutations, and inquired after his health; and it was only after they had chatted for ever so long, that they went on their way. The nurse called out to them and stopped them, “Have you two gentlemen,” she said, “come out from seeing master?”

They both nodded assent. “Your master,” they explained, “is in the Meng P'o Chai small library having his siesta; so that you can go through there with no fear.”

As they uttered these words, they walked away.

This remark also evoked a smile from Pao Yü, but without further delay he turned a corner, went towards the north, and came into the Pear

Fragrance Court, where, as luck would have it, he met the head manager of the Household Treasury, Wu Hsin-teng, who, in company with the head of the granary, Tai Liang, and several other head stewards, seven persons in all, was issuing out of the Account Room.

On seeing Pao Yü approaching, they, in a body, stood still, and hung down their arms against their sides. One of them alone, a certain butler, called Ch'ien Hua, promptly came forward, as he had not seen Pao Yü for many a day, and bending on one knee, paid his respects to Pao Yü. Pao Yü at once gave a smile and pulled him up.

“The day before yesterday,” smiled all the bystanders, “we were somewhere together and saw some characters written by you, master Secundus, in the composite style. The writing is certainly better than it was before! When will you give us a few sheets to stick on the wall?”

“Where did you see them?” inquired Pao Yü, with a grin.

“They are to be found in more than one place,” they replied, “and every one praises them very much, and what's more, asks us for a few.”

“They are not worth having,” observed Pao Yü smilingly; “but if you do want any, tell my young servants and it will be all right.”

As he said these words, he moved onwards. The whole party waited till he had gone by, before they separated, each one to go his own way.

But we need not dilate upon matters of no moment, but return to Pao Yü.

On coming to the Pear Fragrance Court, he entered, first, into “aunt” Hsüeh's room, where he found her getting some needlework ready to give to the waiting-maids to work at. Pao Yü forthwith paid his respects to her, and “aunt” Hsüeh, taking him by the hand, drew him towards her and clasped him in her embrace.

page 123

“With this cold weather,” she smilingly urged, “it's too kind of you, my dear child, to think of coming to see me; come along on the stove-couch

at once!—Bring some tea,” she continued, addressing the servants, “and make it as hot as it can be!”

“Isn't Hsüeh P'an at home?” Pao Yü having inquired: “He's like a horse without a halter,” Mrs. Hsüeh remarked with a sigh; “he's daily running here and there and everywhere, and nothing can induce him to stay at home one single day.”

“Is sister (Pao Ch'ai) all right again?” asked Pao Yü. “Yes,” replied Mrs. Hsüeh, “she's well again. It was very kind of you two days ago to again think of her, and send round to inquire after her. She's now in there, and you can go and see her. It's warmer there than it's here; go and sit with her inside, and, as soon as I've put everything away, I'll come and join you and have a chat.”

Pao Yü, upon hearing this, jumped down with alacrity from the stove-couch, and walked up to the door of the inner room, where he saw hanging a portiere somewhat the worse for use, made of red silk. Pao Yü raised the portiere and making one step towards the interior, he found Pao Ch'ai seated on the couch, busy over some needlework. On the top of her head was gathered, and made into a knot, her chevelure, black as lacquer, and glossy like pomade. She wore a honey-coloured wadded robe, a rose-brown short-sleeved jacket, lined with the fur of the squirrel of two colours: the “gold and silver;” and a jupe of leek-yellow silk. Her whole costume was neither too new, neither too old, and displayed no sign of extravagance.

Her lips, though not rouged, were naturally red; her eyebrows, though not pencilled, were yet blue black; her face resembled a silver basin, and her eyes, juicy plums. She was sparing in her words, chary in her talk, so much so that people said that she posed as a simpleton. She was quiet in the acquittal of her duties and scrupulous as to the proper season for everything. “I practise simplicity,” she would say of herself.

“How are you? are you quite well again, sister?” inquired Pao Yü, as he gazed at her; whereupon Pao Ch'ai raised her head, and perceiving Pao Yü walk in, she got up at once and replied with a smile, “I'm all right again; many thanks for your kindness in thinking of me.”

While uttering this, she pressed him to take a seat on the stove-couch, and as he sat down on the very edge of the couch, she told Ying Erh to bring tea and asked likewise after dowager lady Chia and lady Feng. "And are all the rest of the young ladies quite well?" she inquired.

Saying this she scrutinised Pao Yü, who she saw had a head-dress of purplish-gold twisted threads, studded with precious stones. His forehead

page 124

was bound with a gold circlet, representing two dragons, clasping a pearl. On his person he wore a light yellow, archery-sleeved jacket, ornamented with rampant dragons, and lined with fur from the ribs of the silver fox; and was clasped with a dark sash, embroidered with different-coloured butterflies and birds. Round his neck was hung an amulet, consisting of a clasp of longevity, a talisman of recorded name, and, in addition to these, the precious jade which he had had in his mouth at the time of his birth.

"I've daily heard every one speak of this jade," said Pao Ch'ai with a smile, "but haven't, after all, had an opportunity of looking at it closely, but anyhow to-day I must see it."

As she spoke, she drew near. Pao Yü himself approached, and taking it from his neck, he placed it in Pao Ch'ai's hand. Pao Ch'ai held it in her palm. It appeared to her very much like the egg of a bird, resplendent as it was like a bright russet cloud; shiny and smooth like variegated curd and covered with a net for the sake of protection.

Readers, you should know that this was the very block of useless stone which had been on the Ta Huang Hills, and which had dropped into the Ch'ing Keng cave, in a state of metamorphosis. A later writer expresses his feelings in a satirical way as follows:

*Nü Wo's fusion of stones was e'er a myth inane,
But from this myth hath sprung fiction still more insane!
Lost is the subtle life, divine, and real!—gone!
Assumed, mean subterfuge! foul bags of skin and bone!
Fortune, when once adverse, how true! gold glows no more!
In evil days, alas! the jade's splendour is o'er!*

*Bones, white and bleached, in nameless hill-like mounds are flung,
Bones once of youths renowned and maidens fair and young.*

The rejected stone has in fact already given a record of the circumstances of its transformation, and the inscription in seal characters, engraved upon it by the bald-headed bonze, and below will now be also appended a faithful representation of it; but its real size is so very diminutive, as to allow of its being held by a child in his mouth while yet unborn, that were it to have been drawn in its exact proportions, the characters would, it is feared, have been so insignificant in size, that the beholder would have had to waste much of his eyesight, and it would besides have been no pleasant thing.

While therefore its shape has been adhered to, its size has unavoidably been slightly enlarged, to admit of the reader being able, conveniently, to peruse the inscription, even by very lamplight, and though he may be under the influence of wine.

These explanations have been given to obviate any such sneering remarks as: "What could be, pray, the size of the mouth of a child in his mother's womb, and how could it grasp such a large and clumsy thing?"

page 125

On the face of the jade was written:

*Precious Gem of Spiritual Perception.
If thou wilt lose me not and never forget me,
Eternal life and constant luck will be with thee!*

On the reverse was written:

*1 To exorcise evil spirits and the accessory visitations;
2 To cure predestined sickness;
3 To prognosticate weal and woe.*

Pao Ch'ai having looked at the amulet, twisted it again to the face, and scrutinising it closely, read aloud:

*If thou wilt lose me not and never forget me,
Eternal life and constant luck will be with thee!*

She perused these lines twice, and, turning round, she asked Ying Erh laughingly: "Why don't you go and pour the tea? what are you standing here like an idiot!"

"These two lines which I've heard," smiled Ying Erh, "would appear to pair with the two lines on your necklet, miss!"

"What!" eagerly observed Pao Yü with a grin, when he caught these words, "are there really eight characters too on your necklet, cousin? do let me too see it."

"Don't listen to what she says," remarked Pao Ch'ai, "there are no characters on it."

"My dear cousin," pleaded Pao Yü entreatingly, "how is it you've seen mine?"

Pao Ch'ai was brought quite at bay by this remark of his, and she consequently added, "There are also two propitious phrases engraved on this charm, and that's why I wear it every day. Otherwise, what pleasure would there be in carrying a clumsy thing."

As she spoke, she unfastened the button, and produced from inside her crimson robe, a crystal-like locket, set with pearls and gems, and with a brilliant golden fringe. Pao Yü promptly received it from her, and upon minute examination, found that there were in fact four characters on each side; the eight characters on both sides forming two sentences of good omen. The similitude of the locket is likewise then given below. On the face of the locket is written:

"Part not from me and cast me not away;"

And on the reverse:

"And youth, perennial freshness will display!"

Pao Yü examined the charm, and having also read the inscription twice over aloud, and then twice again to himself, he said as he smiled, "Dear

cousin, these eight characters of yours form together with mine an antithetical verse.”

“They were presented to her,” ventured Ying Erh, “by a mangy-pated bonze, who explained that they should be engraved on a golden trinket...”

Pao Ch'ai left her no time to finish what she wished to say, but speedily called her to task for not going to bring the tea, and then inquired of Pao Yü “Where he had come from?”

Pao Yü had, by this time, drawn quite close to Pao Ch'ai, and perceived whiff after whiff of some perfume or other, of what kind he could not tell. “What perfume have you used, my cousin,” he forthwith asked, “to fumigate your dresses with? I really don't remember smelling any perfumery of the kind before.”

“I'm very averse,” replied Pao Ch'ai blandly, “to the odour of fumigation; good clothes become impregnated with the smell of smoke.”

“In that case,” observed Pao Yü, “what scent is it?”

“Yes, I remember,” Pao Ch'ai answered, after some reflection; “it's the scent of the 'cold fragrance' pills which I took this morning.”

“What are these cold fragrance pills,” remarked Pao Yü smiling, “that they have such a fine smell? Give me, cousin, a pill to try.”

“Here you are with your nonsense again,” Pao Ch'ai rejoined laughingly; “is a pill a thing to be taken recklessly?”

She had scarcely finished speaking, when she heard suddenly some one outside say, “Miss Lin is come;” and shortly Lin Tai-yü walked in in a jaunty manner.

“Oh, I come at a wrong moment!” she exclaimed forthwith, smirking significantly when she caught sight of Pao Yü.

Pao Yü and the rest lost no time in rising and offering her a seat,

whereupon Pao Ch'ai added with a smile, "How can you say such things?"

"Had I known sooner," continued Tai-yü, "that he was here, I would have kept away."

"I can't fathom this meaning of yours," protested Pao Ch'ai.

"If one comes," Tai-yü urged smiling, "then all come, and when one doesn't come, then no one comes. Now were he to come to-day, and I to come to-morrow, wouldn't there be, by a division of this kind, always some one with you every day? and in this way, you wouldn't feel too lonely, nor too crowded. How is it, cousin, that you didn't understand what I meant to imply?"

"Is it snowing?" inquired Pao Yü, upon noticing that she wore a cloak made of crimson camlet, buttoning in front.

page 127

"It has been snowing for some time," ventured the matrons, who were standing below. "Fetch my wrapper!" Pao Yü remarked, and Tai-yü readily laughed. "Am I not right? I come, and, of course, he must go at once."

"Did I ever mention that I was going?" questioned Pao Yü; "I only wish it brought to have it ready when I want it."

"It's a snowy day," consequently remarked Pao Yü's nurse, dame Li, "and we must also look to the time, but you had better remain here and amuse yourself with your cousin. Your aunt has, in there, got ready tea and fruits. I'll tell the waiting-maid to go and fetch your wrapper and the boys to return home." Pao Yü assented, and nurse Li left the room and told the boys that they were at liberty to go.

By this time Mrs. Hsüeh had prepared tea and several kinds of nice things and kept them all to partake of those delicacies. Pao Yü, having spoken highly of some goose feet and ducks' tongues he had tasted some days before, at his eldest sister-in-law's, Mrs. Yu's, "aunt" Hsüeh promptly produced several dishes of the same kind, made by herself, and

gave them to Pao Yü to try. "With a little wine," added Pao Yü with a smile, "they would be first rate."

Mrs. Hsüeh thereupon bade the servants fetch some wine of the best quality; but dame Li came forward and remonstrated. "My lady," she said, "never mind the wine."

Pao Yü smilingly pleaded: "My nurse, I'll take just one cup and no more."

"It's no use," nurse Li replied, "were your grandmother and mother present, I wouldn't care if you drank a whole jar. I remember the day when I turned my eyes away but for a moment, and some ignorant fool or other, merely with the view of pandering for your favour, gave you only a drop of wine to drink, and how this brought reproaches upon me for a couple of days. You don't know, my lady, you have no idea of his disposition! it's really dreadful; and when he has had a little wine he shows far more temper. On days when her venerable ladyship is in high spirits, she allows him to have his own way about drinking, but he's not allowed to have wine on any and every day; and why should I have to suffer inside and all for nothing at all?"

"You antiquated thing!" replied Mrs. Hsüeh laughing, "set your mind at ease, and go and drink your own wine! I won't let him have too much, and should even the old lady say anything, let the fault be mine."

Saying this, she asked a waiting-maid to take nurse Li along with her and give her also a glass of wine so as to keep out the cold air.

When nurse Li heard these words, she had no alternative but to go for a time with all the others and have some wine to drink.

page 128

"The wine need not be warmed: I prefer it cold!" Pao Yü went on to suggest meanwhile.

"That won't do," remonstrated Mrs. Hsüeh; "cold wine will make your hand tremble when you write."

"You have," interposed Pao Ch'ai smiling, "the good fortune, cousin Pao Yü, of having daily opportunities of acquiring a knowledge of every kind

of subject, and yet don't you know that the properties of wine are mostly heating? If you drink wine warm, its effects soon dispel, but if you drink it cold, it at once congeals in you; and as upon your intestines devolves the warming of it, how can you not derive any harm? and won't you yet from this time change this habit of yours? leave off at once drinking that cold wine."

Pao Yü finding that the words he had heard contained a good deal of sense, speedily put down the cold wine, and having asked them to warm it, he at length drank it.

Tai-yü was bent upon cracking melon seeds, saying nothing but simply pursing up her lips and smiling, when, strange coincidence, Hsüeh Yen, Tai-yü's waiting-maid, walked in and handed her mistress a small hand-stove.

"Who told you to bring it?" ascertained Tai-yü grinningly. "I'm sorry to have given whoever it is the trouble; I'm obliged to her. But did she ever imagine that I would freeze to death?"

"Tzu Chuan was afraid," replied Hsüeh Yen, "that you would, miss, feel cold, and she asked me to bring it over."

Tai-yü took it over and held it in her lap. "How is it," she smiled, "that you listen to what she tells you, but that you treat what I say, day after day, as so much wind blowing past your ears! How is it that you at once do what she bids you, with even greater alacrity than you would an imperial edict?"

When Pao Yü heard this, he felt sure in his mind that Tai-yü was availing herself of this opportunity to make fun of him, but he made no remark, merely laughing to himself and paying no further notice. Pao Ch'ai, again, knew full well that this habit was a weak point with Tai-yü, so she too did not go out of her way to heed what she said.

"You've always been delicate and unable to stand the cold," interposed "aunt" Hsüeh, "and is it not a kind attention on their part to have thought of you?"

"You don't know, aunt, how it really stands," responded Tai-yü smilingly;

“fortunately enough, it was sent to me here at your quarters; for had it been in any one else's house, wouldn't it have been a slight upon them? Is it forsooth nice to think that people haven't so much as a hand-

page 129

stove, and that one has fussily to be sent over from home? People won't say that the waiting-maids are too officious, but will imagine that I'm in the habit of behaving in this offensive fashion.”

“You're far too punctilious,” remarked Mrs. Hsüeh, “as to entertain such notions! No such ideas as these crossed my mind just now.”

While they were conversing, Pao Yü had taken so much as three cups of wine, and nurse Li came forward again to prevent him from having any more. Pao Yü was just then in a state of exultation and excitement, (a state) enhanced by the conversation and laughter of his cousins, so that was he ready to agree to having no more! But he was constrained in a humble spirit to entreat for permission. “My dear nurse,” he implored, “I'll just take two more cups and then have no more.”

“You'd better be careful,” added nurse Li, “your father is at home to-day, and see that you're ready to be examined in your lessons.”

When Pao Yü heard this mention, his spirits at once sank within him, and gently putting the wine aside, he dropped his head upon his breast.

Tai-yü promptly remonstrated. “You've thrown cold water,” she said, “over the spirits of the whole company; why, if uncle should ask to see you, well, say that aunt Hsüeh detained you. This old nurse of yours has been drinking, and again makes us the means of clearing her muddled head!”

While saying this, she gave Pao Yü a big nudge with the intent of stirring up his spirits, adding, as she addressed him in a low tone of voice: “Don't let us heed that old thing, but mind our own enjoyment.”

Dame Li also knew very well Tai-yü's disposition, and therefore remarked: “Now, Miss Lin, don't you urge him on; you should after all, give him good advice, as he may, I think, listen to a good deal of what you say to him.”

“Why should I urge him on?” rejoined Lin Tai-yü, with a sarcastic smile, “nor will I trouble myself to give him advice. You, old lady, are far too scrupulous! Old lady Chia has also time after time given him wine, and if he now takes a cup or two more here, at his aunt's, lady Hsüeh's house, there's no harm that I can see. Is it perhaps, who knows, that aunt is a stranger in this establishment, and that we have in fact no right to come over here to see her?”

Nurse Li was both vexed and amused by the words she had just heard. “Really,” she observed, “every remark this girl Lin utters is sharper than a razor! I didn't say anything much!”

Pao Ch'ai too could not suppress a smile, and as she pinched Tai-yü's cheek, she exclaimed, “Oh the tongue of this frowning girl! one can neither resent what it says, nor yet listen to it with any gratification!”

page .130

“Don't be afraid!” Mrs. Hsüeh went on to say, “don't be afraid; my son, you've come to see me, and although I've nothing good to give you, you mustn't, through fright, let the trifle you've taken lie heavy on your stomach, and thus make me uneasy; but just drink at your pleasure, and as much as you like, and let the blame fall on my shoulders. What's more, you can stay to dinner with me, and then go home; or if you do get tipsy, you can sleep with me, that's all.”

She thereupon told the servants to heat some more wine. “I'll come,” she continued, “and keep you company while you have two or three cups, after which we'll have something to eat!”

It was only after these assurances that Pao Yü's spirits began at length, once more to revive, and dame Li then directed the waiting-maids what to do. “You remain here,” she enjoined, “and mind, be diligent while I go home and change; when I'll come back again. Don't allow him,” she also whispered to “aunt” Hsüeh, “to have all his own way and drink too much.”

Having said this, she betook herself back to her quarters; and during this while, though there were two or three nurses in attendance, they did not concern themselves with what was going on. As soon as they saw that nurse Li had left, they likewise all quietly slipped out, at the first

opportunity they found, while there remained but two waiting-maids, who were only too glad to curry favour with Pao Yü. But fortunately "aunt" Hsüeh, by much coaxing and persuading, only let him have a few cups, and the wine being then promptly cleared away, pickled bamboo shoots and chicken-skin soup were prepared, of which Pao Yü drank with relish several bowls full, eating besides more than half a bowl of finest rice congee.

By this time, Hsüeh Pao Ch'ai and Lin Tai-yü had also finished their repast; and when Pao Yü had drunk a few cups of strong tea, Mrs. Hsüeh felt more easy in her mind. Hsüeh Yen and the others, three or four of them in all, had also had their meal, and came in to wait upon them.

"Are you now going or not?" inquired Tai-yü of Pao Yü.

Pao Yü looked askance with his drowsy eyes. "If you want to go," he observed, "I'll go with you."

Tai-yü hearing this, speedily rose. "We've been here nearly the whole day," she said, "and ought to be going back."

As she spoke the two of them bade good-bye, and the waiting-maids at once presented a hood to each of them.

Pao Yü readily lowered his head slightly and told a waiting-maid to put it on. The girl promptly took the hood, made of deep red cloth, and shaking it out of its folds, she put it on Pao Yü's head.

page 131

"That will do," hastily exclaimed Pao Yü. "You stupid thing! gently a bit; is it likely you've never seen any one put one on before? let me do it myself."

"Come over here, and I'll put it on for you," suggested Tai-yü, as she stood on the edge of the couch. Pao Yü eagerly approached her, and Tai-yü carefully kept the cap, to which his hair was bound, fast down, and taking the hood she rested its edge on the circlet round his forehead. She then raised the ball of crimson velvet, which was as large as a walnut, and put it in such a way that, as it waved tremulously, it should appear outside the hood. These arrangements completed she cast a look for a

while at what she had done. "That's right now," she added, "throw your wrapper over you!"

When Pao Yü caught these words, he eventually took the wrapper and threw it over his shoulders.

"None of your nurses," hurriedly interposed aunt Hsüeh, "are yet come, so you had better wait a while."

"Why should we wait for them?" observed Pao Yü. "We have the waiting-maids to escort us, and surely they should be enough."

Mrs. Hsüeh finding it difficult to set her mind at ease deputed two married women to accompany the two cousins; and after they had both expressed (to these women) their regret at having troubled them, they came straightway to dowager lady Chia's suite of apartments.

Her venerable ladyship had not, as yet, had her evening repast. Hearing that they had been at Mrs. Hsüeh's, she was extremely pleased; but noticing that Pao Yü had had some wine, she gave orders that he should be taken to his room, and put to bed, and not be allowed to come out again.

"Do take good care of him," she therefore enjoined the servants, and when suddenly she bethought herself of Pao Yü's attendants, "How is it," she at once inquired of them all, "that I don't see nurse Li here?"

They did not venture to tell her the truth, that she had gone home, but simply explained that she had come in a few moments back, and that they thought she must have again gone out on some business or other.

"She's better off than your venerable ladyship," remarked Pao Yü, turning round and swaying from side to side. "Why then ask after her? Were I rid of her, I believe I might live a little longer."

While uttering these words, he reached the door of his bedroom, where he saw pen and ink laid out on the writing table.

"That's nice," exclaimed Ch'ing Wen, as she came to meet him with a

smile on her face, "you tell me to prepare the ink for you, but though when you get up, you were full of the idea of writing, you only wrote three
page 132

characters, when you discarded the pencil, and ran away, fooling me, by making me wait the whole day! Come now at once and exhaust all this ink before you're let off."

Pao Yü then remembered what had taken place in the morning. "Where are the three characters I wrote?" he consequently inquired, smiling.

"Why this man is tipsy," remarked Ch'ing Wen sneeringly. "As you were going to the other mansion, you told me to stick them over the door. I was afraid lest any one else should spoil them, as they were being pasted, so I climbed up a high ladder and was ever so long in putting them up myself; my hands are even now numb with cold."

"Oh I forgot all about it," replied Pao Yü grinning, "if your hands are cold, come and I'll rub them warm for you."

Promptly stretching out his hand, he took those of Ch'ing Wen in his, and the two of them looked at the three characters, which he recently had written, and which were pasted above the door. In a short while, Tai-yü came.

"My dear cousin," Pao Yü said to her smilingly, "tell me without any prevarication which of the three characters is the best written?"

Tai-yü raised her head and perceived the three characters: Red, Rue, Hall. "They're all well done," she rejoined, with a smirk, "How is it you've written them so well? By and bye you must also write a tablet for me."

"Are you again making fun of me?" asked Pao Yü smiling; "what about sister Hsi Jen?" he went on to inquire.

Ch'ing Wen pouted her lips, pointing towards the stove-couch in the inner room, and, on looking in, Pao Yü espied Hsi Jen fast asleep in her daily costume.

"Well," Pao Yü observed laughing, "there's no harm in it, but its rather early to sleep. When I was having my early meal, on the other side," he

proceeded, speaking to Ch'ing Wen, "there was a small dish of dumplings, with bean-curd outside; and as I thought you would like to have some, I asked Mrs. Yu for them, telling her that I would keep them, and eat them in the evening; I told some one to bring them over, but have you perchance seen them?"

"Be quick and drop that subject," suggested Ch'ing Wen; "as soon as they were brought over, I at once knew they were intended for me; as I had just finished my meal, I put them by in there, but when nurse Li came she saw them. 'Pao Yü,' she said, 'is not likely to eat them, so I'll take them and give them to my grandson.' And forthwith she bade some one take them over to her home."

page 133

While she was speaking, Hsi Hsüeh brought in tea, and Pao Yü pressed his cousin Lin to have a cup.

"Miss Lin has gone long ago," observed all of them, as they burst out laughing, "and do you offer her tea?"

Pao Yü drank about half a cup, when he also suddenly bethought himself of some tea, which had been brewed in the morning. "This morning," he therefore inquired of Hsi Hsüeh, "when you made a cup of maple-dew tea, I told you that that kind of tea requires brewing three or four times before its colour appears; and how is that you now again bring me this tea?"

"I did really put it by," answered Hsi Hsüeh, "but nurse Li came and drank it, and then went off."

Pao Yü upon hearing this, dashed the cup he held in his hand on the ground, and as it broke into small fragments, with a crash, it spattered Hsi Hsüeh's petticoat all over.

"Of whose family is she the mistress?" inquired Pao Yü of Hsi Hsüeh, as he jumped up, "that you all pay such deference to her. I just simply had a little of her milk, when I was a brat, and that's all; and now she has got into the way of thinking herself more high and mighty than even the heads of the family! She should be packed off, and then we shall all have peace and quiet."

Saying this, he was bent upon going, there and then, to tell dowager lady Chia to have his nurse driven away.

Hsi Jen was really not asleep, but simply feigning, with the idea, when Pao Yü came, to startle him in play. At first, when she heard him speak of writing, and inquire after the dumplings, she did not think it necessary to get up, but when he flung the tea-cup on the floor, and got into a temper, she promptly jumped up and tried to appease him, and to prevent him by coaxing from carrying out his threat.

A waiting-maid sent by dowager lady Chia came in, meanwhile, to ask what was the matter.

“I had just gone to pour tea,” replied Hsi Jen, without the least hesitation, “and I slipped on the snow and fell, while the cup dropped from my hand and broke. Your decision to send her away is good,” she went on to advise Pao Yü, “and we are all willing to go also; and why not avail yourself of this opportunity to dismiss us in a body? It will be for our good, and you too on the other hand, needn't perplex yourself about not getting better people to come and wait on you!”

When Pao Yü heard this taunt, he had at length not a word to say, and supported by Hsi Jen and the other attendants on to the couch, they divested him of his clothes. But they failed to understand the drift of what Pao Yü

page 134

kept on still muttering, and all they could make out was an endless string of words; but his eyes grew heavier and drowsier, and they forthwith waited upon him until he went to sleep; when Hsi Jen unclasped the jade of spiritual perception, and rolling it up in a handkerchief, she lay it under the mattress, with the idea that when he put it on the next day it should not chill his neck.

Pao Yü fell sound asleep the moment he lay his head on the pillow. By this time nurse Li and the others had come in, but when they heard that Pao Yü was tipsy, they too did not venture to approach, but gently made inquiries as to whether he was asleep or not. On hearing that he was, they took their departure with their minds more at ease.

The next morning the moment Pao Yü awoke, some one came in to tell him that young Mr. Jung, living in the mansion on the other side, had brought Ch'in Chung to pay him a visit.

Pao Yü speedily went out to greet them and to take them over to pay their respects to dowager lady Chia. Her venerable ladyship upon perceiving that Ch'in Chung, with his handsome countenance, and his refined manners, would be a fit companion for Pao Yü in his studies, felt extremely delighted at heart; and having readily detained him to tea, and kept him to dinner, she went further and directed a servant to escort him to see madame Wang and the rest of the family.

With the fond regard of the whole household for Mrs. Ch'in, they were, when they saw what a kind of person Ch'in Chung was, so enchanted with him, that at the time of his departure, they all had presents to give him; even dowager lady Chia herself presented him with a purse and a golden image of the God of Learning, with a view that it should incite him to study and harmony.

“Your house,” she further advised him, “is far off, and when it's cold or hot, it would be inconvenient for you to come all that way, so you had better come and live over here with me. You'll then be always with your cousin Pao Yü, and you won't be together, in your studies, with those fellow-pupils of yours who have no idea what progress means.”

Ch'in Chung made a suitable answer to each one of her remarks, and on his return home he told everything to his father.

His father, Ch'in Pang-yeh, held at present the post of Secretary in the Peking Field Force, and was well-nigh seventy. His wife had died at an early period, and as she left no issue, he adopted a son and a daughter from a foundling asylum.

But who would have thought it, the boy also died, and there only remained the girl, known as Ko Ch'ing in her infancy, who when she grew up,

page 135

was beautiful in face and graceful in manners, and who by reason of

some relationship with the Chia family, was consequently united by the ties of marriage (to one of the household).

Ch'in Pang-yeh was in his fiftieth year when he at length got this son. As his tutor had the previous year left to go south, he remained at home keeping up his former lessons; and (his father) had been just thinking of talking over the matter with his relatives of the Chia family, and sending his son to the private school, when, as luck would have it, this opportunity of meeting Pao Yü presented itself.

Knowing besides that the family school was under the direction of the venerable scholar Chia Tai-ju, and hoping that by joining his class, (his son) might advance in knowledge and by these means reap reputation, he was therefore intensely gratified. The only drawbacks were that his official emoluments were scanty, and that both the eyes of everyone in the other establishment were set upon riches and honours, so that he could not contribute anything short of the amount (given by others); but his son's welfare throughout life was a serious consideration, and he, needless to say, had to scrape together from the East and to collect from the West; and making a parcel, with all deference, of twenty-four taels for an introduction present, he came along with Ch'in Chung to Tai-ju's house to pay their respects. But he had to wait subsequently until Pao Yü could fix on an auspicious date on which they could together enter the school.

As for what happened after they came to school, the next chapter will divulge.

CHAPTER IX.

*Chia Cheng gives good advice to his wayward son.
Li Kuei receives a reprimand.
Chia Jui and Li Kuei rebuke the obstinate youths!
Ming Yen causes trouble in the school-room.*

But to return to our story. Mr. Ch'in, the father, and Ch'in Chung, his son, only waited until the receipt, by the hands of a servant, of a letter from the Chia family about the date on which they were to go to school. Indeed, Pao Yü was only too impatient that he and Ch'in Chung should come together, and, without loss of time, he fixed upon two days later as the day upon which they were definitely to begin their studies, and he despatched a servant with a letter to this effect.

On the day appointed, as soon as it was daylight, Pao Yü turned out of bed. Hsi Jen had already by that time got books, pencils and all writing

page 136

necessaries in perfect readiness, and was sitting on the edge of the bed in a moping mood; but as soon as she saw Pao Yü approach, she was constrained to wait upon him in his toilette and ablutions.

Pao Yü, noticing how despondent she was, made it a point to address her. "My dear sister," he said, "how is it you aren't again yourself? Is it likely that you bear me a grudge for being about to go to school, because when I leave you, you'll all feel dull?"

Hsi Jen smiled. "What an ideal" she replied. "Study is a most excellent thing, and without it a whole lifetime is a mere waste, and what good comes in the long run? There's only one thing, which is simply that when engaged in reading your books, you should set your mind on your books; and that you should think of home when not engaged in reading. Whatever you do, don't romp together with them, for were you to meet our master, your father, it will be no joke! Although it's asserted that a scholar must strain every nerve to excel, yet it's preferable that the tasks should be somewhat fewer, as, in the first place, when one eats too much, one cannot digest it; and, in the second place, good health must also be carefully attended to. This is my view on the subject, and you

should at all times consider it in practice.”

While Hsi Jen gave utterance to a sentence, Pao Yü nodded his head in sign of approval of that sentence. Hsi Jen then went on to speak. “I've also packed up,” she continued, “your long pelisse, and handed it to the pages to take it over; so mind, when it's cold in the school-room, please remember to put on this extra clothing, for it's not like home, where you have people to look after you. The foot-stove and hand-stove, I've also sent over; and urge that pack of lazy-bones to attend to their work, for if you say nothing, they will be so engrossed in their frolics, that they'll be loth to move, and let you, all for nothing, take a chill and ruin your constitution.”

“Compose your mind,” replied Pao Yü; “when I go out, I know well enough how to attend to everything my own self. But you people shouldn't remain in this room, and mope yourselves to death; and it would be well if you would often go over to cousin Lin's for a romp.”

While saying this, he had completed his toilette, and Hsi Jen pressed him to go and wish good morning to dowager lady Chia, Chia Cheng, madame Wang, and the other members of the family.

Pao Yü, after having gone on to give a few orders to Ch'ing Wen and She Yüh, at length left his apartments, and coming over, paid his obeisance to dowager lady Chia. Her venerable Ladyship had likewise, as a matter of course, a few recommendations to make to him, which ended, he next went and greeted madame Wang; and leaving again her quarters, he came into the library to wish Chia Cheng good morning.

page 137

As it happened, Chia Cheng had on this day returned home at an early hour, and was, at this moment, in the library, engaged in a friendly chat with a few gentlemen, who were family companions. Suddenly perceiving Pao Yü come in to pay his respects, and report that he was about to go to school, Chia Cheng gave a sardonic smile. “If you do again,” he remarked, “make allusions to the words going to school, you'll make even me blush to death with shame! My advice to you is that you should after all go your own way and play; that's the best thing for you; and mind you don't pollute with dirt this floor by standing here, and soil this door of mine

by leaning against it!"

The family companions stood up and smilingly expostulated.

"Venerable Sir," they pleaded, "why need you be so down upon him? Our worthy brother is this day going to school, and may in two or three years be able to display his abilities and establish his reputation. He will, beyond doubt, not behave like a child, as he did in years gone past. But as the time for breakfast is also drawing nigh, you should, worthy brother, go at once."

When these words had been spoken, two among them, who were advanced in years, readily took Pao Yü by the hand, and led him out of the library.

"Who are in attendance upon Pao Yü?" Chia Cheng having inquired, he heard a suitable reply, "We, Sir!" given from outside; and three or four sturdy fellows entered at an early period and fell on one knee, and bowed and paid their obeisance.

When Chia Cheng came to scrutinise who they were, and he recognised Li Kuei, the son of Pao Yü's nurse, he addressed himself to him. "You people," he said, "remain waiting upon him the whole day long at school, but what books has he after all read? Books indeed! why, he has read and filled his brains with a lot of trashy words and nonsensical phrases, and learnt some ingenious way of waywardness. Wait till I have a little leisure, and I'll set to work, first and foremost, and flay your skin off, and then settle accounts with that good-for-nothing!"

This threat so terrified Li Kuei that he hastily fell on both his knees, pulled off his hat, knocked his head on the ground, and gave vent to repeated assenting utterances: "Oh, quite so, Sir! Our elder brother Mr. Pao has," he continued, "already read up to the third book of the Book of Odes, up to where there's something or other like: 'Yiu, Yiu, the deer bleat; the lotus leaves and duckweed.' Your servant wouldn't presume to tell a lie!" As he said this, the whole company burst out into a boisterous fit of laughter, and Chia Cheng himself could not also contain his countenance

and had to laugh. "Were he even," he observed, "to read thirty books of the Book of Odes, it would be as much an imposition upon people and no more, as (when the thief) who, in order to steal the bell, stops up his own ears! You go and present my compliments to the gentleman in the schoolroom, and tell him, from my part, that the whole lot of Odes and old writings are of no use, as they are subjects for empty show; and that he should, above all things, take the Four Books, and explain them to him, from first to last, and make him know them all thoroughly by heart,—that this is the most important thing!"

Li Kuei signified his obedience with all promptitude, and perceiving that Chia Cheng had nothing more to say, he retired out of the room. During this while, Pao Yü had been standing all alone outside in the court, waiting quietly with suppressed voice, and when they came out he at once walked away in their company.

Li Kuei and his companions observed as they shook their clothes, "Did you, worthy brother, hear what he said that he would first of all flay our skins off! People's servants acquire some respectability from the master whom they serve, but we poor fellows fruitlessly wait upon you, and are beaten and blown up in the bargain. It would be well if we were, from henceforward, to be treated with a certain amount of regard."

Pao Yü smiled, "Dear Brother," he added, "don't feel aggrieved; I'll invite you to come round to-morrow!"

"My young ancestor," replied Li Kuei, "who presumes to look forward to an invitation? all I entreat you is to listen to one or two words I have to say, that's all."

As they talked they came over once more to dowager lady Chia's on this side.

Ch'in Chung had already arrived, and the old lady was first having a chat with him. Forthwith the two of them exchanged salutations, and took leave of her ladyship; but Pao Yü, suddenly remembering that he had not said good-bye to Tai-yü, promptly betook himself again to Tai-yü's quarters to do so.

Tai-yü was, at this time, below the window, facing the mirror, and

adjusting her toilette. Upon hearing Pao Yü mention that he was on his way to school, she smiled and remarked, "That's right! you're now going to school and you'll be sure to reach the lunar palace and pluck the olea fragrans; but I can't go along with you."

"My dear cousin," rejoined Pao Yü, "wait for me to come out from school, before you have your evening meal; wait also until I come to prepare the cosmetic of rouge."

page 139

After a protracted chat, he at length tore himself away and took his departure.

"How is it," interposed Tai-yü, as she once again called out to him and stopped him, "that you don't go and bid farewell to your cousin Pao Ch'ai?"

Pao Yü smiled, and saying not a word by way of reply he straightway walked to school, accompanied by Ch'in Chung.

This public school, which it must be noticed was also not far from his quarters, had been originally instituted by the founder of the establishment, with the idea that should there be among the young fellows of his clan any who had not the means to engage a tutor, they should readily be able to enter this class for the prosecution of their studies; that all those of the family who held official position should all give (the institution) pecuniary assistance, with a view to meet the expenses necessary for allowances to the students; and that they were to select men advanced in years and possessed of virtue to act as tutors of the family school.

The two of them, Ch'in Chung and Pao Yü, had now entered the class, and after they and the whole number of their schoolmates had made each other's acquaintance, their studies were commenced. Ever since this time, these two were wont to come together, go together, get up together, and sit together, till they became more intimate and close. Besides, dowager lady Chia got very fond of Ch'in Chung, and would again and again keep him to stay with them for three and five days at a

time, treating him as if he were one of her own great-grandsons. Perceiving that in Ch'in Chung's home there was not much in the way of sufficiency, she also helped him in clothes and other necessaries; and scarcely had one or two months elapsed before Ch'in Chung got on friendly terms with every one in the Jung mansion.

Pao Yü was, however, a human being who could not practise contentment and observe propriety; and as his sole delight was to have every caprice gratified, he naturally developed a craving disposition. "We two, you and I, are," he was also wont secretly to tell Ch'in Chung, "of the same age, and fellow-scholars besides, so that there's no need in the future to pay any regard to our relationship of uncle and nephew; and we should treat each other as brothers or friends, that's all."

Ch'in Chung at first (explained that) he could not be so presumptuous; but as Pao Yü would not listen to any such thing, but went on to address him as brother and to call him by his style Ch'ing Ch'ing, he had likewise himself no help, but to begin calling him, at random, anything and anyhow.

There were, it is true, a large number of pupils in this school, but these consisted of the sons and younger brothers of that same clan, and of several sons and nephews of family connections. The proverb appositely describes

page 140

that there are nine species of dragons, and that each species differs; and it goes of course without saying that in a large number of human beings there were dragons and snakes, confusedly admixed, and that creatures of a low standing were included.

Ever since the arrival of the two young fellows, Ch'in Chung and Pao Yü, both of whom were in appearance as handsome as budding flowers, and they, on the one hand, saw how modest and genial Ch'in Chung was, how he blushed before he uttered a word, how he was timid and demure like a girl, and on the other hand, how that Pao Yü was naturally proficient in abasing and demeaning himself, how he was so affable and good-natured, considerate in his temperament and so full of conversation, and how that these two were, in consequence, on such

terms of intimate friendship, it was, in fact, no matter of surprise that the whole company of fellow-students began to foster envious thoughts, that they, behind their backs, passed on their account, this one one disparaging remark and that one another, and that they insinuated slanderous lies against them, which extended inside as well as outside the school-room.

Indeed, after Hsüeh P'an had come over to take up his quarters in madame Wang's suite of apartments, he shortly came to hear of the existence of a family school, and that this school was mainly attended by young fellows of tender years, and inordinate ideas were suddenly aroused in him. While he therefore fictitiously gave out that he went to school, [he was as irregular in his attendance as the fisherman] who catches fish for three days, and suns his nets for the next two; simply presenting his school-fee gift to Chia Tai-jui and making not the least progress in his studies; his sole dream being to knit a number of familiar friendships. Who would have thought it, there were in this school young pupils, who, in their greed to obtain money, clothes and eatables from Hsüeh P'an, allowed themselves to be cajoled by him, and played tricks upon; but on this topic, it is likewise superfluous to dilate at any length.

There were also two lovable young scholars, relatives of what branch of the family is not known, and whose real surnames and names have also not been ascertained, who, by reason of their good and winsome looks, were, by the pupils in the whole class, given two nicknames, to one that of "Hsiang Lin," "Fragrant Love," and to the other "Yü Ai," "Precious Affection." But although every one entertained feelings of secret admiration for them, and had the wish to take liberties with the young fellows, they lived, nevertheless, one and all, in such terror of Hsüeh P'an's imperious influence, that they had not the courage to come forward and interfere with them.

As soon as Ch'in Chung and Pao Yü had, at this time, come to school, and they had made the acquaintance of these two fellow-pupils, they too

could not help becoming attached to them and admiring them, but as they also came to know that they were great friends of Hsüeh P'an, they

did not, in consequence, venture to treat them lightly, or to be unseemly in their behaviour towards them. Hsiang Lin and Yü Ai both kept to themselves the same feelings, which they fostered for Ch'in Chung and Pao Yü, and to this reason is to be assigned the fact that though these four persons nurtured fond thoughts in their hearts there was however no visible sign of them. Day after day, each one of them would, during school hours, sit in four distinct places: but their eight eyes were secretly linked together; and, while indulging either in innuendoes or in double entendres, their hearts, in spite of the distance between them, reflected the whole number of their thoughts.

But though their outward attempts were devoted to evade the detection of other people's eyes, it happened again that, while least expected, several sly lads discovered the real state of affairs, with the result that the whole school stealthily frowned their eyebrows at them, winked their eyes at them, or coughed at them, or raised their voices at them; and these proceedings were, in fact, not restricted to one single day.

As luck would have it, on this day Tai-jui was, on account of business, compelled to go home; and having left them as a task no more than a heptameter line for an antithetical couplet, explaining that they should find a sentence to rhyme, and that the following day when he came back, he would set them their lessons, he went on to hand the affairs connected with the class to his elder grandson, Chia Jui, whom he asked to take charge.

Wonderful to say Hsüeh P'an had of late not frequented school very often, not even so much as to answer the roll, so that Ch'in Chung availed himself of his absence to ogle and smirk with Hsiang Lin; and these two pretending that they had to go out, came into the back court for a chat.

"Does your worthy father at home mind your having any friends?" Ch'in Chung was the first to ask. But this sentence was scarcely ended, when they heard a sound of coughing coming from behind. Both were taken much aback, and, speedily turning their heads round to see, they found that it was a fellow-scholar of theirs, called Chin Jung.

Hsiang Lin was naturally of somewhat hasty temperament, so that with shame and anger mutually impelling each other, he inquired of him, "What's there to cough at? Is it likely you wouldn't have us speak to each

other?"

"I don't mind your speaking," Chin Jung observed laughing; "but would you perchance not have me cough? I'll tell you what, however; if you have anything to say, why not utter it in intelligible language? Were you allowed to go on in this mysterious manner, what strange doings would

page 142

you be up to? But I have sure enough found you out, so what's the need of still prevaricating? But if you will, first of all, let me partake of a share in your little game, you and I can hold our tongue and utter not a word. If not, why the whole school will begin to turn the matter over."

At these words, Ch'in Chung and Hsiang Lin were so exasperated that their blood rushed up to their faces. "What have you found out?" they hastily asked.

"What I have now detected," replied Chin Jung smiling, "is the plain truth!" and saying this he went on to clap his hands and to call out with a loud voice as he laughed: "They have moulded some nice well-baked cakes, won't you fellows come and buy one to eat!" (These two have been up to larks, won't you come and have some fun!)

Both Ch'in Chung and Hsiang Lin felt resentful as well as fuming with rage, and with hurried step they went in, in search of Chia Jui, to whom they reported Chin Jung, explaining that Chin Jung had insulted them both, without any rhyme or reason.

The fact is that this Chia Jui was, in an extraordinary degree, a man with an eye to the main chance, and devoid of any sense of propriety. His wont was at school to take advantage of public matters to serve his private interest, and to bring pressure upon his pupils with the intent that they should regale him. While subsequently he also lent his countenance to Hsüeh P'an, scheming to get some money or eatables out of him, he left him entirely free to indulge in disorderly behaviour; and not only did he not go out of his way to hold him in check, but, on the contrary, he encouraged him, infamous though he was already, to become a bully, so as to curry favour with him.

But this Hsüeh P'an was, by nature, gifted with a fickle disposition; today, he would incline to the east, and to-morrow to the west, so that having recently obtained new friends, he put Hsiang Lin and Yü Ai aside. Chin Jung too was at one time an intimate friend of his, but ever since he had acquired the friendship of the two lads, Hsiang Lin and Yü Ai, he forthwith deposed Chin Jung. Of late, he had already come to look down upon even Hsiang Lin and Yü Ai, with the result that Chia Jui as well was deprived of those who could lend him support, or stand by him; but he bore Hsüeh P'an no grudge, for wearying with old friends, as soon as he found new ones, but felt angry that Hsiang Lin and Yü Ai had not put in a word on his behalf with Hsüeh P'an. Chia Jui, Chin Jung and in fact the whole crowd of them were, for this reason, just harbouring a jealous grudge against these two, so that when he saw Ch'in Chung and Hsiang Lin come on this occasion

page 143

and lodge a complaint against Chin Jung, Chia Jui readily felt displeasure creep into his heart; and, although he did not venture to call Ch'in Chung to account, he nevertheless made an example of Hsiang Lin. And instead (of taking his part), he called him a busybody and denounced him in much abusive language, with the result that Hsiang Lin did not, contrariwise, profit in any way, but brought displeasure upon himself. Even Ch'in Chung grumbled against the treatment, as each of them resumed their places.

Chin Jung became still more haughty, and wagging his head and smacking his lips, he gave vent to many more abusive epithets; but as it happened that they also reached Yü Ai's ears, the two of them, though seated apart, began an altercation in a loud tone of voice.

Chin Jung, with obstinate pertinacity, clung to his version. "Just a short while back," he said, "I actually came upon them, as they were indulging in demonstrations of intimate friendship in the back court. These two had resolved to be one in close friendship, and were eloquent in their protestations, mindful only in persistently talking their trash, but they were not aware of the presence of another person."

But his language had, contrary to all expectations, given, from the very first, umbrage to another person, and who do you, (gentle reader,) imagine this person to have been?

This person was, in fact, one whose name was Chia Se; a grandson likewise of a main branch of the Ning mansion. His parents had died at an early period, and he had, ever since his youth, lived with Chia Chen. He had at this time grown to be sixteen years of age, and was, as compared with Chia Jung, still more handsome and good looking. These two cousins were united by ties of the closest intimacy, and were always together, whether they went out or stayed at home.

The inmates of the Ning mansion were many in number, and their opinions of a mixed kind; and that whole bevy of servants, devoid as they were of all sense of right, solely excelled in the practice of inventing stories to backbite their masters; and this is how some mean person or other again, who it was is not known, insinuated slanderous and opprobrious reports (against Chia Se). Chia Chen had, presumably, also come to hear some unfavourable criticisms (on his account), and having, of course, to save himself from odium and suspicion, he had, at this juncture, after all, to apportion him separate quarters, and to bid Chia Se move outside the Ning mansion, where he went and established a home of his own to live in.

This Chia Se was handsome as far as external appearances went, and intelligent withal in his inward natural gifts, but, though he nominally came to school, it was simply however as a mere blind; for he treated, as he had

page 144

ever done, as legitimate occupations, such things as cock fighting, dog-racing and visiting places of easy virtue. And as, above, he had Chia Chen to spoil him by over-indulgence; and below, there was Chia Jung to stand by him, who of the clan could consequently presume to run counter to him?

Seeing that he was on the closest terms of friendship with Chia Jung, how could he reconcile himself to the harsh treatment which he now saw Ch'in Chung receive from some persons? Being now bent upon pushing

himself forward to revenge the injustice, he was, for the time, giving himself up to communing with his own heart. "Chin Jung, Chia Jui and the rest are," he pondered, "friends of uncle Hsüeh, but I too am on friendly terms with him, and he with me, and if I do come forward and they tell old Hsüeh, won't we impair the harmony which exists between us? and if I don't concern myself, such idle tales make, when spoken, every one feel uncomfortable; and why shouldn't I now devise some means to hold them in check, so as to stop their mouths, and prevent any loss of face!"

Having concluded this train of thought, he also pretended that he had to go out, and, walking as far as the back, he, with low voice, called to his side Ming Yen, the page attending upon Pao Yü in his studies, and in one way and another, he made use of several remarks to egg him on.

This Ming Yen was the smartest of Pao Yü's attendants, but he was also young in years and lacked experience, so that he lent a patient ear to what Chia Se had to say about the way Chin Jung had insulted Ch'in Chung. "Even your own master, Pao Yü," (Chia Se added), "is involved, and if you don't let him know a bit of your mind, he will next time be still more arrogant."

This Ming Yen was always ready, even with no valid excuse, to be insolent and overbearing to people, so that after hearing the news and being furthermore instigated by Chia Se, he speedily rushed into the schoolroom and cried out "Chin Jung;" nor did he address him as Mr. Chin, but merely shouted "What kind of fellow is this called Chin?"

Chia Se presently shuffled his feet, while he designedly adjusted his dress and looked at the rays of the sun. "It's time," he observed and walking forthwith, first up to Chia Jui, he explained to him that he had something to attend to and would like to get away a little early; and as Chia Jui did not venture to stop him, he had no alternative but to let him have his way and go.

During this while, Ming Yen had entered the room and promptly seizing Chin Jung in a grip: "What we do, whether proper or improper," he said, "doesn't concern you! It's enough anyway that we don't defile your father! A fine brat you are indeed, to come out and meddle with your Mr. Ming!"

These words plunged the scholars of the whole class in such consternation that they all wistfully and absently looked at him.

“Ming Yen,” hastily shouted out Chia Jui, “you're not to kick up a rumpus.”

Chin Jung was so full of anger that his face was quite yellow. “What a subversion of propriety! a slave and a menial to venture to behave in this manner! I'll just simply speak to your master,” he exclaimed as he readily pushed his hands off and was about to go and lay hold of Pao Yü to beat him.

Ch'in Chung was on the point of turning round to leave the room, when with a sound of 'whiff' which reached him from behind, he at once caught sight of a square inkslab come flying that way. Who had thrown it he could not say, but it struck the desk where Chia Lan and Chia Chün were seated.

These two, Chia Lan and Chia Chün, were also the great-grandsons of a close branch of the Jung mansion. This Chia Chün had been left fatherless at an early age, and his mother doated upon him in an unusual manner, and it was because at school he was on most friendly terms with Chia Lan, that these two sat together at the same desk. Who would have believed that Chia Chün would, in spite of being young in years, have had an extremely strong mind, and that he would be mostly up to mischief without the least fear of any one. He watched with listless eye from his seat Chin Jung's friends stealthily assist Chin Jung, as they flung an inkslab to strike Ming Yen, but when, as luck would have it, it hit the wrong mark, and fell just in front of him, smashing to atoms the porcelain inkslab and water bottle, and smudging his whole book with ink, Chia Chün was, of course, much incensed, and hastily gave way to abuse. “You consummate pugnacious criminal rowdies! why, doesn't this amount to all of you taking a share in the fight!” And as he uttered this abuse, he too forthwith seized an inkslab, which he was bent upon flinging.

Chia Lan was one who always tried to avoid trouble, so that he lost no time in pressing down the inkslab, while with all the words his mouth could express, he tried to pacify him, adding “My dear brother, it's no

business of yours and mine.”

Chia Chün could not repress his resentment; and perceiving that the inkslab was held down, he at once laid hold of a box containing books, which he flung in this direction; but being, after all, short of stature, and weak of strength, he was unable to send it anywhere near the mark; so that it dropped instead when it got as far as the desk belonging to Pao Yü and Ch'in Chung, while a dreadful crash became audible as it fell smash on the table. The books, papers, pencils, inkslabs, and other writing materials were all scattered over the whole table; and Pao Yü's cup besides containing tea was itself broken to pieces and the tea spilt.

page 146

Chia Chün forthwith jumped forward with the intent of assailing the person who had flung the inkslab at the very moment that Chin Jung took hold of a long bamboo pole which was near by; but as the space was limited, and the pupils many, how could he very well brandish a long stick? Ming Yen at an early period received a whack, and he shouted wildly, “Don't you fellows yet come to start a fight.”

Pao Yü had, besides, along with him several pages, one of whom was called Sao Hung, another Ch'u Yo, another Mo Yü. These three were naturally up to every mischief, so that with one voice, bawling boisterously, “You children of doubtful mothers, have you taken up arms?” Mo Yü promptly took up the bar of a door; while Sao Hung and Ch'u Yo both laid hold of horsewhips, and they all rushed forward like a hive of bees.

Chia Jui was driven to a state of exasperation; now he kept this one in check, and the next moment he reasoned with another, but who would listen to his words? They followed the bent of their inclinations and stirred up a serious disturbance.

Of the whole company of wayward young fellows, some there were who gave sly blows for fun's sake; others there were who were not gifted with much pluck and hid themselves on one side; there were those too who stood on the tables, clapping their hands and laughing immoderately, shouting out: “Go at it.”

The row was, at this stage, like water bubbling over in a cauldron, when several elderly servants, like Li Kuei and others, who stood outside, heard the uproar commence inside, and one and all came in with all haste and united in their efforts to pacify them. Upon asking "What's the matter?" the whole bevy of voices shouted out different versions; this one giving this account, while another again another story. But Li Kuei temporised by rebuking Ming Yen and others, four in all, and packing them off.

Ch'in Chung's head had, at an early period, come into contact with Chin Jung's pole and had had the skin grazed off. Pao Yü was in the act of rubbing it for him, with the overlap of his coat, but realising that the whole lot of them had been hushed up, he forthwith bade Li Kuei collect his books.

"Bring my horse round," he cried; "I'm going to tell Mr. Chia Tai-ju that we have been insulted. I won't venture to tell him anything else, but (tell him I will) that having come with all propriety and made our report to Mr. Chia Jui, Mr. Chia Jui instead (of helping us) threw the fault upon our shoulders. That while he heard people abuse us, he went so far as to instigate them to beat us; that Ming Yen seeing others insult us, did naturally take our part; but that they, instead (of desisting,) combined together and struck Ming Yen and even broke open Ch'in Chung's head. And that how is it possible for us to continue our studies in here?"

page 147

"My dear sir," replied Li Kuei coaxingly, "don't be so impatient! As Mr. Chia Tai-ju has had something to attend to and gone home, were you now, for a trifle like this, to go and disturb that aged gentleman, it will make us, indeed, appear as if we had no sense of propriety: my idea is that wherever a thing takes place, there should it be settled; and what's the need of going and troubling an old man like him. This is all you, Mr. Chia Jui, who is to blame; for in the absence of Mr. Chia Tai-ju, you, sir, are the head in this school, and every one looks to you to take action. Had all the pupils been at fault, those who deserved a beating should have been beaten, and those who merited punishment should have been punished! and why did you wait until things came to such a pass, and

didn't even exercise any check?"

"I blew them up," pleaded Chia Jui, "but not one of them would listen."

"I'll speak out, whether you, worthy sir, resent what I'm going to say or not," ventured Li Kuei. "It's you, sir, who all along have after all had considerable blame attached to your name; that's why all these young men wouldn't hear you! Now if this affair is bruited, until it reaches Mr. Chia Tai-ju's ears, why even you, sir, will not be able to escape condemnation; and why don't you at once make up your mind to disentangle the ravelled mess and dispel all trouble and have done with it!"

"Disentangle what?" inquired Pao Yü; "I shall certainly go and make my report."

"If Chin Jung stays here," interposed Ch'in Chung sobbing, "I mean to go back home."

"Why that?" asked Pao Yü. "Is it likely that others can safely come and that you and I can't? I feel it my bounden duty to tell every one everything at home so as to expel Chin Jung. This Chin Jung," he went on to inquire as he turned towards Lei Kuei, "is the relative or friend of what branch of the family?"

Li Kuei gave way to reflection and then said by way of reply: "There's no need whatever for you to raise this question; for were you to go and report the matter to the branch of the family to which he belongs, the harmony which should exist between cousins will be still more impaired." "He's the nephew of Mrs. Huang, of the Eastern mansion," interposed Ming Yen from outside the window. "What a determined and self-confident fellow he must be to even come and bully us; Mrs. Huang is his paternal aunt! That mother of yours is only good for tossing about like a millstone, for kneeling before our lady Lien, and begging for something to pawn. I've no eye for such a specimen of mistress."

"What!" speedily shouted Li Kuei, "does this son of a dog happen to know

of the existence of all these gnawing maggots?" (these disparaging facts).

Pao Yü gave a sardonic smile. "I was wondering whose relative he was," he remarked; "is he really sister-in-law Huang's nephew? well, I'll go at once and speak to her."

As he uttered these words, his purpose was to start there and then, and he called Ming Yen in, to come and pack up his books. Ming Yen walked in and put the books away. "Master," he went on to suggest, in an exultant manner, "there's no need for you to go yourself to see her; I'll go to her house and tell her that our old lady has something to ask of her. I can hire a carriage to bring her over, and then, in the presence of her venerable ladyship, she can be spoken to; and won't this way save a lot of trouble?"

"Do you want to die?" speedily shouted Li Kuei; "mind, when you go back, whether right or wrong, I'll first give you a good bumping, and then go and report you to our master and mistress, and just tell them that it's you, and only you, who instigated Mr. Pao Yü! I've succeeded, after ever so much trouble, in coaxing them, and mending matters to a certain extent, and now you come again to continue a new plan. It's you who stirred up this row in the school-room; and not to speak of your finding, as would have been the proper course, some way of suppressing it, there you are instead still jumping into the fire."

Ming Yen, at this juncture, could not muster the courage to utter a sound. By this time Chia Jui had also apprehended that if the row came to be beyond clearing up, he himself would likewise not be clear of blame, so that circumstances compelled him to pocket his grievances and to come and entreat Ch'in Chung as well as to make apologies to Pao Yü. These two young fellows would not at first listen to his advances, but Pao Yü at length explained that he would not go and report the occurrence, provided only Chin Jung admitted his being in the wrong. Chin Jung refused, at the outset, to agree to this, but he ultimately could find no way out of it, as Chia Jui himself urged him to make some temporising apology.

Li Kuei and the others felt compelled to tender Chin Jung some good

advice: "It's you," they said, "who have given rise to the disturbance, and if you don't act in this manner, how will the matter ever be brought to an end?" so that Chin Jung found it difficult to persist in his obstinacy, and was constrained to make a bow to Ch'in Chung.

Pao Yü was, however, not yet satisfied, but would insist upon his knocking his head on the ground, and Chia Jui, whose sole aim was to

page 149

temporarily smother the affair, quietly again urged Chin Jung, adding that the proverb has it: "That if you keep down the anger of a minute, you will for a whole life-time feel no remorse."

Whether Chin Jung complied or not to his advice is not known, but the following chapter will explain.

CHAPTER X.

Widow Chin, prompted by a desire to reap advantage, puts up temporarily with an insult.

Dr. Chang in discussing Mrs. Chin's illness minutely exhausts its origin.

We will now resume our story. As the persons against Chin Jung were so many and their pressure so great, and as, what was more, Chia Jui urged him to make amends, he had to knock his head on the ground before Ch'in Chung. Pao Yü then gave up his clamorous remonstrances and the whole crowd dispersed from school.

Chin Jung himself returned home all alone, but the more he pondered on the occurrence, the more incensed he felt. "Ch'in Chung," he argued, "is simply Chia Jung's young brother-in-law, and is no son or grandson of the Chia family, and he too joins the class and prosecutes his studies on no other footing than that of mine; but it's because he relies upon Pao Yü's friendship for him that he has no eye for any one. This being the case, he should be somewhat proper in his behaviour, and there would be then not a word to say about it! He has besides all along been very mystical with Pao Yü, imagining that we are all blind, and have no eyes to see what's up! Here he goes again to-day and mixes with people in illicit intrigues; and it's all because they happened to obtrude themselves before my very eyes that this rumpus has broken out; but of what need I fear?"

His mother, nee Hu, hearing him mutter; "Why meddle again," she explained, "in things that don't concern you? I had endless trouble in getting to speak to your paternal aunt; and your aunt had, on the other hand, a thousand and one ways and means to devise, before she could appeal to lady Secunda, of the Western mansion; and then only it was that you got this place to study in. Had we not others to depend upon for your studies, would we have in our house the means sufficient to engage a teacher? Besides, in other people's school, tea and eatables are all ready and found; and these two years that you've been there for your lessons, we've likewise effected at home a great saving in what would otherwise have been necessary for your eating and use. Something has been, it's true, economised; but

you have further a liking for spick and span clothes. Besides, it's only through your being there to study, that you've come to know Mr. Hsüeh! that Mr. Hsüeh, who has even in one year given us so much pecuniary assistance as seventy and eighty taels! And now you would go and raise a row in this school-room! why, if we were bent upon finding such another place, I tell you plainly, and once for all, that we would find it more difficult than if we tried to scale the heavens! Now do quietly play for a while, and then go to sleep, and you'll be ever so much better for it then."

Chin Jung thereupon stifled his anger and held his tongue; and, after a short while, he in fact went to sleep of his own accord.

The next day he again went to school, and no further comment need be made about it; but we will go on to explain that a young lady related to her had at one time been given in marriage to a descendant (of the eldest branch) of the Chia family, (whose names were written) with the jade radical, Chia Huang by name; but how could the whole number of members of the clan equal in affluence and power the two mansions of Ning and Jung? This fact goes, as a matter of course, without saying. The Chia Huang couple enjoyed some small income; but they also went, on frequent occasions, to the mansions of Ning and Jung to pay their respects; and they knew likewise so well how to adulate lady Feng and Mrs. Yu, that lady Feng and Mrs. Yu would often grant them that assistance and support which afforded them the means of meeting their daily expenses.

It just occurred on this occasion that the weather was clear and fine, and that there happened, on the other hand, to be nothing to attend to at home, so forthwith taking along with her a matron, (Mrs. Chia Huang) got into a carriage and came over to see widow Chin and her nephew. While engaged in a chat, Chin Jung's mother accidentally broached the subject of the affair, which had transpired in the school-room of the Chia mansion on the previous day, and she gave, for the benefit of her young sister-in-law, a detailed account of the whole occurrence from beginning to end.

This Mrs. Huang would not have had her temper ruffled had she not

come to hear what had happened; but having heard about it, anger sprung from the very depths of her heart. "This fellow, Ch'in Chung," she exclaimed, "is a relative of the Chia family, but is it likely that Jung Erh isn't, in like manner, a relative of the Chia family; and when relatives are many, there's no need to put on airs! Besides, does his conduct consist, for the most part, of anything that would make one get any face? In fact, Pao Yü himself shouldn't do injury to himself by condescending to look at him. But, as things have come to this pass, give me time and I'll go to the

page 151

Eastern mansion and see our lady Chen and then have a chat with Ch'in Chung's sister, and ask her to decide who's right and who's wrong!"

Chin Jung's mother upon hearing these words was terribly distressed. "It's all through my hasty tongue," she observed with vehemence, "that I've told you all, sister-in-law: but please, sister, give up at once the idea of going over to say anything about it! Don't trouble yourself as to who is in the right, and who is in the wrong; for were any unpleasantness to come out of it, how could we here stand on our legs? and were we not to stand on our legs, not only would we never be able to engage a tutor, but the result will be, on the contrary, that for his own person will be superadded many an expense for eatables and necessaries."

"What do I care about how many?" replied Mrs. Huang; "wait till I've spoken about it, and we'll see what will be the result." Nor would she accede to her sister-in-law's entreaties, but bidding, at the same time, the matron look after the carriage, she got into it, and came over to the Ning Mansion.

On her arrival at the Ning Mansion, she entered by the eastern side gate, and dismounting from the carriage, she went in to call on Mrs. Yu, the spouse of Chia Chen, with whom she had not the courage to put on any high airs; but gently and quietly she made inquiries after her health, and after passing some irrelevant remarks, she ascertained: "How is it I don't see lady Jung to-day?"

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Yu, "what's the matter with her these last few days; but she hasn't been herself for two months and more; and the

doctor who was asked to see her declares that it is nothing connected with any happy event. A couple of days back, she felt, as soon as the afternoon came, both to move, and both even to utter a word; while the brightness of her eyes was all dimmed; and I told her, 'You needn't stick to etiquette, for there's no use for you to come in the forenoon and evening, as required by conventionalities; but what you must do is, to look after your own health. Should any relative come over, there's also myself to receive them; and should any of the senior generation think your absence strange, I'll explain things for you, if you'll let me.'

"I also advised brother Jung on the subject: 'You shouldn't,' I said, 'allow any one to trouble her; nor let her be put out of temper, but let her quietly attend to her health, and she'll get all right. Should she fancy anything to eat, just come over here and fetch it; for, in the event of anything happening to her, were you to try and find another such a wife to wed, with such a face and such a disposition, why, I fear, were you even to seek with a

page 152

lantern in hand, there would really be no place where you could discover her. And with such a temperament and deportment as hers, which of our relatives and which of our elders don't love her?' That's why my heart has been very distressed these two days! As luck would have it early this morning her brother turned up to see her, but who would have fancied him to be such a child, and so ignorant of what is proper and not proper to do? He saw well enough that his sister was not well; and what's more all these matters shouldn't have been recounted to her; for even supposing he had received the gravest offences imaginable, it behoved him anyhow not to have broached the subject to her! Yesterday, one would scarcely believe it, a fight occurred in the school-room, and some pupil or other who attends that class, somehow insulted him; besides, in this business, there were a good many indecent and improper utterances, but all these he went and told his sister! Now, sister-in-law, you are well aware that though (our son Jung's) wife talks and laughs when she sees people, that she is nevertheless imaginative and withal too sensitive, so that no matter what she hears, she's for the most part bound to brood over it for three days and five nights, before she loses sight of it, and it's from this excessive sensitiveness that this complaint of

hers arises. Today, when she heard that some one had insulted her brother, she felt both vexed and angry; vexed that those fox-like, cur-like friends of his had moved right and wrong, and intrigued with this one and deluded that one; angry that her brother had, by not learning anything profitable, and not having his mind set upon study, been the means of bringing about a row at school; and on account of this affair, she was so upset that she did not even have her early meal. I went over a short while back and consoled her for a time, and likewise gave her brother a few words of advice; and after having packed off that brother of hers to the mansion on the other side, in search of Pao Yü, and having stood by and seen her have half a bowl of birds' nests soup, I at length came over. Now, sister-in-law, tell me, is my heart sore or not? Besides, as there's nowadays no good doctor, the mere thought of her complaint makes my heart feel as if it were actually pricked with needles! But do you and yours, perchance, know of any good practitioner?"

Mrs. Chin had, while listening to these words, been, at an early period, so filled with concern that she cast away to distant lands the reckless rage she had been in recently while at her sister-in-law's house, when she had determined to go and discuss matters over with Mrs. Ch'in. Upon hearing Mrs. Yu inquire of her about a good doctor, she lost no time in saying by way of reply: "Neither have we heard of any one speak of a good doctor; but from the account I've just heard of Mrs. Ch'in's illness, it may still, there's no saying, be some felicitous ailment; so, sister-in-law, don't let any

page 153

one treat her recklessly, for were she to be treated for the wrong thing, the result may be dreadful!"

"Quite so!" replied Mrs. Yu.

But while they were talking, Chia Chen came in from out of doors, and upon catching sight of Mrs. Chin; "Isn't this Mrs. Huang?" he inquired of Mrs. Yu; whereupon Mrs. Chin came forward and paid her respects to Chia Chen.

"Invite this lady to have her repast here before she goes," observed Chia

Chen to Mrs. Yu; and as he uttered these words he forthwith walked into the room on the off side.

The object of Mrs. Chin's present visit had originally been to talk to Mrs. Ch'in about the insult which her brother had received from the hands of Ch'in Chung, but when she heard that Mrs. Ch'in was ill, she did not have the courage to even so much as make mention of the object of her errand. Besides, as Chia Chen and Mrs. Yu had given her a most cordial reception, her resentment was transformed into pleasure, so that after a while spent in a further chat about one thing and another, she at length returned to her home.

It was only after the departure of Mrs. Chin that Chia Chen came over and took a seat. "What did she have to say for herself during this visit to-day?" he asked of Mrs. Yu.

"She said nothing much," replied Mrs. Yu. "When she first entered the room, her face bore somewhat of an angry look, but, after a lengthy chat and as soon as mention of our son's wife's illness was made, this angered look after all gradually abated. You also asked me to keep her for the repast, but, having heard that our son's wife was so ill she could not very well stay, so that all she did was to sit down, and after making a few more irrelevant remarks, she took her departure. But she had no request to make. To return however now to the illness of Jung's wife, it's urgent that you should find somewhere a good doctor to diagnose it for her; and whatever you do, you should lose no time. The whole body of doctors who at present go in and out of our household, are they worth having? Each one of them listens to what the patient has to say of the ailment, and then, adding a string of flowery sentences, out he comes with a long rigmarole; but they are exceedingly diligent in paying us visits; and in one day, three or four of them are here at least four and five times in rotation! They come and feel her pulse, they hold consultation together, and write their prescriptions, but, though she has taken their medicines, she has seen no improvement;

page 154

on the contrary, she's compelled to change her clothes three and five times each day, and to sit up to see the doctor; a thing which, in fact,

does the patient no good.”

“This child too is somewhat simple,” observed Chia Chen; “for what need has she to be taking off her clothes, and changing them for others? And were she again to catch a chill, she would add something more to her illness; and won't it be dreadful! The clothes may be no matter how fine, but what is their worth, after all? The health of our child is what is important to look to! and were she even to wear out a suit of new clothes a-day, what would that too amount to? I was about to tell you that a short while back, Feng Tzu-ying came to see me, and, perceiving that I had somewhat of a worried look, he asked me what was up; and I told him that our son's wife was not well at all, that as we couldn't get any good doctor, we couldn't determine with any certainty, whether she was in an interesting condition, or whether she was suffering from some disease; that as we could neither tell whether there was any danger or not, my heart was, for this reason, really very much distressed. Feng Tzu-ying then explained that he knew a young doctor who had made a study of his profession, Chang by surname, and Yu-shih by name, whose learning was profound to a degree; who was besides most proficient in the principles of medicine, and had the knack of discriminating whether a patient would live or die; that this year he had come to the capital to purchase an official rank for his son, and that he was now living with him in his house. In view of these circumstances, not knowing but that if, perchance, the case of our daughter-in-law were placed in his hands, he couldn't avert the danger, I readily despatched a servant, with a card of mine, to invite him to come; but the hour to-day being rather late, he probably won't be round, but I believe he's sure to be here to-morrow. Besides, Feng-Tzu-ying was also on his return home, to personally entreat him on my behalf, so that he's bound, when he has asked him, to come and see her. Let's therefore wait till Dr. Chang has been here and seen her, when we can talk matters over!”

Mrs. Yu was very much cheered when she heard what was said. “The day after to-morrow,” she felt obliged to add, “is again our senior's, Mr. Chia Ching's birthday, and how are we to celebrate it after all?”

“I've just been over to our Senior's and paid my respects,” replied Chia Chen, “and further invited the old gentleman to come home, and receive the congratulations of the whole family.

"I'm accustomed,' our Senior explained, 'to peace and quiet, and have no wish to go over to that worldly place of yours; for you people are certain to have published that it's my birthday, and to entertain the design to ask me to go round to receive the bows of the

page 155

whole lot of you. But won't it be better if you were to give the "Record of Meritorious Acts," which I annotated some time ago, to some one to copy out clean for me, and have it printed? Compared with asking me to come, and uselessly receive the obeisances of you all, this will be yea even a hundred times more profitable! In the event of the whole family wishing to pay me a visit on any of the two days, to-morrow or the day after to-morrow, if you were to stay at home and entertain them in proper style, that will be all that is wanted; nor will there be any need to send me anything! Even you needn't come two days from this; and should you not feel contented at heart, well, you had better bow your head before me to-day before you go. But if you do come again the day after to-morrow, with a lot of people to disturb me, I shall certainly be angry with you.' After what he said, I will not venture to go and see him two days hence; but you had better send for Lai Sheng, and bid him get ready a banquet to continue for a couple of days."

Mrs. Yu, having asked Chia Jung to come round, told him to direct Lai Sheng to make the usual necessary preparations for a banquet to last for a couple of days, with due regard to a profuse and sumptuous style.

"You go by-and-by," (she advised him), "in person to the Western Mansion and invite dowager lady Chia, mesdames Hsing and Wang, and your sister-in-law Secunda lady Lien to come over for a stroll. Your father has also heard of a good doctor, and having already sent some one to ask him round, I think that by to-morrow he's sure to come; and you had better tell him, in a minute manner, the serious symptoms of her ailment during these few days."

Chia Jung having signified his obedience to each of her recommendations, and taken his leave, was just in time to meet the youth coming back from Feng Tzu-ying's house, whither he had gone a short

while back to invite the doctor round.

“Your slave,” he consequently reported, “has just been with a card of master's to Mr. Feng's house and asked the doctor to come. 'The gentleman here,' replied the doctor, 'has just told me about it; but to-day, I've had to call on people the whole day, and I've only this moment come home; and I feel now my strength (so worn out), that I couldn't really stand any exertion. In fact were I even to get as far as the mansion, I shouldn't be in a fit state to diagnose the pulses! I must therefore have a night's rest, but, to-morrow for certain, I shall come to the mansion. My medical knowledge,' he went on to observe, 'is very shallow, and I don't deserve the honour of such eminent recommendation; but as Mr. Feng has already thus spoken of me in your mansion, I can't but present myself. It will be all right if in anticipation you deliver

page 156

this message for me to your honourable master; but as for your worthy master's card, I cannot really presume to keep it.' It was again at his instance that I've brought it back; but, Sir, please mention this result for me (to master).”

Chia Jung turned back again, and entering the house delivered the message to Chia Chen and Mrs. Yu; whereupon he walked out, and, calling Lai Sheng before him, he transmitted to him the orders to prepare the banquet for a couple of days.

After Lai Sheng had listened to the directions, he went off, of course, to get ready the customary preparations; but upon these we shall not dilate, but confine ourselves to the next day.

At noon, a servant on duty at the gate announced that the Doctor Chang, who had been sent for, had come, and Chia Chen conducted him along the Court into the large reception Hall, where they sat down; and after they had partaken of tea, he broached the subject.

“Yesterday,” he explained, “the estimable Mr. Feng did me the honour to speak to me of your character and proficiency, venerable doctor, as well as of your thorough knowledge of medicine, and I, your mean brother,

was filled with an immeasurable sense of admiration!”

“Your Junior,” remonstrated Dr. Chang, “is a coarse, despicable and mean scholar and my knowledge is shallow and vile! but as worthy Mr. Feng did me the honour yesterday of telling me that your family, sir, had condescended to look upon me, a low scholar, and to favour me too with an invitation, could I presume not to obey your commands? But as I cannot boast of the least particle of real learning, I feel overburdened with shame!”

“Why need you be so modest?” observed Chia Chen; “Doctor, do please walk in at once to see our son's wife, for I look up, with full reliance, to your lofty intelligence to dispel my solicitude!”

Chia Jung forthwith walked in with him. When they reached the inner apartment, and he caught sight of Mrs. Ch'in, he turned round and asked Chia Jung, “This is your honourable spouse, isn't it?”

“Yes, it is,” assented Chia Jung; “but please, Doctor, take a seat, and let me tell you the symptoms of my humble wife's ailment, before her pulse be felt. Will this do?”

“My mean idea is,” remarked the Doctor, “that it would, after all, be better that I should begin by feeling her pulse, before I ask you to inform me what the source of the ailment is. This is the first visit I pay to your honourable mansion; besides, I possess no knowledge of anything; but as our worthy Mr. Feng would insist upon my coming over to see you, I had in consequence no alternative but to come. After I have now made a diagnosis,

page 157

you can judge whether what I say is right or not, before you explain to me the phases of the complaint during the last few days, and we can deliberate together upon some prescription; as to the suitability or unsuitability of which your honourable father will then have to decide, and what is necessary will have been done.”

“Doctor,” rejoined Chia Jung, “you are indeed eminently clear sighted; all I regret at present is that we have met so late! But please, Doctor,

diagnose the state of the pulse, so as to find out whether there be hope of a cure or not; if a cure can be effected, it will be the means of allaying the solicitude of my father and mother.”

The married women attached to that menage forthwith presented a pillow; and as it was being put down for Mrs. Ch'in to rest her arm on, they raised the lower part of her sleeve so as to leave her wrist exposed. The Doctor thereupon put out his hand and pressed it on the pulse of the right hand. Regulating his breath (to the pulsation) so as to be able to count the beatings, he with due care and minuteness felt the action for a considerable time, when, substituting the left hand, he again went through the same operation.

“Let us go and sit outside,” he suggested, after he had concluded feeling her pulses. Chia Jung readily adjourned, in company with the Doctor, to the outer apartment, where they seated themselves on the stove-couch. A matron having served tea; “Please take a cup of tea, doctor,” Chia Jung observed. When tea was over, “Judging,” he inquired, “Doctor, from the present action of the pulses, is there any remedy or not?”

“The action of the pulse, under the forefinger, on the left hand of your honorable spouse,” proceeded the Doctor, “is deep and agitated; the left hand pulse, under the second finger, is deep and faint. The pulse, under the forefinger, of the right hand, is gentle and lacks vitality. The right hand pulse, under my second finger, is superficial, and has lost all energy. The deep and agitated beating of the forepulse of the left hand arises from the febrile state, due to the weak action of the heart. The deep and delicate condition of the second part of the pulse of the left wrist, emanates from the sluggishness of the liver, and the scarcity of the blood in that organ. The action of the forefinger pulse, of the right wrist, is faint and lacks strength, as the breathing of the lungs is too weak. The second finger pulse of the right wrist is superficial and devoid of vigour, as the spleen must be affected injuriously by the liver. The weak action of the heart, and its febrile state, should be the natural causes which conduce to the present irregularity in the catamenia, and insomnia at night; the poverty of blood in the liver, and the sluggish condition of that organ must necessarily produce pain in the ribs; while the overdue of the catamenia, the cardiac fever, and debility of

the respiration of the lungs, should occasion frequent giddiness in the head, and swimming of the eyes, the certain recurrence of perspiration between the periods of 3 to 5 and 5 to 7, and the sensation of being seated on board ship. The obstruction of the spleen by the liver should naturally create distaste for liquid or food, debility of the vital energies and prostration of the four limbs. From my diagnosis of these pulses, there should exist these various symptoms, before (the pulses and the symptoms can be said) to harmonise. But should perchance (any doctor maintain) that this state of the pulses imports a felicitous event, your servant will not presume to give an ear to such an opinion!"

A matron, who was attached as a personal attendant (to Mrs. Ch'in,) and who happened to be standing by interposed: "How could it be otherwise?" she ventured. "In real truth, Doctor, you speak like a supernatural being, and there's verily no need for us to say anything! We have now, ready at hand, in our household, a good number of medical gentlemen, who are in attendance upon her, but none of these are proficient enough to speak in this positive manner. Some there are who say that it's a genital complaint; others maintain that it's an organic disease. This doctor explains that there is no danger: while another, again, holds that there's fear of a crisis either before or after the winter solstice; but there is, in one word, nothing certain said by them. May it please you, sir, now to favour us with your clear directions."

"This complaint of your lady's," observed the Doctor, "has certainly been neglected by the whole number of doctors; for had a treatment with certain medicines been initiated at the time of the first occurrence of her habitual sickness, I cannot but opine that, by this time, a perfect cure would have been effected. But seeing that the organic complaint has now been, through neglect, allowed to reach this phase, this calamity was, in truth, inevitable. My ideas are that this illness stands, as yet, a certain chance of recovery, (three chances out of ten); but we will see how she gets on, after she has had these medicines of mine. Should they prove productive of sleep at night, then there will be added furthermore two more chances in the grip of our hands. From my diagnosis, your lady is a person, gifted with a preeminently excellent, and intelligent disposition; but an excessive degree of intelligence is the cause of frequent

contrarities; and frequent contrarities give origin to an excessive amount of anxious cares. This illness arises from the injury done, by worrying and fretting, to the spleen, and from the inordinate vigour of the liver; hence it is that the relief cannot come at the proper time and season. Has not your lady, may I ask, heretofore at the period of the catamenia, suffered, if indeed not from anaemia, then necessarily from plethora? Am I right in assuming this or not?"

page 159

"To be sure she did," replied the matron; "but she has never been subject to anaemia, but to a plethora, varying from either two to three days, and extending, with much irregularity, to even ten days."

"Quite so!" observed the Doctor, after hearing what she had to say, "and this is the source of this organic illness! Had it in past days been treated with such medicine as could strengthen the heart, and improve the respiration, would it have reached this stage? This has now overtly made itself manifest in an ailment originating from the paucity of water and the vigour of fire; but let me make use of some medicines, and we'll see how she gets on!"

There and then he set to work and wrote a prescription, which he handed to Chia Jung, the purpose of which was: Decoction for the improvement of respiration, the betterment of the blood, and the restoration of the spleen. Ginseng, *Atractylodes Lancea*; Yunnan root; Prepared Ti root; *Aralia edulis*; Peony roots; *Levisticum* from Sze Ch'uan; *Sophora tormentosa*; *Cyperus rotundus*, prepared with rice; Gentian, soaked in vinegar; Huai Shan Yao root; Real "O" glue; *Carydalis Ambigua*; and Dried liquorice. Seven Fukien lotus seeds, (the cores of which should be extracted,) and two large zizyphi to be used as a preparative.

"What exalted intelligence!" Chia Jung, after perusing it, exclaimed. "But I would also ask you, Doctor, to be good enough to tell me whether this illness will, in the long run, endanger her life or not?"

The Doctor smiled. "You, sir, who are endowed with most eminent intelligence (are certain to know) that when a human illness has reached this phase, it is not a derangement of a day or of a single night; but after

these medicines have been taken, we shall also have to watch the effect of the treatment! My humble opinion is that, as far as the winter of this year goes, there is no fear; in fact, after the spring equinox, I entertain hopes of a complete cure.”

Chia Jung was likewise a person with all his wits about him, so that he did not press any further minute questions.

Chia Jung forthwith escorted the Doctor and saw him off, and taking the prescription and the diagnosis, he handed them both to Chia Chen for his perusal, and in like manner recounted to Chia Chen and Mrs. Yu all that had been said on the subject.

“The other doctors have hitherto not expressed any opinions as positive as this one has done,” observed Mrs. Yu, addressing herself to Chia Chen, “so that the medicines to be used are, I think, surely the right ones!”

“He really isn't a man,” rejoined Chia Chen, “accustomed to give much of his time to the practice of medicine, in order to earn rice for his support:

page 160

and it's Feng Tzu-ying, who is so friendly with us, who is mainly to be thanked for succeeding, after ever so much trouble, in inducing him to come. But now that we have this man, the illness of our son's wife may, there is no saying, stand a chance of being cured. But on that prescription of his there is ginseng mentioned, so you had better make use of that catty of good quality which was bought the other day.”

Chia Jung listened until the conversation came to a close, after which he left the room, and bade a servant go and buy the medicines, in order that they should be prepared and administered to Mrs. Ch'in.

What was the state of Mrs. Ch'in's illness, after she partook of these medicines, we do not know; but, reader, listen to the explanation given in the chapter which follows.

CHAPTER XI.

In honour of Chia Ching's birthday, a family banquet is spread in the Ning Mansion.

At the sight of Hsi-feng, Chia Jui entertains feelings of licentious love.

We will now explain, in continuation of our story, that on the day of Chia Ching's birthday, Chia Chen began by getting ready luscious delicacies and rare fruits, which he packed in sixteen spacious present boxes, and bade Chia Jung take them, along with the servants belonging to the household, over to Chia Ching.

Turning round towards Chia Jung: "Mind," he said, "that you observe whether your grandfather be agreeable or not, before you set to work and pay your obeisance! 'My father,' tell him, 'has complied with your directions, venerable senior, and not presumed to come over; but he has at home ushered the whole company of the members of the family (into your apartments), where they all paid their homage facing the side of honour.'"

After Chia Jung had listened to these injunctions, he speedily led off the family domestics, and took his departure. During this interval, one by one arrived the guests. First came Chia Lien and Chia Se, who went to see whether the seats in the various places (were sufficient). "Is there to be any entertainment or not?" they also inquired.

"Our master," replied the servants, "had, at one time, intended to invite the venerable Mr. Chia Ching to come and spend this day at home, and hadn't for this reason presumed to get up any entertainment. But when the other day he came to hear that the old gentleman was not coming, he at once gave us orders to go in search of a troupe of young actors, as well as

a band of musicians, and all these people are now engaged making their

preparations on the stage in the garden.”

Next came, in a group, mesdames Hsing and Wang, lady Feng and Pao Yü, followed immediately after by Chia Chen and Mrs. Yu; Mrs. Yu's mother having already arrived and being in there in advance of her. Salutations were exchanged between the whole company, and they pressed one another to take a seat. Chia Chen and Mrs. Yu both handed the tea round.

“Our venerable lady,” they explained, as they smiled, “is a worthy senior; while our father is, on the other hand, only her nephew; so that on a birthday of a man of his age, we should really not have had the audacity to invite her ladyship; but as the weather, at this time, is cool, and the chrysanthemums, in the whole garden, are in luxuriant blossom, we have requested our venerable ancestor to come for a little distraction, and to see the whole number of her children and grand-children amuse themselves. This was the object we had in view, but, contrary to our expectations, our worthy senior has not again conferred upon us the lustre of her countenance.”

Lady Feng did not wait until madame Wang could open her mouth, but took the initiative to reply. “Our venerable lady,” she urged, “had, even so late as yesterday, said that she meant to come; but, in the evening, upon seeing brother Pao eating peaches, the mouth of the old lady once again began to water, and after partaking of a little more than the half of one, she had, about the fifth watch, to get out of bed two consecutive times, with the result that all the forenoon to-day, she felt her body considerably worn out. She therefore bade me inform our worthy senior that it was utterly impossible for her to come to-day; adding however that, if there were any delicacies, she fancied a few kinds, but that they should be very tender.”

When Chia Chen heard these words, he smiled. “Our dowager lady,” he replied, “is, I argued, so fond of amusement that, if she doesn't come to-day, there must, for a certainty, be some valid reason; and that's exactly what happens to be the case.”

“The other day I heard your eldest sister explain,” interposed madame Wang, “that Chia Jung's wife was anything but well; but what's after all

the matter with her?"

"She has," observed Mrs. Yu, "contracted this illness verily in a strange manner! Last moon at the time of the mid-autumn festival, she was still well enough to be able to enjoy herself, during half the night, in company with our dowager lady and madame Wang. On her return, she continued in good health, until after the twentieth, when she began to feel more and more languid every day, and loth, likewise, to eat anything; and this has

page 162

been going on for well-nigh half a month and more; she hasn't besides been anything like her old self for two months."

"May she not," remarked madame Hsing, taking up the thread of the conversation, "be ailing for some happy event?"

But while she was uttering these words, some one from outside announced: "Our senior master, second master and all the gentlemen of the family have come, and are standing in the Reception Hall!" Whereupon Chia Chen and Chia Lien quitted the apartment with hurried step; and during this while, Mrs. Yu reiterated how that some time ago a doctor had also expressed the opinion that she was ailing for a happy event, but that the previous day, had come a doctor, recommended by Feng Tzu-ying—a doctor, who had from his youth up made medicine his study, and was very proficient in the treatment of diseases,—who asserted, after he had seen her, that it was no felicitous ailment, but that it was some grave complaint. "It was only yesterday," (she explained,) "that he wrote his prescription; and all she has had is but one dose, and already to-day the giddiness in the head is considerably better; as regards the other symptoms they have as yet shown no marked improvement."

"I maintain," remarked lady Feng, "that, were she not quite unfit to stand the exertion, would she in fact, on a day like this, be unwilling to strain every nerve and come round."

"You saw her," observed Mrs. Yu, "on the third in here; how that she bore up with a violent effort for ever so long, but it was all because of the

friendship that exists between you two, that she still longed for your society, and couldn't brook the idea of tearing herself away."

When lady Feng heard these words, her eyes got quite red, and after a time she at length exclaimed: "In the Heavens of a sudden come wind and rain; while with man, in a day and in a night, woe and weal survene! But with her tender years, if for a complaint like this she were to run any risk, what pleasure is there for any human being to be born and to sojourn in the world?"

She was just speaking, when Chia Jung walked into the apartment; and after paying his respects to madame Hsing, madame Wang, and lady Feng, he then observed to Mrs. Yu: "I have just taken over the eatables to our venerable ancestor; and, at the same time, I told him that my father was at home waiting upon the senior, and entertaining the junior gentlemen of the whole family, and that in compliance with grandfather's orders, he did not presume to go over. The old gentleman was much delighted by what he heard me say, and having signified that that was all in order, bade me tell father and you, mother, to do all you can in your attendance upon the senior

page 163

gentlemen and ladies, enjoining me to entertain, with all propriety, my uncles, aunts, and my cousins. He also went on to urge me to press the men to cut, with all despatch, the blocks for the Record of Meritorious Deeds, and to print ten thousand copies for distribution. All these messages I have duly delivered to my father, but I must now be quick and go out, so as to send the eatables for the elder as well as for the younger gentlemen of the entire household."

"Brother Jung Erh," exclaimed lady Feng, "wait a moment. How is your wife getting on? how is she, after all, to-day?"

"Not well," replied Chia Jung. "But were you, aunt, on your return to go in and see her, you will find out for yourself."

Chia Jung forthwith left the room. During this interval, Mrs. Yu addressed herself to mesdames Hsing and Wang; "My ladies," she asked, "will you

have your repast in here, or will you go into the garden for it? There are now in the garden some young actors engaged in making their preparations?"

"It's better in here," madame Wang remarked, as she turned towards madame Hsing.

Mrs. Yu thereupon issued directions to the married women and matrons to be quick in serving the eatables. The servants, in waiting outside the door, with one voice signified their obedience; and each of them went off to fetch what fell to her share. In a short while, the courses were all laid out, and Mrs. Yu pressed mesdames Hsing and Wang, as well as her mother, into the upper seats; while she, together with lady Feng and Pao Yü, sat at a side table.

"We've come," observed mesdames Hsing and Wang, "with the original idea of paying our congratulations to our venerable senior on the occasion of his birthday; and isn't this as if we had come for our own birthdays?"

"The old gentleman," answered lady Feng, "is a man fond of a quiet life; and as he has already consummated a process of purification, he may well be looked upon as a supernatural being, so that the purpose to which your ladyships have given expression may be considered as manifest to his spirit, upon the very advent of the intention."

As this sentence was uttered the whole company in the room burst out laughing. Mrs. Yu's mother, mesdames Hsing and Wang, and lady Feng having one and all partaken of the banquet, rinsed their mouths and washed their hands, which over, they expressed a wish to go into the garden.

Chia Jung entered the room. "The senior gentlemen," he said to Mrs. Yu, "as well as all my uncles and cousins, have finished their repast; but the elder gentleman Mr. Chia She, who excused himself on the score of

having at home something to attend to, and Mr. Secundus (Chia Cheng),

who is not partial to theatrical performances and is always afraid that people will be too boisterous in their entertainments, have both of them taken their departure. The rest of the family gentlemen have been taken over by uncle Secundus Mr. Lien, and Mr. Se, to the other side to listen to the play. A few moments back Prince Nan An, Prince Tung P'ing, Prince Hsi Ning, Prince Pei Ching, these four Princes, with Niu, Duke of Chen Kuo, and five other dukes, six in all, and Shih, Marquis of Chung Ching, and other seven, in all eight marquises, sent their messengers with their cards and presents. I have already told father all about it; but before I did so, the presents were put away in the counting room, the lists of presents were all entered in the book, and the 'received with thanks' cards were handed to the respective messengers of the various mansions; the men themselves were also tipped in the customary manner, and all of them were kept to have something to eat before they went on their way. But, mother, you should invite the two ladies, your mother and my aunt, to go over and sit in the garden."

"Just so!" observed Mrs. Yu, "but we've only now finished our repast, and were about to go over."

"I wish to tell you, madame," interposed lady Feng, "that I shall go first and see brother Jung's wife and then come and join you."

"All right," replied madame Wang; "we should all have been fain to have paid her a visit, did we not fear lest she should look upon our disturbing her with displeasure, but just tell her that we would like to know how she is getting on!"

"My dear sister," remarked Mrs. Yu, "as our son's wife has a ready ear for all you say, do go and cheer her up, (and if you do so,) it will besides set my own mind at ease; but be quick and come as soon as you can into the garden."

Pao Yü being likewise desirous to go along with lady Feng to see lady Ch'in, madame Wang remarked, "Go and see her just for a while, and then come over at once into the garden; (for remember) she is your nephew's wife, (and you couldn't sit in there long)."

Mrs. Yu forthwith invited mesdames Wang and Hsing, as well as her own

mother, to adjourn to the other side, and they all in a body walked into the garden of Concentrated Fragrance; while lady Feng and Pao Yü betook themselves, in company with Chia Jung, over to this side.

Having entered the door, they with quiet step walked as far as the entrance of the inner chamber. Mrs. Ch'in, upon catching sight of them, was bent upon getting up; but "Be quick," remonstrated lady Feng, "and give up all idea of standing up; for take care your head will feel dizzy."

page 165

Lady Feng hastened to make a few hurried steps forward and to grasp Mrs. Ch'in's hand in hers. "My dear girl!" she exclaimed; "How is it that during the few days I've not seen you, you have grown so thin?"

Readily she then took a seat on the rug, on which Mrs. Ch'in was seated, while Pao Yü, after inquiring too about her health, sat in the chair on the opposite side.

"Bring the tea in at once," called out Chia Jung, "for aunt and uncle Secundus have not had any tea in the drawing room."

Mrs. Ch'in took lady Feng's hand in her own and forced a smile. "This is all due to my lack of good fortune; for in such a family as this, my father and mother-in-law treat me just as if I were a daughter of their own flesh and blood! Besides, your nephew, (my husband,) may, it is true, my dear aunt, be young in years, but he is full of regard for me, as I have regard for him, and we have had so far no misunderstanding between us! In fact, among the senior generation, as well as that of the same age as myself, in the whole clan, putting you aside, aunt, about whom no mention need be made, there is not one who has not ever had anything but love for me, and not one who has not ever shown me anything but kindness! But since I've fallen ill with this complaint, all my energy has even every bit of it been taken out of me, so that I've been unable to show to my father and mother-in-law any mark of filial attention, yea so much as for one single day and to you, my dear aunt, with all this affection of yours for me, I have every wish to be dutiful to the utmost degree, but, in my present state, I'm really not equal to it; my own idea is, that it isn't likely that I shall last through this year."

Pao Yü kept, while (she spoke,) his eyes fixed intently upon a picture on the opposite side, representing some begonias drooping in the spring time, and upon a pair of scrolls, with this inscription written by Ch'in Taihsü:

A gentle chill doth circumscribe the dreaming man because the spring is cold!

The fragrant whiff which wafts itself into man's nose, is the perfume of wine!

And he could not help recalling to mind his experiences at the time when he had fallen asleep in this apartment, and had, in his dream, visited the confines of the Great Void. He was just plunged in a state of abstraction, when he heard Mrs. Ch'in give utterance to these sentiments, which pierced his heart as if they were ten thousand arrows, (with the result that) tears unwittingly trickled from his eyes.

Lady Feng perceiving him in tears felt it extremely painful within herself to bear the sight; but she was on pins and needles lest the patient should detect their frame of mind, and feel, instead (of benefit), still more sore

page 166

at heart, which would not, after all, be quite the purpose of her visit; which was to afford her distraction and consolation. "Pao Yü," she therefore exclaimed, "you are like an old woman! Ill, as she is, simply makes her speak in this wise, and how ever could things come to such a pass! Besides, she is young in years, so that after a short indisposition, her illness will get all right!" "Don't," she said as she turned towards Mrs. Ch'in, "give way to silly thoughts and idle ideas! for by so doing won't you yourself be aggravating your ailment?"

"All that her sickness in fact needs," observed Chia Jung, "is, that she should be able to take something to eat, and then there will be nothing to fear."

"Brother Pao," urged lady Feng, "your mother told you to go over, as soon as you could, so that don't stay here, and go on in the way you're

doing, for you after all incite this lady also to feel uneasy at heart. Besides, your mother over there is solicitous on your account.” “You had better go ahead with your uncle Pao,” she consequently continued, addressing herself to Chia Jung, “while I sit here a little longer.”

When Chia Jung heard this remark, he promptly crossed over with Pao Yü into the garden of Concentrated Fragrance, while lady Feng went on both to cheer her up for a time, and to impart to her, in an undertone, a good deal of confidential advice.

Mrs. Yu had despatched servants, on two or three occasions, to hurry lady Feng, before she said to Mrs. Ch'in: “Do all you can to take good care of yourself, and I'll come and see you again. You're bound to get over this illness; and now, in fact, that you've come across that renowned doctor, you have really nothing more to fear.”

“He might,” observed Mrs. Ch'in as she smiled, “even be a supernatural being and succeed in healing my disease, but he won't be able to remedy my destiny; for, my dear aunt, I feel sure that with this complaint of mine, I can do no more than drag on from day to day.”

“If you encourage such ideas,” remonstrated lady Feng, “how can this illness ever get all right? What you absolutely need is to cast away all these notions, and then you'll improve. I hear moreover that the doctor asserts that if no cure be effected, the fear is of a change for the worse in spring, and not till then. Did you and I moreover belong to a family that hadn't the means to afford any ginseng, it would be difficult to say how we could manage to get it; but were your father and mother-in-law to hear that it's good for your recovery, why not to speak of two mace of ginseng a day, but even two catties will be also within their means! So mind you do take every care of your health! I'm now off on my way into the garden.”

page 167

“Excuse me, my dear aunt,” added Mrs. Ch'in, “that I can't go with you; but when you have nothing to do, I entreat you do come over and see me! and you and I can sit and have a long chat.”

After lady Feng had heard these words, her eyes unwillingly got quite red again. "When I'm at leisure I shall, of course," she rejoined, "come often to see you;" and forthwith leading off the matrons and married women, who had come over with her, as well as the women and matrons of the Ning mansion, she passed through the inner part of the house, and entered, by a circuitous way, the side gate of the park, when she perceived: yellow flowers covering the ground; white willows flanking the slopes; diminutive bridges spanning streams, resembling the Jo Yeh; zigzag pathways (looking as if) they led to the steps of Heaven; limpid springs dripping from among the rocks; flowers hanging from hedges emitting their fragrance, as they were flapped by the winds; red leaves on the tree tops swaying to and fro; groves picture-like, half stripped of foliage; the western breeze coming with sudden gusts, and the wail of the oriole still audible; the warm sun shining with genial rays, and the cicada also adding its chirp: structures, visible to the gaze at a distance in the South-east, soaring high on various sites and resting against the hills; three halls, visible near by on the North-west, stretching in one connected line, on the bank of the stream; strains of music filling the pavilion, imbued with an unwonted subtle charm; and maidens in fine attire penetrating the groves, lending an additional spell to the scene.

Lady Feng, while engaged in contemplating the beauties of the spot, advanced onwards step by step. She was plunged in a state of ecstasy, when suddenly, from the rear of the artificial rockery, egressed a person, who approached her and facing her said, "My respects to you, sister-in-law."

Lady Feng was so startled by this unexpected appearance that she drew back. "Isn't this Mr. Jui?" she ventured.

"What! sister-in-law," exclaimed Chia Jui, "don't you recognise even me?"

"It isn't that I didn't recognise you," explained lady Feng, "but at the sudden sight of you, I couldn't conceive that it would possibly be you, sir, in this place!"

"This was in fact bound to be," replied Chia Jui; "for there's some subtle sympathy between me and you, sister-in-law. Here I just stealthily leave the entertainment, in order to revel for a while in this solitary place when, against every expectation, I come across you, sister-in-law; and isn't this

a subtle sympathy?"

As he spoke, he kept his gaze fixed on lady Feng, who being an intelligent person, could not but arrive, at the sight of his manner, at the whole truth

page 168

in her surmises. "It isn't to be wondered at," she consequently observed, as she smiled hypocritically, "that your eldest brother should make frequent allusion to your qualities! for after seeing you on this occasion, and hearing you utter these few remarks, I have readily discovered what an intelligent and genial person you are! I am just now on my way to join the ladies on the other side, and have no leisure to converse with you; but wait until I've nothing to attend to, when we can meet again."

"I meant to have gone over to your place and paid my respects to you, sister-in-law," pleaded Chia Jui, "but I was afraid lest a person of tender years like yourself mightn't lightly receive any visitors!"

Lady Feng gave another sardonic smile. "Relatives," she continued, "of one family, as we are, what need is there to say anything of tender years?"

After Chia Jui had heard these words, he felt his heart swell within him with such secret joy that he was urged to reflect: "I have at length to-day, when least I expected it, obtained this remarkable encounter with her!"

But as the display of his passion became still more repulsive, lady Feng urged him to go. "Be off at once," she remarked, "and join the entertainment; for mind, if they find you out, they will mulct you in so many glasses of wine!"

By the time this suggestion had reached Chia Jui's ears, half of his body had become stiff like a log of wood; and as he betook himself away, with lothful step, he turned his head round to cast glances at her. Lady Feng purposely slackened her pace; and when she perceived that he had gone a certain distance, she gave way to reflection. "This is indeed," she thought, "knowing a person, as far as face goes, and not as heart! Can there be another such a beast as he! If he really continues to behave in

this manner, I shall soon enough compass his death, with my own hands, and he'll then know what stuff I'm made of."

Lady Feng, at this juncture moved onward, and after turning round a chain of hillocks, she caught sight of two or three matrons coming along with all speed. As soon as they espied lady Feng they put on a smile. "Our mistress," they said, "perceiving that your ladyship was not forthcoming, has been in a great state of anxiety, and bade your servants come again to request you to come over.

"Is your mistress," observed lady Feng, "so like a quick-footed demon?"

While lady Feng advanced leisurely, she inquired, "How many plays have been recited?" to which question one of the matrons replied, "They have gone through eight or nine." But while engaged in conversation, they had already reached the back door of the Tower of Celestial Fragrance,

page 169

where she caught sight of Pao Yü playing with a company of waiting-maids and pages. "Brother Pao," lady Feng exclaimed, "don't be up to too much mischief!" "The ladies are all sitting upstairs," interposed one of the maids. "Please, my lady, this is the way up."

At these words lady Feng slackened her pace, raised her dress, and walked up the stairs, where Mrs. Yu was already at the top of the landing waiting for her.

"You two," remarked Mrs. Yu, smiling, "are so friendly, that having met you couldn't possibly tear yourself away to come. You had better tomorrow move over there and take up your quarters with her and have done; but sit down and let me, first of all, present you a glass of wine."

Lady Feng speedily drew near mesdames Hsing and Wang, and begged permission to take a seat; while Mrs. Yu brought the programme, and pressed lady Feng to mark some plays.

"The senior ladies occupy the seats of honour," remonstrated lady Feng, "and how can I presume to choose?"

“We, and our relative by marriage, have selected several plays,” explained mesdames Hsing and Wang, “and it’s for you now to choose some good ones for us to listen to.”

Standing up, lady Feng signified her obedience; and taking over the programme, and perusing it from top to bottom, she marked off one entitled, the “Return of the Spirit,” and another called “Thrumming and Singing;” after which she handed back the programme, observing, “When they have done with the ‘Ennoblement of two Officers,’ which they are singing just at present, it will be time enough to sing these two.”

“Of course it will,” retorted madame Wang, “but they should get it over as soon as they can, so as to allow your elder Brother and your Sister-in-law to have rest; besides, their hearts are not at ease.”

“You senior ladies don’t come often,” expostulated Mrs. Yu, “and you and I will derive more enjoyment were we to stay a little longer; it’s as yet early in the day!”

Lady Feng stood up and looked downstairs. “Where have all the gentlemen gone to?” she inquired.

“The gentlemen have just gone over to the Pavilion of Plenteous Effulgence,” replied a matron, who stood by; “they have taken along with them ten musicians and gone in there to drink their wine.”

“It wasn’t convenient for them,” remarked lady Feng, “to be over here; but who knows what they have again gone to do behind our backs?”

“Could every one,” interposed Mrs. Yu, “resemble you, a person of such propriety!”

page 170

While they indulged in chatting and laughing, the plays they had chosen were all finished; whereupon the tables were cleared of the wines, and the repast was served. The meal over, the whole company adjourned into the garden, and came and sat in the drawing-room. After tea, they at length gave orders to get ready the carriages, and they took their leave of

Mrs. Yu's mother. Mrs. Yu, attended by all the secondary wives, servants, and married women, escorted them out, while Chia Chen, along with the whole bevy of young men, stood by the vehicles, waiting in a group for their arrival.

After saluting mesdames Hsing and Wang, "Aunts," they said, "you must come over again to-morrow for a stroll."

"We must be excused," observed madame Wang, "we've sat here the whole day to-day, and are, after all, feeling quite tired; besides, we shall need to have some rest to-morrow."

Both of them thereupon got into their carriages and took their departure, while Chia Jui still kept a fixed gaze upon lady Feng; and it was after Chia Chen had gone in that Li Kuei led round the horse, and that Pao Yü mounted and went off, following in the track of mesdames Hsing and Wang.

Chia Chen and the whole number of brothers and nephews belonging to the family had, during this interval, partaken of their meal, and the whole party at length broke up. But in like manner, all the inmates of the clan and the guests spent on the morrow another festive day, but we need not advert to it with any minuteness.

After this occasion, lady Feng came in person and paid frequent visits to Mrs. Ch'in; but as there were some days on which her ailment was considerably better, and others on which it was considerably worse, Chia Chen, Mrs. Yu, and Chia Jung were in an awful state of anxiety.

Chia Jui, it must moreover be noticed, came over, on several instances, on a visit to the Jung mansion; but it invariably happened that he found that lady Feng had gone over to the Ning mansion.

This was just the thirtieth of the eleventh moon, the day on which the winter solstice fell; and the few days preceding that season, dowager lady Chia, madame Wang and lady Feng did not let one day go by without sending some one to inquire about Mrs. Ch'in; and as the servants, on their return, repeatedly reported that, during the last few days, neither had her ailment aggravated, nor had it undergone any marked improvement, madame Wang explained to dowager lady Chia,

that as a complaint of this nature had reached this kind of season without getting any worse, there was some hope of recovery.

page 171

“Of course there is!” observed the old lady; “what a dear child she is! should anything happen to her, won't it be enough to make people die from grief!” and as she spake she felt for a time quite sore at heart. “You and she,” continuing, she said to lady Feng, “have been friends for ever so long; to-morrow is the glorious first (and you can't go), but after to-morrow you should pay her a visit and minutely scrutinise her appearance: and should you find her any better, come and tell me on your return! Whatever things that dear child has all along a fancy for, do send her round a few even as often as you can by some one or other!”

Lady Feng assented to each of her recommendations; and when the second arrived, she came, after breakfast, to the Ning mansion to see how Mrs. Ch'in was getting on; and though she found her none the worse, the flesh all over her face and person had however become emaciated and parched up. She readily sat with Mrs. Ch'in for a long while, and after they had chatted on one thing and another, she again reiterated the assurances that this illness involved no danger, and distracted her for ever so long.

“Whether I get well or not,” observed Mrs. Ch'in, “we'll know in spring; now winter is just over, and I'm anyhow no worse, so that possibly I may get all right; and yet there's no saying; but, my dear sister-in-law, do press our old lady to compose her mind! yesterday, her ladyship sent me some potato dumplings, with minced dates in them, and though I had two, they seem after all to be very easily digested!”

“I'll send you round some more to-morrow,” lady Feng suggested; “I'm now going to look up your mother-in-law, and will then hurry back to give my report to our dowager lady.”

“Please, sister-in-law,” Mrs. Ch'in said, “present my best respects to her venerable ladyship, as well as to madame Wang.”

Lady Feng signified that she would comply with her wishes, and, forthwith

leaving the apartment, she came over and sat in Mrs. Yu's suite of rooms.

"How do you, who don't see our son's wife very often, happen to find her?" inquired Mrs. Yu.

Lady Feng drooped her head for some time. "There's no help," she ventured, "for this illness! but you should likewise make every subsequent preparation, for it would also be well if you could scour it away."

"I've done so much as to secretly give orders," replied Mrs. Yu, "to get things ready; but for that thing (the coffin), there's no good timber to be found, so that it will have to be looked after by and by."

page 172

Lady Feng swallowed hastily a cup of tea, and after a short chat, "I must be hurrying back," she remarked, "to deliver my message to our dowager lady!"

"You should," urged Mrs. Yu, "be sparse in what you tell her lady ship so as not to frighten an old person like her!"

"I know well enough what to say," replied lady Feng.

Without any further delay, lady Feng then sped back. On her arrival at home she looked up the old lady. "Brother Jung's wife," she explained, "presents her compliments, and pays obeisance to your venerable ladyship; she says that she's much better, and entreats you, her worthy senior, to set your mind at ease! That as soon as she's a little better she will come and prostrate herself before your ladyship."

"How do you find her?" inquired dowager lady Chia.

"For the present there's nothing to fear," continued lady Feng; "for her mien is still good."

After the old lady had heard these words, she was plunged for a long while in deep reflection; and as she turned towards lady Feng, "Go and

divest yourself of your toilette," she said, "and have some rest."

Lady Feng in consequence signified her obedience, and walked away, returning home after paying madame Wang a visit. P'ing Erh helped lady Feng to put on the house costume, which she had warmed by the fire, and lady Feng eventually took a seat and asked "whether there was anything doing at home?"

P'ing Erh then brought the tea, and after going over to hand the cup: "There's nothing doing," she replied; "as regards the interest on the three hundred taels, Wang Erh's wife has brought it in, and I've put it away. Besides this, Mr. Jui sent round to inquire if your ladyship was at home or not, as he meant to come and pay his respects and to have a chat."

"Heng!" exclaimed lady Feng at these words. "Why should this beast compass his own death? we'll see when he comes what is to be done."

"Why is this Mr. Jui so bent upon coming?" P'ing Erh having inquired, lady Feng readily gave her an account of how she had met him in the course of the ninth moon in the Ning mansion, and of what had been said by him.

"What a mangy frog to be bent upon eating the flesh of a heavenly goose!" ejaculated P'ing Erh. "A stupid and disorderly fellow with no conception of relationship, to harbour such a thought! but we'll make him find an unnatural death!"

page 173

"Wait till he comes," added lady Feng, "when I feel certain I shall find some way."

What happened, however, when Chia Jui came has not, as yet, been ascertained, but listen, reader, to the explanation given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

Wang Hsi-feng maliciously lays a trap for Chia Jui, under pretence that his affection is reciprocated.

Chia T'ien-hsiang gazes at the face of the mirror of Voluptuousness.

Lady Feng, it must be noticed in continuation of our narrative, was just engaged in talking with P'ing Erh, when they heard some one announce that Mr. Jui had come. Lady Feng gave orders that he should be invited to step in, and Chia Jui perceiving that he had been asked to walk in was at heart elated at the prospect of seeing her.

With a face beaming with smiles, Lady Feng inquired again and again how he was; and, with simulated tenderness she further pressed him to take a seat and urged him to have a cup of tea.

Chia Jui noticed how still more voluptuous lady Feng looked in her present costume, and, as his eyes burnt with love, "How is it," he inquired, "that my elder brother Secundus is not yet back?"

"What the reason is I cannot tell," lady Feng said by way of reply.

"May it not be," Chia Jui smilingly insinuated, "that some fair damsel has got hold of him on the way, and that he cannot brook to tear himself from her to come home?"

"That makes it plain that there are those among men who fall in love with any girl they cast their eyes on," hinted lady Feng.

"Your remarks are, sister-in-law, incorrect, for I'm none of this kind!" Chia Jui explained smirkingly.

"How many like you can there be!" rejoined lady Feng with a sarcastic smile; "in ten, not one even could be picked out!"

When Chia Jui heard these words, he felt in such high glee that he rubbed his ears and smoothed his cheeks. "My sister-in-law," he

continued, "you must of course be extremely lonely day after day."

"Indeed I am," observed lady Feng, "and I only wish some one would come and have a chat with me to break my dull monotony."

page 174

"I daily have ample leisure," Chia Jui ventured with a simper, "and wouldn't it be well if I came every day to dispel your dulness, sister-in-law?"

"You are simply fooling me," exclaimed lady Feng laughing. "It isn't likely you would wish to come over here to me?"

"If in your presence, sister-in-law, I utter a single word of falsehood, may the thunder from heaven blast me!" protested Chia Jui. "It's only because I had all along heard people say that you were a dreadful person, and that you cannot condone even the slightest shortcoming committed in your presence, that I was induced to keep back by fear; but after seeing you, on this occasion, so chatty, so full of fun and most considerate to others, how can I not come? were it to be the cause of my death, I would be even willing to come!"

"You're really a clever person," lady Feng observed sarcastically. "And oh so much superior to both Chia Jung and his brother! Handsome as their presence was to look at, I imagined their minds to be full of intelligence, but who would have thought that they would, after all, be a couple of stupid worms, without the least notion of human affection!"

The words which Chia Jui heard, fell in so much the more with his own sentiments, that he could not restrain himself from again pressing forward nearer to her; and as with eyes strained to give intentness to his view, he gazed at lady Feng's purse: "What rings have you got on?" he went on to ask.

"You should be a little more deferential," remonstrated lady Feng in a low tone of voice, "so as not to let the waiting-maids detect us."

Chia Jui withdrew backward with as much alacrity as if he had received

an Imperial decree or a mandate from Buddha.

“You ought to be going!” lady Feng suggested, as she gave him a smile.

“Do let me stay a while longer,” entreated Chia Jui, “you are indeed ruthless, my sister-in-law.”

But with gentle voice did lady Feng again expostulate. “In broad daylight,” she said, “with people coming and going, it is not really convenient that you should abide in here; so you had better go, and when it's dark and the watch is set, you can come over, and quietly wait for me in the corridor on the Eastern side!”

At these words, Chia Jui felt as if he had received some jewel or precious thing. “Don't make fun of me!” he remarked with vehemence. “The only thing is that crowds of people are ever passing from there, and how will it be possible for me to evade detection?”

page 175

“Set your mind at ease!” lady Feng advised; “I shall dismiss on leave all the youths on duty at night; and when the doors, on both sides, are closed, there will be no one else to come in!”

Chia Jui was delighted beyond measure by the assurance, and with impetuous haste, he took his leave and went off; convinced at heart of the gratification of his wishes. He continued, up to the time of dusk, a prey to keen expectation; and, when indeed darkness fell, he felt his way into the Jung mansion, availing himself of the moment, when the doors were being closed, to slip into the corridor, where everything was actually pitch dark, and not a soul to be seen going backwards or forwards.

The door leading over to dowager lady Chia's apartments had already been put under key, and there was but one gate, the one on the East, which had not as yet been locked. Chia Jui lent his ear, and listened for ever so long, but he saw no one appear. Suddenly, however, was heard a sound like “lo teng,” and the east gate was also bolted; but though Chia Jui was in a great state of impatience, he none the less did not venture to utter a sound. All that necessity compelled him to do was to issue, with

quiet steps, from his corner, and to try the gates by pushing; but they were closed as firmly as if they had been made fast with iron bolts; and much though he may, at this juncture, have wished to find his way out, escape was, in fact, out of the question; on the south and north was one continuous dead wall, which, even had he wished to scale, there was nothing which he could clutch and pull himself up by.

This room, besides, was one the interior (of which was exposed) to the wind, which entered through (the fissure) of the door; and was perfectly empty and bare; and the weather being, at this time, that of December, and the night too very long, the northerly wind, with its biting gusts, was sufficient to penetrate the flesh and to cleave the bones, so that the whole night long he had a narrow escape from being frozen to death; and he was yearning, with intolerable anxiety for the break of day, when he espied an old matron go first and open the door on the East side, and then come in and knock at the western gate.

Chia Jui seeing that she had turned her face away, bolted out, like a streak of smoke, as he hugged his shoulders with his hands (from intense cold.) As luck would have it, the hour was as yet early, so that the inmates of the house had not all got out of bed; and making his escape from the postern door, he straightaway betook himself home, running back the whole way.

Chia Jui's parents had, it must be explained, departed life at an early period, and he had no one else, besides his grandfather Tai-ju, to take charge of his support and education. This Tai-ju had, all along, exercised a very

page 176

strict control, and would not allow Chia Jui to even make one step too many, in the apprehension that he might gad about out of doors drinking and gambling, to the neglect of his studies.

Seeing, on this unexpected occasion, that he had not come home the whole night, he simply felt positive, in his own mind, that he was certain to have run about, if not drinking, at least gambling, and dissipating in houses of the demi-monde up to the small hours; but he never even gave

so much as a thought to the possibility of a public scandal, as that in which he was involved. The consequence was that during the whole length of the night he boiled with wrath.

Chia Jui himself, on the other hand, was (in such a state of trepidation) that he could wipe the perspiration (off his face) by handfuls; and he felt constrained on his return home, to have recourse to deceitful excuses, simply explaining that he had been at his eldest maternal uncle's house, and that when it got dark, they kept him to spend the night there.

“Hitherto,” remonstrated Tai-ju, “when about to go out of doors, you never ventured to go, on your own hook, without first telling me about it, and how is it that yesterday you surreptitiously left the house? for this offence alone you deserve a beating, and how much more for the lie imposed upon me.”

Into such a violent fit of anger did he consequently fly that laying hands on him, he pulled him over and administered to him thirty or forty blows with a cane. Nor would he allow him to have anything to eat, but bade him remain on his knees in the court conning essays; impressing on his mind that he would not let him off, before he had made up for the last ten days' lessons.

Chia Jui had in the first instance, frozen the whole night, and, in the next place, came in for a flogging. With a stomach, besides, gnawed by the pangs of hunger, he had to kneel in a place exposed to drafts reading the while literary compositions, so that the hardships he had to endure were of manifold kinds.

Chia Jui's infamous intentions had at this junction undergone no change; but far from his thoughts being even then any idea that lady Feng was humbugging him, he seized, after the lapse of a couple of days, the first leisure moments to come again in search of that lady.

Lady Feng pretended to bear him a grudge for his breach of faith, and Chia Jui was so distressed that he tried by vows and oaths (to establish his innocence.) Lady Feng perceiving that he had, of his own accord, fallen into the meshes of the net laid for him, could not but devise another plot to give him a lesson and make him know what was right and mend

his ways.

page 177

With this purpose, she gave him another assignation. "Don't go over there," she said, "to-night, but wait for me in the empty rooms giving on to a small passage at the back of these apartments of mine. But whatever you do, mind don't be reckless."

"Are you in real earnest?" Chia Jui inquired.

"Why, who wants to play with you?" replied lady Feng; "if you don't believe what I say, well then don't come!"

"I'll come, I'll come, yea I'll come, were I even to die!" protested Chia Jui.

"You should first at this very moment get away!" lady Feng having suggested, Chia Jui, who felt sanguine that when evening came, success would for a certainty crown his visit, took at once his departure in anticipation (of his pleasure.)

During this interval lady Feng hastily set to work to dispose of her resources, and to add to her stratagems, and she laid a trap for her victim; while Chia Jui, on the other hand, was until the shades of darkness fell, a prey to incessant expectation.

As luck would have it a relative of his happened to likewise come on that very night to their house and to only leave after he had dinner with them, and at an hour of the day when the lamps had already been lit; but he had still to wait until his grandfather had retired to rest before he could, at length with precipitate step, betake himself into the Jung mansion.

Straightway he came into the rooms in the narrow passage, and waited with as much trepidation as if he had been an ant in a hot pan. He however waited and waited, but he saw no one arrive; he listened but not even the sound of a voice reached his ear. His heart was full of intense fear, and he could not restrain giving way to surmises and suspicion. "May it not be," he thought, "that she is not coming again; and that I may have once more to freeze for another whole night?"

While indulging in these erratic reflections, he discerned some one coming, looking like a black apparition, who Chia Jui readily concluded, in his mind, must be lady Feng; so that, unmindful of distinguishing black from white, he as soon as that person arrived in front of him, speedily clasped her in his embrace, like a ravenous tiger pouncing upon its prey, or a cat clawing a rat, and cried: "My darling sister, you have made me wait till I'm ready to die."

As he uttered these words, he dragged the comer, in his arms, on to the couch in the room; and while indulging in kisses and protestations of warm love, he began to cry out at random epithets of endearment.

page 178

Not a sound, however, came from the lips of the other person; and Chia Jui had in the fulness of his passion, exceeded the bounds of timid love and was in the act of becoming still more affectionate in his protestations, when a sudden flash of a light struck his eye, by the rays of which he espied Chia Se with a candle in hand, casting the light round the place, "Who's in this room?" he exclaimed.

"Uncle Jui," he heard some one on the couch explain, laughing, "was trying to take liberties with me!"

Chia Jui at one glance became aware that it was no other than Chia Jung; and a sense of shame at once so overpowered him that he could find nowhere to hide himself; nor did he know how best to extricate himself from the dilemma. Turning himself round, he made an attempt to make good his escape, when Chia Se with one grip clutched him in his hold.

"Don't run away," he said; "sister-in-law Lien has already reported your conduct to madame Wang; and explained that you had tried to make her carry on an improper flirtation with you; that she had temporised by having recourse to a scheme to escape your importunities, and that she had imposed upon you in such a way as to make you wait for her in this place. Our lady was so terribly incensed, that she well-nigh succumbed; and hence it is that she bade me come and catch you! Be quick now and

follow me, and let us go and see her.”

After Chia Jui had heard these words, his very soul could not be contained within his body.

“My dear nephew,” he entreated, “do tell her that it wasn't I; and I'll show you my gratitude to-morrow in a substantial manner.”

“Letting you off,” rejoined Chia Se, “is no difficult thing; but how much, I wonder, are you likely to give? Besides, what you now utter with your lips, there will be no proof to establish; so you had better write a promissory note.”

“How could I put what happened in black and white on paper?” observed Chia Jui.

“There's no difficulty about that either!” replied Chia Se; “just write an account of a debt due, for losses in gambling, to some one outside; for payment of which you had to raise funds, by a loan of a stated number of taels, from the head of the house; and that will be all that is required.”

“This is, in fact, easy enough!” Chia Jui having added by way of answer; Chia Se turned round and left the room; and returning with paper and pencils, which had been got ready beforehand for the purpose, he bade Chia Jui write. The two of them (Chia Jung and Chia Se) tried, the one

page 179

to do a good turn, and the other to be perverse in his insistence; but (Chia Jui) put down no more than fifty taels, and appended his signature.

Chia Se pocketed the note, and endeavoured subsequently to induce Chia Jung to come away; but Chia Jung was, at the outset, obdurate and unwilling to give in, and kept on repeating; “To-morrow, I'll tell the members of our clan to look into your nice conduct!”

These words plunged Chia Jui in such a state of dismay, that he even went so far as to knock his head on the ground; but, as Chia Se was trying to get unfair advantage of him though he had at first done him a good turn, he had to write another promissory note for fifty taels, before

the matter was dropped.

Taking up again the thread of the conversation, Chia Se remarked, "Now when I let you go, I'm quite ready to bear the blame! But the gate at our old lady's over there is already bolted, and Mr. Chia Cheng is just now engaged in the Hall, looking at the things which have arrived from Nanking, so that it would certainly be difficult for you to pass through that way. The only safe course at present is by the back gate; but if you do go by there, and perchance meet any one, even I will be in for a mess; so you might as well wait until I go first and have a peep, when I'll come and fetch you! You couldn't anyhow conceal yourself in this room; for in a short time they'll be coming to stow the things away, and you had better let me find a safe place for you."

These words ended, he took hold of Chia Jui, and, extinguishing again the lantern, he brought him out into the court, feeling his way up to the bottom of the steps of the large terrace. "It's safe enough in this nest," he observed, "but just squat down quietly and don't utter a sound; wait until I come back before you venture out."

Having concluded this remark, the two of them (Chia Se and Chia Jung) walked away; while Chia Jui was, all this time, out of his senses, and felt constrained to remain squatting at the bottom of the terrace stairs. He was about to consider what course was open for him to adopt, when he heard a noise just over his head; and, with a splash, the contents of a bucket, consisting entirely of filthy water, was emptied straight down over him from above, drenching, as luck would have it, his whole person and head.

Chia Jui could not suppress an exclamation. "Ai ya!" he cried, but he hastily stopped his mouth with his hands, and did not venture to give vent to another sound. His whole head and face were a mass of filth, and his body felt icy cold. But as he shivered and shook, he espied Chia Se come running. "Get off," he shouted, "with all speed! off with you at once!"

page 180

As soon as Chia Jui returned to life again, he bolted with hasty strides, out of the back gate, and ran the whole way home. The night had already

reached the third watch, so that he had to knock at the door for it to be opened.

“What's the matter?” inquired the servants, when they saw him in this sorry plight; (an inquiry) which placed him in the necessity of making some false excuse. “The night was dark,” he explained, “and my foot slipped and I fell into a gutter.”

Saying this, he betook himself speedily to his own apartment; and it was only after he had changed his clothes and performed his ablutions, that he began to realise that lady Feng had made a fool of him. He consequently gave way to a fit of wrath; but upon recalling to mind the charms of lady Feng's face, he felt again extremely aggrieved that he could not there and then clasp her in his embrace, and as he indulged in these wild thoughts and fanciful ideas, he could not the whole night long close his eyes.

From this time forward his mind was, it is true, still with lady Feng, but he did not have the courage to put his foot into the Jung mansion; and with Chia Jung and Chia Se both coming time and again to dun him for the money, he was likewise full of fears lest his grandfather should come to know everything.

His passion for lady Feng was, in fact, already a burden hard to bear, and when, moreover, the troubles of debts were superadded to his tasks, which were also during the whole day arduous, he, a young man of about twenty, as yet unmarried, and a prey to constant cravings for lady Feng, which were difficult to gratify, could not avoid giving way, to a great extent, to such evil habits as exhausted his energies. His lot had, what is more, been on two occasions to be frozen, angered and to endure much hardship, so that with the attacks received time and again from all sides, he unconsciously soon contracted an organic disease. In his heart inflammation set in; his mouth lost the sense of taste; his feet got as soft as cotton from weakness; his eyes stung, as if there were vinegar in them. At night, he burnt with fever. During the day, he was repeatedly under the effects of lassitude. Perspiration was profuse, while with his expectorations of phlegm, he brought up blood. The whole number of these several ailments came upon him, before the expiry of a year, (with the result that) in course of time, he had not the strength to bear himself

up. Of a sudden, he would fall down, and with his eyes, albeit closed, his spirit would be still plunged in confused dreams, while his mouth would be full of nonsense and he would be subject to strange starts.

Every kind of doctor was asked to come in, and every treatment had recourse to; and, though of such medicines as cinnamon, aconitum seeds,

page 181

turtle shell, ophiopogon, Yü-chü herb, and the like, he took several tens of catties, he nevertheless experienced no change for the better; so that by the time the twelfth moon drew once again to an end, and spring returned, this illness had become still more serious.

Tai-ju was very much concerned, and invited doctors from all parts to attend to him, but none of them could do him any good. And as later on, he had to take nothing else but decoctions of pure ginseng, Tai-ju could not of course afford it. Having no other help but to come over to the Jung mansion, and make requisition for some, Madame Wang asked lady Feng to weigh two taels of it and give it to him. "The other day," rejoined lady Feng, "not long ago, when we concocted some medicine for our dowager lady, you told us, madame, to keep the pieces that were whole, to present to the spouse of General Yang to make physic with, and as it happens it was only yesterday that I sent some one round with them."

"If there's none over here in our place," suggested madame Wang, "just send a servant to your mother-in-law's, on the other side, to inquire whether they have any. Or it may possibly be that your elder brother-in-law Chen, over there, might have a little. If so, put all you get together, and give it to them; and when he shall have taken it, and got well and you shall have saved the life of a human being, it will really be to the benefit of you all."

Lady Feng acquiesced; but without directing a single person to institute any search, she simply took some refuse twigs, and making up a few mace, she despatched them with the meagre message that they had been sent by madame Wang, and that there was, in fact, no more; subsequently reporting to madame Wang that she had asked for and

obtained all there was and that she had collected as much as two taels, and forwarded it to them.

Chia Jui was, meanwhile, very anxious to recover his health, so that there was no medicine that he would not take, but the outlay of money was of no avail, for he derived no benefit.

On a certain day and at an unexpected moment, a lame Taoist priest came to beg for alms, and he averred that he had the special gift of healing diseases arising from grievances received, and as Chia Jui happened, from inside, to hear what he said, he forthwith shouted out: "Go at once, and bid that divine come in and save my life!" while he reverentially knocked his head on the pillow.

The whole bevy of servants felt constrained to usher the Taoist in; and Chia Jui, taking hold of him with a dash, "My Buddha!" he repeatedly cried out, "save my life!"

page 182

The Taoist heaved a sigh. "This ailment of yours," he remarked, "is not one that could be healed with any medicine; I have a precious thing here which I'll give you, and if you gaze at it every day, your life can be saved!"

When he had done talking, he produced from his pouch a looking-glass which could reflect a person's face on the front and back as well. On the upper part of the back were engraved the four characters: "Precious Mirror of Voluptuousness." Handing it over to Chia Jui: "This object," he proceeded, "emanates from the primordial confines of the Great Void and has been wrought by the Monitory Dream Fairy in the Palace of Unreality and Spirituality, with the sole intent of healing the illnesses which originate from evil thoughts and improper designs. Possessing, as it does, the virtue of relieving mankind and preserving life, I have consequently brought it along with me into the world, but I only give it to those intelligent preeminent and refined princely men to set their eyes on. On no account must you look at the front side; and you should only gaze at the back of it; this is urgent, this is expedient! After three days, I shall come and fetch it away; by which time, I'm sure, it will have made him all right."

These words finished, he walked away with leisurely step, and though all tried to detain him, they could not succeed.

Chia Jui received the mirror. "This Taoist," he thought, "would seem to speak sensibly, and why should I not look at it and try its effect?" At the conclusion of these thoughts, he took up the Mirror of Voluptuousness, and cast his eyes on the obverse side; but upon perceiving nought else than a skeleton standing in it, Chia Jui sustained such a fright that he lost no time in covering it with his hands and in abusing the Taoist. "You good-for-nothing!" he exclaimed, "why should you frighten me so? but I'll go further and look at the front and see what it's like."

While he reflected in this manner, he readily looked into the face of the mirror, wherein he caught sight of lady Feng standing, nodding her head and beckoning to him. With one gush of joy, Chia Jui felt himself, in a vague and mysterious manner, transported into the mirror, where he held an affectionate tête-à-tête with lady Feng. Lady Feng escorted him out again. On his return to bed, he gave vent to an exclamation of "Ai yah!" and opening his eyes, he turned the glass over once more; but still, as hitherto, stood the skeleton in the back part.

Chia Jui had, it is true, experienced all the pleasant sensations of a tête-à-tête, but his heart nevertheless did not feel gratified; so that he again turned the front round, and gazed at lady Feng, as she still waved her hand and beckoned to him to go. Once more entering the mirror, he went on in the same way for three or four times, until this occasion, when just as he was about to issue from the mirror, he espied two persons come up to him, who made him fast with chains round the neck, and hauled him away. Chia Jui shouted. "Let me take the mirror and I'll come along." But only this remark could he utter, for it was forthwith beyond his power to say one word more. The servants, who stood by in attendance, saw him at first still holding the glass in his hand and looking in, and then, when it fell from his grasp, open his eyes again to pick it up, but when at length the mirror dropped, and he at once ceased to move, they in a body came forward to ascertain what had happened to him. He had already breathed his last. The lower part of his body was icy-cold; his clothes moist from profuse perspiration. With all promptitude they changed him there and then, and carried him to another bed.

Tai-ju and his wife wept bitterly for him, to the utter disregard of their own lives, while in violent terms they abused the Taoist priest. "What kind of magical mirror is it?" they asked. "If we don't destroy this glass, it will do harm to not a few men in the world!"

Having forthwith given directions to bring fire and burn it, a voice was heard in the air to say, "Who told you to look into the face of it? You yourselves have mistaken what is false for what is true, and why burn this glass of mine?"

Suddenly the mirror was seen to fly away into the air; and when Tai-ju went out of doors to see, he found no one else than the limping Taoist, shouting, "Who is he who wishes to destroy the Mirror of Voluptuousness?" While uttering these words, he snatched the glass, and, as all eyes were fixed upon him, he moved away lissomely, as if swayed by the wind.

Tai-ju at once made preparations for the funeral and went everywhere to give notice that on the third day the obsequies would commence, that on the seventh the procession would start to escort the coffin to the Iron Fence Temple, and that on the subsequent day, it would be taken to his original home.

Not much time elapsed before all the members of the Chia family came, in a body, to express their condolences. Chia She, of the Jung Mansion, presented twenty taels, and Chia Cheng also gave twenty taels. Of the Ning Mansion, Chia Chen likewise contributed twenty taels. The remainder of the members of the clan, of whom some were poor and some rich, and not equally well off, gave either one or two taels, or three or four, some more, some less. Among strangers, there were also contributions, respectively presented by the families of his fellow-scholars, amounting, likewise, collectively to twenty or thirty taels.

The private means of Tai-ju were, it is true, precarious, but with the monetary assistance he obtained, he anyhow performed the funeral rites with all splendour and *éclat*.

But who would have thought it, at the close of winter of this year, Lin Ju-

hai contracted a serious illness, and forwarded a letter, by some one, with the express purpose of fetching Lin Tai-yü back. These tidings, when they reached dowager lady Chia, naturally added to the grief and distress (she already suffered), but she felt compelled to make speedy preparations for Tai-yü's departure. Pao Yü too was intensely cut up, but he had no alternative but to defer to the affection of father and daughter; nor could he very well place any hindrance in the way.

Old lady Chia, in due course, made up her mind that she would like Chia Lien to accompany her, and she also asked him to bring her back again along with him. But no minute particulars need be given of the manifold local presents and of the preparations, which were, of course, everything that could be wished for in excellence and perfectness. Forthwith the day for starting was selected, and Chia Lien, along with Lin Tai-yü, said good-bye to all the members of the family, and, followed by their attendants, they went on board their boats, and set out on their journey for Yang Chou.

But, Reader, should you have any wish to know fuller details, listen to the account given in the subsequent Chapter.

CHAPTER XIII.

*Ch'in K'o-ch'ing dies, and Chia Jung is invested with the rank of military officer to the Imperial Body-guard.
Wang Hsi-feng lends her help in the management of the Jung Kuo Mansion.*

Lady Feng, it must be added, in prosecuting our narrative, was ever since Chia Lien's departure to accompany Tai-yü to Yang Chou, really very dejected at heart; and every day, when evening came, she would, after simply indulging in a chat and a laugh with P'ing Erh, turn in, in a heedless frame of mind, for the night.

In the course of the night of this day, she had been sitting with P'ing Erh by lamp-light clasping the hand-stove; and weary of doing her work of embroidery, she had at an early hour, given orders to warm the embroidered quilt, and both had gone to bed; and as she was bending her fingers, counting the progress of the journey, and when they should be arriving, unexpectedly, the third watch struck.

page 185

P'ing Erh had already fallen fast asleep; and lady Feng was feeling at length her sleepy eyes slightly dose, when she faintly discerned Mrs. Ch'in walk in from outside.

“My dear sister-in-law,” she said as she smiled, “sleep in peace; I'm on my way back to-day, and won't even you accompany me just one stage? But as you and I have been great friends all along, I cannot part from you, sister-in-law, and have therefore come to take my leave of you. There is, besides, a wish of mine, which isn't yet accomplished; and if I don't impart it to you, it isn't likely that telling any one else will be of any use.”

Lady Feng could not make out the sense of the words she heard. “What wish is it you have?” she inquired, “do tell me, and it will be safe enough with me.”

“You are, my dear sister-in-law, a heroine among women,” observed Mrs.

Ch'in, "so much so that those famous men, with sashes and official hats, cannot excel you; how is it that you're not aware of even a couple of lines of common adages, of that trite saying, 'when the moon is full, it begins to wane; when the waters are high, they must overflow?' and of that other which says that 'if you ascend high, heavy must be your fall.' Our family has now enjoyed splendour and prosperity for already well-nigh a century, but a day comes when at the height of good fortune, calamity arises; and if the proverb that 'when the tree falls, the monkeys scatter,' be fulfilled, will not futile have been the reputation of culture and old standing of a whole generation?"

Lady Feng at these words felt her heart heavy, and overpowered by intense awe and veneration.

"The fears you express are well founded," she urgently remarked, "but what plan is there adequate to preserve it from future injury?"

"My dear sister-in-law," rejoined Mrs. Ch'in with a sardonic smile, "you're very simple indeed! When woe has reached its climax, weal supervenes. Prosperity and adversity, from days of yore up to the present time, now pass away, and now again revive, and how can (prosperity) be perpetuated by any human exertion? But if now, we could in the time of good fortune, make provision against any worldly concerns, which might arise at any season of future adversity, we might in fact prolong and preserve it. Everything, for instance, is at present well-regulated; but there are two matters which are not on a sure footing, and if such and such suitable action could be adopted with regard to these concerns, it will, in subsequent days, be found easy to perpetuate the family welfare in its entirety."

"What matters are these?" inquired lady Feng.

"Though at the graves of our ancestors," explained Mrs. Ch'in, "sacrifices and oblations be offered at the four seasons, there's nevertheless no

page 186

fixed source of income. In the second place, the family school is, it is true, in existence; but it has no definite grants-in-aid. According to my

views, now that the times are prosperous, there's, as a matter of course, no lack of offerings and contributions; but by and by, when reverses set in, whence will these two outlays be met from? Would it not be as well, and my ideas are positive on this score, to avail ourselves of the present time, when riches and honours still reign, to establish in the immediate vicinity of our ancestral tombs, a large number of farms, cottages, and estates, in order to enable the expenditure for offerings and grants to entirely emanate from this source? And if the household school were also established on this principle, the old and young in the whole clan can, after they have, by common consent, determined upon rules, exercise in days to come control, in the order of the branches, over the affairs connected with the landed property, revenue, ancestral worship and school maintenance for the year (of their respective term.) Under this rotatory system, there will likewise be no animosities; neither will there be any mortgages, or sales, or any of these numerous malpractices; and should any one happen to incur blame, his personal effects can be confiscated by Government. But the properties, from which will be derived the funds for ancestral worship, even the officials should not be able to appropriate, so that when reverses do supervene, the sons and grandsons of the family may be able to return to their homes, and prosecute their studies, or go in for farming. Thus, while they will have something to fall back upon, the ancestral worship will, in like manner, be continued in perpetuity. But, if the present affluence and splendour be looked upon as bound to go on without intermission, and with no thought for the day to come, no enduring plan be after all devised, presently, in a little while, there will, once again, transpire a felicitous occurrence of exceptional kind, which, in point of fact, will resemble the splendour of oil scorched on a violent fire, or fresh flowers decorated with brocades. You should bear in mind that it will also be nothing more real than a transient pageant, nothing but a short-lived pleasure! Whatever you do, don't forget the proverb, that 'there's no banquet, however sumptuous, from which the guests do not disperse;' and unless you do, at an early date, take precautions against later evils, regret will, I apprehend, be of no avail."

"What felicitous occurrence will take place?" lady Feng inquired with alacrity.

"The decrees of Heaven cannot be divulged; but as I have been very

friendly with you, sister-in-law, for so long, I will present you, before I take my leave, with two lines, which it behoves you to keep in mind," rejoined Mrs. Ch'in, as she consequently proceeded to recite what follows:

*The three springs, when over, all radiance will wane;
The inmates to seek each a home will be fain.*

page 187

Lady Feng was bent upon making further inquiries, when she heard a messenger at the second gate strike the "cloudy board" four consecutive blows. It was indeed the announcement of a death; and it woke up lady Feng with a start. A servant reported that lady Jung of the eastern mansion was no more.

Lady Feng was so taken aback that a cold perspiration broke out all over her person, and she fell for a while into vacant abstraction. But she had to change her costume, with all possible haste, and to come over to madame Wang's apartments.

By this time, all the members of the family were aware of the tidings, and there was not one of them who did not feel disconsolate; one and all of them were much wounded at heart. The elder generation bethought themselves of the dutiful submission which she had all along displayed; those of the same age as herself reflected upon the friendship and intimacy which had ever existed with her; those younger than her remembered her past benevolence. Even the servants of the household, whether old or young, looked back upon her qualities of sympathy with the poor, pity of the destitute, affection for the old, and consideration for the young; and not one of them all was there who did not mourn her loss, and give way to intense grief.

But these irrelevant details need not be dilated upon; suffice it to confine ourselves to Pao Yü.

Consequent upon Lin Tai-yü's return home, he was left to his own self and felt very lonely. Neither would he go and disport himself with others; but with the daily return of dusk, he was wont to retire quietly to sleep.

On this day, while he was yet under the influence of a dream, he heard the announcement of Mrs. Ch'in's death, and turning himself round quickly he crept out of bed, when he felt as if his heart had been stabbed with a sword. With a sudden retch, he straightway expectorated a mouthful of blood, which so frightened Hsi Jen and the rest that they rushed forward and supported him.

"What is the matter?" they inquired, and they meant also to go and let dowager lady Chia know, so as to send for a doctor, but Pao Yü dissuaded them.

"There's no need of any flurry; it's nothing at all," he said, "it's simply that the fire of grief has attacked the heart, and that the blood did not circulate through the arteries."

As he spoke, he speedily raised himself up, and, after asking for his clothes and changing, he came over to see dowager lady Chia. His wish was to go at once to the other side; and Hsi Jen, though feeling

page 188

uneasy at heart, seeing the state of mind he was in, did not again hinder him, as she felt constrained to let him please himself.

When old lady Chia saw that he was bent upon going: "The breath is just gone out of the body," she consequently remonstrated, "and that side is still sullied. In the second place it's now dark, and the wind is high; so you had better wait until to-morrow morning, when you will be in ample time."

Pao Yü would not agree to this, and dowager lady Chia gave orders to get the carriage ready, and to depute a few more attendants and followers to go with him. Under this escort he went forward and straightway arrived in front of the Ning mansion, where they saw the main entrance wide open, the lamps on the two sides giving out a light as bright as day, and people coming and going in confused and large numbers; while the sound of weeping inside was sufficient to shake the mountains and to move the hills.

Pao Yü dismounted from the carriage; and with hurried step, walked into

the apartment, where the coffin was laid. He gave vent to bitter tears for a few minutes, and subsequently paid his salutations to Mrs. Yu. Mrs. Yu, as it happened, had just had a relapse of her old complaint of pains in the stomach and was lying on her bed.

He eventually came out again from her chamber to salute Chia Chen, just at the very moment that Chia Tai-ju, Chia Tai-hsiu, Chia Ch'ih, Chiao Hsiao, Chia Tun, Chia She, Chia Cheng, Chia Tsung, Chia Pin, Chia Hsing, Chia Kuang, Chia Shen, Chia Ch'iung, Chia Lin, Chia Se, Chia Ch'ang, Chia Ling, Chia Yün, Chia Ch'in, Chia Chen, Chia P'ing, Chia Tsao, Chia Heng, Chia Fen, Chia Fang, Chia Lan, Chia Chun, Chia Chih and the other relatives of the families had likewise arrived in a body.

Chia Chen wept so bitterly that he was like a man of tears. "Of the whole family, whether young or old, distant relatives or close friends," he was just explaining to Chia Tai-ju and the rest, "who did not know that this girl was a hundred times better than even our son? but now that her spirit has retired, it's evident that this elder branch of the family will be cut off and that there will be no survivor."

While he gave vent to these words, he again burst into tears, and the whole company of relatives set to work at once to pacify him. "She has already departed this life," they argued, "and tears are also of no avail, besides the pressing thing now is to consult as to what kind of arrangements are to be made."

Chia Chen clapped his hands. "What arrangements are to be made!" he exclaimed; "nothing is to be done, but what is within my means."

page 189

As they conversed, they perceived Ch'in Yeh and Ch'in Chung, as well as several relations of Mrs. Yu, arrive, together with Mrs. Yu's sisters; and Chia Chen forthwith bade Chia Ch'ung, Chia Shen, Chia Lin and Chia Se, the four of them, to go and entertain the guests; while he, at the same time, issued directions to go and ask the Astrologer of the Imperial Observatory to come and choose the days for the ceremonies.

(This Astrologer) decided that the coffin should remain in the house for seven times seven days, that is forty-nine days; that after the third day,

the mourning rites should be begun and the formal cards should be distributed; that all that was to be done during these forty-nine days was to invite one hundred and eight Buddhist bonzes to perform, in the main Hall, the High Confession Mass, in order to ford the souls of departed relatives across the abyss of suffering, and afterwards to transmute the spirit (of Mrs. Ch'in); that, in addition, an altar should be erected in the Tower of Heavenly Fragrance, where nine times nine virtuous Taoist priests should, for nineteen days, offer up prayers for absolution from punishment, and purification from retribution. That after these services, the tablet should be moved into the Garden of Concentrated Fragrance, and that in the presence of the tablet, fifteen additional eminent bonzes and fifteen renowned Taoist Priests should confront the altar and perform meritorious deeds every seven days.

The news of the death of the wife of his eldest grandson reached Chia Ching; but as he himself felt sure that, at no distant date, he would ascend to the regions above, he was loth to return again to his home, and so expose himself to the contamination of the world, as to completely waste the meritorious excellence acquired in past days. For this reason, he paid no heed to the event, but allowed Chia Chen a free hand to accomplish the necessary preparations.

Chia Chen, to whom we again revert, was fond of display and extravagance, so that he found, on inspection of coffins, those few made of pine-wood unsuitable to his taste; when, strange coincidence, Hsüeh P'an came to pay his visit of condolence, and perceiving that Chia Chen was in quest of a good coffin: "In our establishment," he readily suggested, "we have a lot of timber of some kind or other called Ch'iang wood, which comes from the T'ieh Wang Mount, in Huang Hai; and which made into coffins will not rot, not for ten thousand years. This lot was, in fact, brought down, some years back, by my late father; and had at one time been required by His Highness I Chung, a Prince of the royal blood; but as he became guilty of some mismanagement, it was, in consequence, not used, and is still lying stored up in our establishment; and another thing besides is that there's no one with the means to purchase it. But if you do want it, you should come and have a look at it."

Chia Chen, upon hearing this, was extremely delighted, and gave orders that the planks should be there and then brought over. When the whole family came to inspect them, they found those for the sides and the bottom to be all eight inches thick, the grain like betel-nut, the smell like sandal-wood or musk, while, when tapped with the hand, the sound emitted was like that of precious stones; so that one and all agreed in praising the timber for its remarkable quality.

“What is their price?” Chia Chen inquired with a smile.

“Even with one thousand taels in hand,” explained Hsüeh P'an laughingly, “I feel sure you wouldn't find any place, where you could buy the like. Why ask about price? if you just give the workmen a few taels for their labour, it will be quite sufficient.”

Chia Chen, at these words, lost no time in giving expression to profuse assurances of gratitude, and was forthwith issuing directions that the timber should be split, sawn and made up, when Chia Cheng proffered his advice. “Such articles shouldn't,” he said, “be, in my idea, enjoyed by persons of the common run; it would be quite ample if the body were placed in a coffin made of pine of the best quality.”

But Chia Chen would not listen to any suggestion.

Suddenly he further heard that Mrs. Ch'in's waiting-maid, Jui Chu by name, had, after she had become alive to the fact that her mistress had died, knocked her head against a post, and likewise succumbed to the blows. This unusual occurrence the whole clan extolled in high terms; and Chia Chen promptly directed that, with regard to ceremonies, she should be treated as a granddaughter, and that the body should, after it had been placed in the coffin, be also deposited in the Hall of Attained Immortality, in the Garden of Concentrated Fragrance.

There was likewise a young waiting-maid, called Pao Chu, who, as Mrs. Ch'in left no issue, was willing to become an adopted child, and begged to be allowed to undertake the charge of dashing the mourning bowl, and accompanying the coffin; which pleased Chia Chen so much that he speedily transmitted orders that from that time forth Pao Chu should be addressed by all as 'young miss.'

Pao Chu, after the rites of an unmarried daughter, mourned before the coffin to such an unwonted degree, as if bent upon snapping her own life; while the members of the entire clan, as well as the inmates of the Mansions, each and all, readily observed, in their conduct, the established mourning usages, without of course any transgression or confusion.

“Chia Jung,” pondered Chia Chen, “has no higher status than that of graduate by purchase, and were this designation written on the funeral

page 191

streamer, it will not be imposing, and, in point of fact, the retinue will likewise be small.” He therefore was exceedingly unhappy, in his own mind, when, as luck would have it, on this day, which was the fourth day of the first seven, Tai Ch'üan, a eunuch of the Palace of High Renown, whose office was that of Palace Overseer, first prepared sacrificial presents, which he sent round by messengers, and next came himself in an official chair, preceded by criers beating the gong, to offer sacrificial oblations.

Chia Chen promptly received him, and pressed him into a seat; and when they adjourned into the Hall of the Loitering Bees, tea was presented.

Chia Chen had already arrived at a fixed purpose, so that he seized an opportunity to tell him of his wish to purchase an office for Chia Jung's advancement.

Tai Ch'üan understood the purport of his remark. “It is, I presume,” he added smilingly, “that the funeral rites should be a little more sumptuous.”

“My worthy sir,” eagerly rejoined Chia Chen, “your surmise on that score is perfectly correct.”

“The question,” explained Tai Ch'üan, “comes up at an opportune moment; for there is just at present a good vacancy. Of the three hundred officers who at present constitute the Imperial Body Guard, there are two wanting. Yesterday marquis Hsiang Yang's third brother came to appeal

to me with one thousand five hundred taels of ready money, which he brought over to my house. You know the friendship of old standing which exists between him and me, so that, placing other considerations aside, I without a second thought, assented for his father's sake. But there still remains another vacancy, which, who would have thought it, fat general Feng, of Yung Hsing, asked to purchase for his son; but I have had no time to give him an answer. Besides, as our child wants to purchase it, you had better at once write a statement of his antecedents."

Chia Chen lost no time in bidding some one write the statement on red paper, which Tai Ch'üan found, on perusal, to record that Chia Jung was a graduate, by purchase, of the District of Chiang Ning, of the Ying T'ien Prefecture, in Chiang Nan; that Chia Tai-hua, his great grandfather, had been Commander-in-Chief of the Metropolitan Camp, and an hereditary general of the first class, with the prefix of Spiritual Majesty; that his grandfather Chia Ching was a metropolitan graduate of the tripos in the Ping Ch'en year; and that his father Chia Chen had inherited a rank of nobility of the third degree, and was a general, with the prefix of Majestic Intrepidity.

Tai Ch'üan, after perusal, turned his hand behind him and passed (the statement) to a constant attendant of his, to put away: "Go back," he

page 192

enjoined him, "and give it to His Excellency Mr. Chao, at the head of the Board of Revenue, and tell him, that I present him my compliments, and would like him to draw up a warrant for subaltern of the Imperial Body Guard of the fifth grade, and to also issue a commission; that he should take the particulars from this statement and fill them up; and that tomorrow I'll come and have the money weighed and sent over."

The young attendant signified his obedience, and Tai Ch'üan thereupon took his leave. Chia Chen did all he could to detain him, but with no success; so that he had no alternative but to escort him as far as the entrance of the Mansion. As he was about to mount into his chair, Chia Chen inquired, "As regards the money, shall I go and pay it into the Board, or am I to send it to the Board of Eunuchs?"

“If you were to go and pay it at the Board,” observed Tai Ch'üan; “you are sure to suffer loss; so that it would be better if you just weighed exactly one thousand taels and sent them over to my place; for then an end will be put to all trouble.”

Chia Chen was incessant in his expression of gratitude. “When the period of mourning has expired,” he consequently added, “I shall lead in person, my despicable eldest son to your mansion, to pay our obeisance, and express our thanks.”

They then parted company, but close upon this, were heard again the voices of runners. It was, in fact, the spouse of Shih Ting, the marquis of Chung Ching, who was just arriving. Shih Hsiang-yun, mesdames Wang, and Hsing, lady Feng and the rest came out at once, to greet her, and lead her into the Main Building; when they further saw the sacrificial presents of the three families, of the marquis of Chin Hsiang, the marquis of Ch'uan Ning, and the earl of Shou Shan, likewise spread out in front of the tablet.

In a short while, these three noblemen descended from their chairs, and Chia Chen received them in the Large Hall. In like manner all the relatives and friends arrived in such quick succession, one coming, another going, that it is impossible to remember even so much as their number. One thing need be said that during these forty-nine days the street on which the Ning Kuo mansion stood, was covered with a sheet of white, formed by the people, coming and going; and thronged with clusters of flowers, as the officials came and went.

At the instance of Chia Chen, Chia Jung, the next day donned his gala dress and went over for his papers; and on his return the articles in use in front of the coffin, as well as those belonging to the cortege and other such things, were all regulated by the rules prescribed for an official status of the fifth degree; while, on the tablet and notice alike the inscription consisted

page 193

of: Spirit of lady Ch'in, (by marriage) of the Chia mansion, and by patent a lady of the fifth rank (of the titles of honour).

The main entrance of the Garden of Concentrated Fragrance, adjoining the street, was opened wide; and on both sides were raised sheds for the musicians, and two companies of players, dressed in blue, discoursed music at the proper times; while one pair after another of the paraphernalia was drawn out so straight as if cut by a knife or slit by an axe. There were also two large carmine boards, carved with gilt inscriptions, erected outside the gate; the designations in bold characters on the upper sides being: Guard of the Imperial Antechamber, charged with the protection of the Inner Palace and Roads, in the Red Prohibited City.

On the opposite side, facing each other, rose, high above the ground, two altars for the services of the Buddhist and Taoist priests, while a placard bore the inscription in bold type: Funeral Obsequies of lady Ch'in, (by marriage) of the Chia mansion, by patent a lady of the fifth rank, consort of the eldest grandson of the hereditary duke of Ning Kuo, and guard of the Imperial Antechamber, charged with the protection of the Inner Palace and Roads in the Red Prohibited City. We, Wan Hsü, by Heaven's commands charged with the perennial preservation of perfect peace in the Kingdom of the Four Continents, as well as of the lands contained therein, Head Controller of the School of Void and Asceticism, and Superior in Chief (of the Buddhist hierarchy); and Yeh Sheng, Principal Controller, since the creation, of the Disciples of Perfect Excellence and Superior in Chief (of the Taoist priesthood), and others, having in a reverent spirit purified ourselves by abstinence, now raise our eyes up to Heaven, prostrate ourselves humbly before Buddha, and devoutly pray all the Chia Lans, Chieh Tis, Kung Ts'aos and other divinities to extend their sacred bounties, and from afar to display their spiritual majesty, during the forty-nine days (of the funeral rites), for the deliverance from judgment and the absolution from retribution (of the spirit of lady Ch'in), so that it may enjoy a peaceful and safe passage, whether by sea or by land; and other such prayers to this effect, which are in fact not worth the trouble of putting on record.

Chia Chen had, it is true, all his wishes gratified; but, as his wife was laid up in the inner chambers, with a relapse of her old complaint, and was not in a fit state to undertake the direction of the ceremonies, he was very much distressed lest, when the high officials (and their wives) came and

went, there should occur any breach of the prescribed conventionalities, which he was afraid would evoke ridicule. Hence it was that he felt in low spirits; but while he was plunged in solicitude Pao Yü, who happened to be close by, readily inquired, "Everything may be safely looked upon as being satisfactorily

page 194

settled, and why need you, elder brother, still be so full of concern?"

Chia Chen forthwith explained to him how it was that in the ladies' apartments there was no one (to do the honours), but Pao Yü at these words smiled: "What difficulty is there about it?" he remarked; "I'll recommend some one to take temporary charge of the direction of things for you during the month, and I can guarantee that everything will be properly carried out."

"Who is it?" Chia Chen was quick to ask; but as Pao Yü perceived that there were still too many relatives and friends seated around, he did not feel as if he could very well speak out; so that he went up to Chia Chen and whispered a couple of remarks in his ear.

Chia Chen's joy knew no bounds when he heard this suggestion. "Everything will indeed be properly carried out," he added laughingly; "but I must now be going at once."

With these words, he drew Pao Yü along, and taking leave of the whole number of visitors, they forthwith came into the drawing rooms.

This day was luckily not a grand occasion, so that few relatives and friends had come. In the inner apartments there were only a small number of ladies of close kinship. Mesdames Hsing and Wang, and lady Feng, and the women of the whole household, were entertaining the guests, when they heard a servant announce that Mr. Chia Chen had come. (This announcement) took the whole body of ladies and young ladies so much by surprise, that, with a rushing sound, they tried to hide in the back rooms; but they were not quick enough (to effect their escape).

Lady Feng alone composedly stood up. Chia Chen was himself at this

time rather unwell, and being also very much cut up, he entered the room shuffling along, propping himself up with a staff.

“You are not well?” therefore remarked madame Hsing and the others, “and you've had besides so much to attend to during these consecutive days, that what you require is rest to get all right; and why do you again come over?”

Chia Chen was, as he leant on his staff, straining every nerve to bend his body so as to fall on his knees and pay his respects to them, and express his sense of obligation for the trouble they had taken, when madame Hsing and the other ladies hastily called Pao Yü to raise him up, bidding a servant move a chair for him to sit on. Chia Chen would not take a seat; but making an effort to return a smile, “Your nephew,” he urged, “has come over, as there's a favour that I want to ask of my two aunts as well as of my eldest cousin.”

“What is it?” promptly inquired madame Hsing and the rest.

page 195

“My aunts,” Chia Chen replied with all haste, “you surely are aware that your grandson's wife is now no more; your nephew's wife is also laid up unwell, and, as I see that things in the inner apartments are really not what they should properly be, I would trouble my worthy eldest cousin to undertake in here the direction of affairs for a month; and if she does, my mind will be set at ease.”

Madame Hsing smiled. “Is it really about this that you've come?” she asked; “your eldest cousin is at present staying with your aunt Secunda, and all you have to do is to speak to her and it will be all right.”

“How ever could a mere child like her,” speedily remonstrated madame Wang, “carry out all these matters? and shouldn't she manage things properly, she will, on the contrary, make people laugh, so it would therefore be better that you should trouble some one else.”

“What your ideas are, aunt,” rejoined Chia Chen smiling, “your nephew has guessed; you're afraid lest my eldest cousin should have to bear

fatigue and annoyance; for as to what you say, that she cannot manage things, why my eldest cousin has, from her youth up, ever been in her romping and playing so firm and decided; and now that she has entered the married estate, and has the run of affairs in that mansion, she must have reaped so much the more experience, and have become quite an old hand! I've been thinking these last few days that outside my eldest cousin, there's no one else who could come to my help; and, aunt, if you don't do it for the face of your nephew and your nephew's wife, do it, at least, for the affection you bore to her who is no more."

While he uttered these words tears trickled down his face. The fears that madame Wang inwardly entertained were that lady Feng had no experience in funeral matters, and she apprehended, that if she was not equal to managing them, she would incur the ridicule of others; but when she now heard Chia Chen make the appeal in such a disconsolate mood, she relented considerably in her resolution. But as she turned her eyes towards lady Feng (to ascertain her wishes), she saw that she was plunged in abstraction.

Lady Feng had all along found the greatest zest in taking the initiative in everything, with the idea of making a display of her abilities, so that when she perceived how earnest Chia Chen was in his entreaties, she had, at an early period, made up her mind to give a favourable reply. Seeing besides madame Wang show signs of relenting, she readily turned round and said to her, "My elder cousin has made his appeal in such a solicitous way that your ladyship should give your consent and have done with it."

"Do you think you are equal to the task?" inquired madame Wang in a whisper.

page 196

"What's there that I couldn't be equal to?" replied lady Feng; "for urgent matters outside, my cousin may be said to have already made full provision; and all there is to be done is to keep an eye over things inside. But should there occur anything that I don't know, I can ask you, madame, and it will be right."

Madame Wang perceiving the reasonableness of what she heard her say, uttered not a word, and when Chia Chen saw that lady Feng had assented; "How much you do attend to I don't mind," he observed, forcing another smile, "but I must, in any case, entreat you, cousin, to assume the onerous charge. As a first step I'll pay my obeisance to you in here, and when everything has been finished, I shall then come over into that mansion to express my thanks."

With these words still on his lips, he made a low bow, but lady Feng had scarcely had time to return the compliment, before Chia Chen had directed a servant to fetch the warrant of the Ning mansion, which he bade Pao Yü hand over to lady Feng.

"Cousin," he added, "take whatever steps you think best; and if you want anything, all you have to do is to simply send for it with this, and there will even be no use to consult me. The only thing I must ask you is, not to be too careful in order to save me expense, for the main consideration is that things should be handsomely done. In the second place, it will be well if you were also to treat servants here in the same way as in the other mansion, and not be too scrupulous in the fear that any one might take offence. Outside these two concerns, there's nothing else to disturb my mind."

Lady Feng did not venture to take over the warrant at once, but merely turned round to ascertain what were madame Wang's wishes.

"In view of the reason brother Chen advances," madame Wang rejoined, "you had better assume the charge at once and finish with it; don't, however, act on your own ideas; but when there's aught to be done, be careful and send some one to consult your cousin's wife, ever so little though it be on the subject."

Pao Yü had already taken over the warrant from Chia Chen's grasp, and forcibly handed it to lady Feng, "Will you, cousin," he went on to question, "take up your quarters here or will you come every day? should you cross over, day after day, it will be ever so much more fatiguing for you, so that I shall speedily have a separate court got ready for you in here, where you, cousin, can put up for these several days and be more comfortable."

"There's no need," replied lady Feng smiling; "for on that side they can't

do without me; and it will be better if I were to come daily.”

page 197

“Do as you like,” Chia Chen observed; and after subsequently passing a few more irrelevant remarks, he at length left the room.

After a time, the lady relatives dispersed, and madame Wang seized the opportunity to inquire of lady Feng, “What do you purpose doing to-day?”

“You had better, please madame, go back,” urged lady Feng, “for I must first of all find out some clue before I can go home.”

Madame Wang, upon hearing these words, returned to her quarters, in advance, in company with madame Hsing, where we will leave them.

Lady Feng meanwhile came into a colonnade, which enclosed a suite of three apartments, and taking a seat, she gave way to reflection. “The first consideration,” she communed within herself, “is that the household is made up of mixed elements, and things might be lost; the second is that the preparations are under no particular control, with the result that, when the time comes, the servants might shirk their duties; the third is that the necessary expenditure being great, there will be reckless disbursements and counterfeit receipts; the fourth, that with the absence of any distinction in the matter of duties, whether large or small, hardship and ease will be unequally shared; and the fifth, that the servants being arrogant, through leniency, those with any self-respect will not brook control, while those devoid of 'face' will not be able to improve their ways.”

These five were, in point of fact, usages in vogue in the Ning mansion. But as you are unable, reader, to ascertain here how lady Feng set things right, listen to the explanations given in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XIV.

*Lin Ju-hai dies in the City of Yang Chou.
Chia Pao-yü meets the Prince of Pei Ching on the way.*

When Lai Sheng, be it noticed in continuing our story, the major-domo in the Ning Kuo mansion, came to hear that from inside an invitation had been extended to lady Feng to act as deputy, he summoned together his co-workers and other servants. "Lady Secunda, of the western mansion," he harangued them, "has now been asked to take over the control of internal affairs; and should she come we must, when we apply for anything, or have anything to say, be circumspect in our service; we should all every day come early and leave late; and it's better that we should exert ourselves during this one month and take rest after it's over. We mustn't throw away our old 'face,' for she's well known to be an impetuous thing, with a soured face and a hard heart, who, when angry, knows no distinction of persons."

page 198

The whole company unanimously admitted that he was right; and one of their number too observed smilingly, "It's but right that for the inner apartments, we should, in fact, get her to come and put things in proper order, as everything is very much what it should not be."

But while he uttered these words, they saw Lai Wang's wife coming, with an indent in hand, to fetch paper for the supplications and prayers, the amount of which was mentioned on the order; and they one and all hastened to press her into a seat, and to help her to a cup of tea; while a servant was told to fetch the quantity of paper required. (When it was brought,) Lai Wang carried it in his arms and came, the whole way with his wife, as far as the ceremonial gate; when he, at length, delivered it over to her and she clasped it, and walked into the room all alone.

Lady Feng issued prompt directions to Ts'ai Ming to prepare a register; and sending, there and then, for Lai Sheng's wife, she asked her to submit, for her perusal, the roll with the servants' names. She furthermore fixed upon an early hour of the following day to convene the domestics and their wives in the mansion, in order that they should

receive their orders; but, after cursorily glancing over the number of entries in the list, and making a few inquiries of Lai Sheng's wife, she soon got into her curricula, and went home.

On the next day, at six and two quarters, she speedily came over. The matrons and married women of the Ning Kuo mansion assembled together, as soon as they heard of her arrival; but, perceiving lady Feng, assisted by Lai Sheng's wife, engaged in apportioning the duties of each servant, they could not presume to intrude, but remained outside the window listening to what was going on.

“As I've been asked to take over the charge,” they heard lady Feng explain to Lai Sheng's wife, “I'm, needless to say, sure to incur the displeasure of you all, for I can't compare with your mistress, who has such a sweet temper, and allows you to have your own way. But saying nothing more of those ways, which prevailed hitherto among your people in this mansion, you must now do as I tell you; for on the slightest disregard of my orders, I shall, with no discrimination between those who may be respectable and those who may not be, clearly and distinctly call all alike to account.”

Having concluded these remarks, she went on to order Ts'ai Ming to read the roll; and, as their names were uttered, one by one was called in, and passed under inspection. After this inspection, which was got over in a short time, she continued giving further directions. “These twenty,” she said “should be divided into two companies; ten in each company, whose sole daily duties should be to attend inside to the guests, coming and

page 199

going, and to serve tea for them; while with any other matters, they needn't have anything to do. These other twenty should also be divided into two companies, whose exclusive duties will be, day after day, to look after the tea and eatables of the relatives of our family; and these too will have no business to concern themselves with outside matters. These forty will again be divided into two companies, who will have nothing else to look to than to remain in front of the coffin and offer incense, renew the oil, hang up the streamers, watch the coffin, offer sacrifices of rice, and oblations of tea, and mourn with the mourners; and neither need they

mind anything outside these duties. These four servants will be specially attached to the inner tea-rooms to look after cups, saucers and the tea articles generally; and in the event of the loss of any single thing, the four of them will have to make it good between them. These other four servants will have the sole charge of the articles required for eatables and wine; and should any get mislaid compensation will have likewise to be made by them. These eight servants will only have to attend to taking over the sacrificial offerings; while these eight will have nothing more to see to beyond keeping an eye over the lamps, oil, candles and paper wanted everywhere. I'll have a whole supply served out and handed to you eight to by and by apportion to the various places, in quantities which I will determine. These thirty servants are each day, by rotation, to keep watch everywhere during the night, looking after the gates and windows, taking care of the fires and candles, and sweeping the grounds; while the servants, who remain, are to be divided for duty in the houses and rooms, each one having charge of a particular spot. And beginning from the tables, chairs and curios in each place, up to the very cuspidors and brooms, yea even to each blade of grass or sprout of herb, which may be there, the servants looking after this part will be called upon to make good anything that may be either mislaid or damaged. You, Lai Sheng's wife, will every day have to exercise general supervision and inspection; and should there be those who be lazy, any who may gamble, drink, fight or wrangle, come at once and report the matter to me; and you mustn't show any leniency, for if I come to find it out, I shall have no regard to the good old name of three or four generations, which you may enjoy. You now all have your fixed duties, so that whatever batch of you after this acts contrary to these orders, I shall simply have something to say to that batch and to no one else. The servants, who have all along been in my service, carry watches on their persons, and things, whether large or small, are invariably done at a fixed time. But, in any case, you also have clocks in your master's rooms, so that at 6.30, I shall come and read the roll, and at ten you'll have breakfast. Whenever there is any indent of any permits to be made or any report to be submitted, it should be done at 11.30 a.m. and no later. At 7 p.m., after the evening paper has been burnt, I shall come to each place

in person to hold an inspection; and on my return, the servants on watch

for the night will hand over the keys. The next day, I shall again come over at 6.30 in the morning; and needless to say we must all do the best we can for these few days; and when the work has been finished your master is sure to recompense you.”

When she had done speaking, she went on to give orders that tea, oil, candles, feather dusters, brooms and other necessaries should be issued, according to the fixed quantities. She also had furniture, such as table-covers, antimacassars, cushions, rugs, cuspidors, stools and the like brought over and distributed; while, at the same time, she took up the pencil and made a note of the names of the persons in charge of the various departments, and of the articles taken over by the respective servants, in entries remarkable for the utmost perspicacity.

The whole body of servants received their charge and left; but they all had work to go and attend to; not as in former times, when they were at liberty to select for themselves what was convenient to do, while the arduous work, which remained over, no one could be found to take in hand. Neither was it possible for them in the various establishments to any longer avail themselves of the confusion to carelessly mislay things. In fact, visitors came and guests left, but everything after all went off quietly, unlike the disorderly way which prevailed hitherto, when there was no clue to the ravel; and all such abuses as indolence, and losses, and the like were completely eradicated.

Lady Feng, on her part, (perceiving) the weight her influence had in enjoining the observance of her directions, was in her heart exceedingly delighted. But as she saw, that Chia Chen was, in consequence of Mrs. Yu's indisposition, even so much the more grieved as to take very little to drink or to eat, she daily, with her own hands, prepared, in the other mansion, every kind of fine congee and luscious small dishes, which she sent over, in order that he might be tempted to eat.

And Chia Lien had likewise given additional directions that every day the finest delicacies should be taken into the ante-chamber, for the exclusive use of lady Feng.

Lady Feng was not one to shirk exertion and fatigue, so that, day after day, she came over at the proper time, called the roll, and managed

business, sitting all alone in the ante-chamber, and not congregating with the whole bevy of sisters-in-law. Indeed, even when relatives or visitors came or went, she did not go to receive them, or see them off.

This day was the thirty-fifth day, the very day of the fifth seven, and the whole company of bonzes had just (commenced the services) for unclosing

page 201

the earth, and breaking Hell open; for sending a light to show the way to the departed spirit; for its being admitted to an audience by the king of Hell; for arresting all the malicious devils, as well as for soliciting the soul-saving Buddha to open the golden bridge and to lead the way with streamers. The Taoist priests were engaged in reverently reading the prayers; in worshipping the Three Pure Ones and in prostrating themselves before the Gemmy Lord. The disciples of abstraction were burning incense, in order to release the hungered spirits, and were reading the water regrets manual. There was also a company of twelve nuns of tender years, got up in embroidered dresses, and wearing red shoes, who stood before the coffin, silently reading all the incantations for the reception of the spirit (from the lower regions,) with the result that the utmost bustle and stir prevailed.

Lady Feng, well aware that not a few guests would call on this day, was quick to get out of bed at four sharp, to dress her hair and perform her ablutions. After having completed every arrangement for the day, she changed her costume, washed her hands, and swallowed a couple of mouthfuls of milk. By the time she had rinsed her mouth, it was exactly 6.30; and Lai Wang's wife, at the head of a company of servants, had been waiting a good long while, when lady Feng appeared in front of the Entrance Hall, mounted her carriage and betook herself, preceded by a pair of transparent horn lanterns, on which were written, in large type, the three characters, Jung Kuo mansion, to the main entrance gate of the Ning Household. The door lanterns shed brilliant rays from where they were suspended; while on either side the lanterns, of uniform colours, propped upright, emitted a lustrous light as bright as day.

The servants of the family, got up in their mourning clothes, covered the

ground far and wide like a white sheet. They stood drawn in two rows, and requested that the carriage should drive up to the main entrance. The youths retired, and all the married women came forward, and raising the curtain of the carriage, lady Feng alighted; and as with one arm she supported herself on Feng Erh, two married women, with lanterns in their hands, lighted the way. Pressed round by the servants, lady Feng made her entry. The married women of the Ning mansion advanced to greet her, and to pay their respects; and this over, lady Feng, with graceful bearing, entered the Garden of Concentrated Fragrance. Ascending the Spirit Hall, where the tablet was laid, the tears, as soon as she caught sight of the coffin, trickled down her eyes like pearls whose string had snapped; while the youths in the court, and their number was not small, stood in a reverent posture, with their arms against their sides, waiting to burn the paper. Lady Feng uttered one remark, by way of command: "Offer the tea and

page 202

burn the paper!" when the sound of two blows on the gong was heard and the whole band struck up together. A servant had at an early period placed a large armchair in front of the tablet, and lady Feng sat down, and gave way to loud lamentations. Promptly all those, who stood inside or outside, whether high or low, male or female, took up the note, and kept on wailing and weeping until Chia Chen and Mrs. Yu, after a time, sent a message to advise her to withhold her tears; when at length lady Feng desisted.

Lai Wang's wife served the tea; and when she had finished rinsing her mouth, lady Feng got up; and, taking leave of all the members of the clan, she walked all alone into the ante-chamber, where she ascertained, in the order of their names, the number of the servants of every denomination in there. They were all found to be present, with the exception of one, who had failed to appear, whose duties consisted in receiving and escorting the relatives and visitors. Orders were promptly given to summon him, and the man appeared in a dreadful fright. "What!" exclaimed lady Feng, as she forced a smile, "is it you who have been remiss? Is it because you're more respectable than they that you don't choose to listen to my words?"

“Your servant,” he pleaded, “has come at an early hour every day; and it's only to-day that I come late by one step; and I entreat your ladyship to forgive this my first offence.”

While yet he spoke, she perceived the wife of Wang Hsing, of the Jung Kuo mansion, come forward and pop her head in to see what was going on; but lady Feng did not let this man go, but went on to inquire of Wang Hsing's wife what she had come for.

Wang Hsing's wife drew near. “I've come,” she explained, “to get an order, so as to obtain some thread to make tassels for the carriages and chairs.” Saying this, she produced the permit and handed it up, whereupon lady Feng directed Ts'ai Ming to read the contents aloud. “For two large, sedan chairs,” he said, “four small sedan chairs and four carriages, are needed in all so many large and small tassels, each tassel requiring so many caddies of beads and thread.”

Lady Feng finding, after she had heard what was read, that the numbers (and quantities) corresponded, forthwith bade Ts'ai Ming make the proper entry; and when the order from the Jung Kuo mansion had been fetched, and thrown at her, Wang Hsing's wife took her departure.

Lady Feng was on the very point of saying something, when she espied four managers of the Jung Kuo mansion walk in; all of whom wanted permits to indent for stores. Having asked them to read out the list of

page 203

what they required, she ascertained that they wanted four kinds of articles in all. Drawing attention to two items: “These entries,” she remarked, “are wrong; and you had better go again and make out the account clearly, and then come and fetch a permit.”

With these words, she flung down the requisitions, and the two men went their way in lower spirits than when they had come.

Lady Feng then caught sight of the wife of Chang Ts'ai standing by, and asked her what was her business, whereupon Chang Ts'ai's wife promptly produced an indent. “The covers of the carriages and sedan chairs,” she reported, “have just been completed, and I've come to fetch

the amount due to the tailors for wages.”

Lady Feng, upon hearing her explanation, took over the indent, and directed Ts'ai Ming to enter the items in the book. After Wang Hsing had handed over the money, and obtained the receipt of the accountant, duly signed, which tallied with the payment, he subsequently walked away in company with Chang Ts'ai's wife. Lady Feng simultaneously proceeded to give orders that another indent should be read, which was for money to purchase paper with to paste on the windows of Pao-yü's outer school-room, the repairs to which had been brought to completion, and as soon as lady Feng heard the nature of the application, she there and then gave directions that the permit should be taken over and an entry made, and that the money should be issued after Chang Ts'ai's wife had delivered everything clearly.

“If to-morrow he were to come late,” lady Feng then remarked, “and if the day after, I were to come late; why by and by there'll be no one here at all! I should have liked to have let you off, but if I be lenient with you on this first instance, it will be hard for me, on the occurrence of another offence, to exercise any control over the rest. It's much better therefore that I should settle accounts with you.”

The moment she uttered these words, she put on a serious look, and gave orders that he should be taken out and administered twenty blows with the bamboo. When the servants perceived that lady Feng was in an angry mood, they did not venture to dilly-dally, but dragged him out, and gave him the full number of blows; which done, they came in to report that the punishment had been inflicted.

Lady Feng likewise threw down the Ning Mansion order and exclaimed, addressing herself to Lai Sheng: “Cut him a month's wages and rice! and tell them all to disperse, and have done with it!”

All the servants at length withdrew to attend to their respective duties, while the man too, who had been flogged, walked away, as he did all

he could to conceal his shame and stifle his tears. About this time arrived

and went, in an incessant stream, servants from both the Jung and Ning mansions, bent upon applying for permits and returning permits, and with one by one again did lady Feng settle accounts. And, as in due course, the inmates of the Ning mansion came to know how terrible lady Feng was, each and all were ever since so wary and dutiful that they did not venture to be lazy.

But without going into further details on this subject, we shall now return to Pao-yü. Seeing that there were a lot of people about and fearing lest Ch'in Chung might receive some offence, he lost no time in coming along with him to sit over at lady Feng's. Lady Feng was just having her repast, and upon seeing them arrive: "Your legs are long enough, and couldn't you have come somewhat quicker!" she laughingly observed.

"We've had our rice, thanks," replied Pao-yü.

"Have you had it," inquired lady Feng, "outside here, or over on the other side?"

"Would we eat anything with all that riff-raff?" exclaimed Pao-yü; "we've really had it over there; in fact, I now come after having had mine with dowager lady Chia."

As he uttered these words, they took their seats. Lady Feng had just finished her meal, when a married woman from the Ning mansion came to get an order to obtain an advance of money to purchase incense and lanterns with.

"I calculated," observed lady Feng, "that you would come to-day to make requisition, but I was under the impression that you had forgotten; had you really done so you would certainly have had to get them on your own account, and I would have been the one to benefit."

"Didn't I forget? I did," rejoined the married woman as she smiled; "and it's only a few minutes back that it came to my mind; had I been one second later I wouldn't have been in time to get the things."

These words ended, she took over the order and went off. Entries had, at the time to be made in the books, and orders to be issued, and Ch'in

Chung was induced to interpose with a smirk, "In both these mansions of yours, such orders are alike in use; but were any outsider stealthily to counterfeit one and to abscond, after getting the money, what could ever be done?"

"In what you say," replied lady Feng, "you take no account of the laws of the land."

"How is it that from our house, no one comes to get any orders or to obtain anything?" Pao-yü having inquired: "At the time they come to

page 205

fetch them," rejoined lady Feng, "you're still dreaming; but let me ask you one thing, when will you two at last begin your evening course of studies?"

"Oh, I wish we were able to begin our studies this very day," Pao-yü added; "that would be the best thing, but they're very slow in putting the school-room in order, so that there's no help for it!"

Lady Feng laughed. "Had you asked me," she remarked, "I can assure you it would have been ready quick enough."

"You too would have been of no use," observed Pao-yü, "for it will certainly be ready by the time they ought to finish it in."

"But in order that they should do the work," suggested lady Feng, "it's also necessary that they should have the material, they can't do without them; and if I don't give them any permits, it will be difficult to obtain them."

Pao-yü at these words readily drew near to lady Feng, and there and then applied for the permits. "My dear sister," he added, "do give them the permits to enable them to obtain the material and effect the repairs."

"I feel quite sore from fatigue," ventured lady Feng, "and how can I stand your rubbing against me? but compose your mind. They have this very day got the paper, and gone to paste it; and would they, for whatever they need, have still waited until they had been sent for? they are not

such fools after all!”

Pao-yü would not believe it, and lady Feng at once called Ts'ai Ming to look up the list, which she handed for Pao-yü's inspection; but while they were arguing a servant came in to announce that Chao Erh, who had gone to Su Chow, had returned, and lady Feng all in a flurry directed that he should be asked to walk in. Chao Erh bent one knee and paid his obeisance.

“Why have you come back?” lady Feng readily inquired.

“Mr. Secundus (Chia Lien),” he reported, “sent me back to tell you that Mr. Lin (our dowager lady's) son-in-law, died on the third of the ninth moon; that Master Secundus is taking Miss Lin along with him to escort the coffin of Mr. Lin as far as Su Chow; and that they hope to be back some time about the end of the year. Master despatched me to come and announce the news, to bring his compliments, and to crave our old lady's instructions as well as to see how you are getting on in my lady's home. He also bade me take back to him a few long fur pelisses.”

“Have you seen any one else besides me?” lady Feng inquired.

“I've seen every one,” rejoined Chao Erh; and withdrew hastily at the conclusion of this remark, out of the apartment, while lady Feng turned towards Pao-yü with a smile and said, “Your cousin Lin can now live in our house for ever.”

page 206

“Poor thing!” exclaimed Pao-yü. “I presume that during all these days she has wept who knows how much;” and saying this he wrinkled his brow and heaved a deep sigh.

Lady Feng saw Chao Erh on his return, but as she could not very well, in the presence of third persons, make minute inquiries after Chia Lien, she had to continue a prey to inward solicitude till it was time to go home, for, not having got through what she had to do, she was compelled to wait patiently until she went back in the evening, when she again sent word for Chao Erh to come in, and asked him with all minuteness whether the

journey had been pleasant throughout, and for full particulars. That very night, she got in readiness the long pelisses, which she herself, with the assistance of P'ing Erh, packed up in a bundle; and after careful thought as to what things he would require, she put them in the same bundle and committed them to Chao Erh's care. She went on to solicitously impress upon Chao Erh to be careful in his attendance abroad. "Don't provoke your master to wrath," she said, "and from time to time do advise him not to drink too much wine; and don't entice him to make the acquaintance of any low people; for if you do, when you come back I will cut your leg off."

The preparations were hurriedly and confusedly completed; and it was already the fourth watch of the night when she went to sleep. But soon again the day dawned, and after hastily performing her toilette and ablutions, she came over to the Ning Mansion.

As Chia Chen realised that the day for escorting the body away was drawing nigh, he in person went out in a curricule, along with geomancers, to the Temple of the Iron Fence to inspect a suitable place for depositing the coffin. He also, point by point, enjoined the resident managing-bonze, Se K'ung, to mind and get ready brand-new articles of decoration and furniture, and to invite a considerable number of bonzes of note to be at hand to lend their services for the reception of the coffin.

Se K'ung lost no time in getting ready the evening meal, but Chia Chen had, in fact, no wish for any tea or rice; and, as the day was far advanced and he was not in time to enter the city, he had, after all, to rest during that night as best he could in a "chaste" room in the temple. The next morning, as soon as it was day, he hastened to come into the city and to make every preparation for the funeral. He likewise deputed messengers to proceed ahead to the Temple of the Iron Fence to give, that very night, additional decorative touches to the place where the coffin was to be deposited, and to get ready tea and all the other necessaries, for the use of the persons who would be present at the reception of the coffin.

Lady Feng, seeing that the day was not far distant, also apportioned duties and made provision for everything beforehand with circumspect

care; while at the same time she chose in the Jung mansion, such carriages, sedan chairs and retinue as were to accompany the cortege, in attendance upon madame Wang, and gave her mind furthermore to finding a place where she herself could put up in at the time of the funeral. About this very time, it happened that the consort of the Duke Shan Kuo departed this life, and that mesdames Wang and Hsing had likewise to go and offer sacrifices, and to follow the burial procession; that the birthday occurred of the consort of Prince Hsi An; that presents had to be forwarded on the occasion of this anniversary; and that the consort of the Duke of Chen Kuo gave birth to a first child, a son, and congratulatory gifts had, in like manner, to be provided. Besides, her uterine brother Wang Jen was about to return south, with all his family, and she had too to write her home letters, to send her reverent compliments to her father and mother, as well as to get the things ready that were to be taken along. There was also Ying Ch'un, who had contracted some illness, and the doctor had every day to be sent for, and medicines to be administered, the notes of the doctor to be looked after, consisting of the bulletins of the diagnosis and the prescriptions, with the result that the various things that had to be attended to by lady Feng were so manifold that it would, indeed, be difficult to give an exhaustive idea of them.

In addition to all this, the day for taking the coffin away was close at hand, so that lady Feng was so hard pressed for time that she had even no desire for any tea to drink or anything to eat, and that she could not sit or rest in peace. As soon as she put her foot into the Ning mansion, the inmates of the Jung mansion would follow close upon her heels; and the moment she got back into the Jung mansion, the servants again of the Ning mansion would follow her about. In spite however of this great pressure, lady Feng, whose natural disposition had ever been to try and excel, was urged to strain the least of her energies, as her sole dread was lest she should incur unfavourable criticism from any one; and so excellent were the plans she devised, that every one in the clan, whether high or low, readily conceded her unlimited praise.

On the night of this day, the body had to be watched, and in the inner suite of apartments two companies of young players as well as jugglers entertained the relatives, friends and other visitors during the whole of the night. Mrs. Yu was still laid up in the inside room, so that the whole task

of attending to and entertaining the company devolved upon lady Feng alone, who had to look after everything; for though there were, in the whole clan, many sisters-in-law, some there were too bashful to speak, others too timid to stand on their feet; while there were also those who were not accustomed to meeting company; and those likewise who were afraid of people of high estate and shy of officials. Of every kind there were, but the

page 208

whole number of them could not come up to lady Feng's standard, whose deportment was correct and whose speech was according to rule. Hence it was that she did not even so much as heed any of that large company, but gave directions and issued orders, adopting any course of action which she fancied, just as if there were no bystander.

The whole night, the lanterns emitted a bright light and the fires brilliant rays; while guests were escorted on their way out and officials greeted on their way in; but of this hundredfold bustle and stir nothing need, of course, be said.

The next morning at the dawn of day, and at a propitious moment, sixty-four persons, dressed all alike in blue, carried the coffin, preceded by a streamer with the record in large characters: Coffin of lady Ch'in, a lady of the fifth degree, (by marriage) of the Chia mansion, deceased at middle age, consort of the grandson of the Ning Kuo Duke with the first rank title of honour, (whose status is) a guard of the Imperial antechamber, charged with the protection of the Inner Palace and Roads in the Red Prohibited City.

The various paraphernalia and ornaments were all brand-new, hurriedly made for the present occasion, and the uniform lustrous brilliancy they shed was sufficient to dazzle the eyes.

Pao-chu, of course, observed the rites prescribed for unmarried daughters, and dashed the bowl and walked by the coffin, as she gave way to most bitter lamentations.

At that time, among the officials who escorted the funeral procession,

were Niu Chi-tsung, the grandson of the Chen Kuo duke, who had now inherited the status of earl of the first degree; Liu Fang, the grandson of Liu Piao, duke of Li Kuo, who had recently inherited the rank of viscount of the first class; Ch'en Jui-wen, a grandson of Ch'en Yi, duke of Ch'i Kuo, who held the hereditary rank of general of the third degree, with the prefix of majestic authority; Ma Shang, the grandson of Ma K'uei, duke of Chih Kuo, by inheritance general of the third rank with the prefix of majesty afar; Hou Hsiao-keng, an hereditary viscount of the first degree, grandson of the duke of Hsiu Kuo, Hou Hsiao-ming by name; while the death of the consort of the duke of Shan Kuo had obliged his grandson Shih Kuang-chu to go into mourning so that he could not be present. These were the six families which had, along with the two households of Jung and Ning, been, at one time, designated the eight dukes.

Among the rest, there were besides the grandson of the Prince of Nan An; the grandson of the Prince of Hsi An; Shih Ting, marquis of Chung Ching; Chiang Tzu-ning, an hereditary baron of the second grade, grandson of the earl of P'ing Yuan; Hsieh K'un, an hereditary baron of the second order and Captain of the Metropolitan camp, grandson of the marquis of

page 209

Ting Ch'ang; Hsi Chien-hui, an hereditary baron of the second rank, a grandson of the marquis of Nang Yang; Ch'in Liang, in command of the Five Cities, grandson of the marquis of Ching T'ien. The remainder were Wei Chi, the son of the earl of Chin Hsiang; Feng Tzu-ying, the son of a general, whose prefix was supernatural martial spirit; Ch'en Yeh-chün, Wei Jo-lan and others, grandsons and sons of princes who could not be enumerated.

In the way of ladies, there were also in all about ten large official sedan chairs full of them, thirty or forty private chairs, and including the official and non-official chairs, and carriages containing inmates of the household, there must have been over a hundred and ten; so that with the various kinds of paraphernalia, articles of decoration and hundreds of nick-nacks, which preceded, the vast expanse of the cortege covered a continuous line extending over three or four li.

They had not been very long on their way, when they reached variegated sheds soaring high by the roadside, in which banquets were spread, feasts laid out, and music discoursed in unison. These were the viatory sacrificial offerings contributed by the respective families. The first shed contained the sacrificial donations of the mansion of the Prince of Tung P'ing; the second shed those of the Prince of Nan An; the third those of the Prince of Hsi Ning, and the fourth those of the Prince of Pei Ching.

Indeed of these four Princes, the reputation enjoyed in former days by the Prince of Pei Ching had been the most exalted, and to this day his sons and grandsons still succeeded to the inheritance of the princely dignity. The present incumbent of the Principedom of Pei Ching, Shih Jung, had not as yet come of age, but he was gifted with a presence of exceptional beauty, and with a disposition condescending and genial. At the demise, recently, of the consort of the eldest grandson of the mansion of Ning Kuo, he, in consideration of the friendship which had formerly existed between the two grandfathers, by virtue of which they had been inseparable, both in adversity as well as in prosperity, treating each other as if they had not been of different surnames, was consequently induced to pay no regard to princely dignity or to his importance, but having like the others paid, on the previous day, his condolences and presented sacrificial offerings, he had further now raised a shed wherein to offer libations. Having directed every one of his subordinate officers to remain in this spot in attendance, he himself went at the fifth watch to court, and when he acquitted himself of his public duties he forthwith changed his attire for a mourning costume, and came along, in an official sedan chair, preceded by gongs and umbrellas. Upon reaching the front of the shed the chair was deposited on the ground, and as his subordinate officers pressed on either side and waited upon him,

page 210

neither the military nor the populace, which composed the mass of people, ventured to make any commotion. In a short while, the long procession of the Ning mansion became visible, spreading far and wide, covering in its course from the north, the whole ground like a silver mountain. At an early hour, the forerunners, messengers and other attendants on the staff of the Ning mansion apprised Chia Chen (of the presence of the sheds), and Chia Chen with all alacrity gave orders that

the foremost part of the cortege should halt. Attended by Chia She and Chia Chen, the three of them came with hurried step to greet (the Prince of Pei Ching), whom they saluted with due ceremony. Shih Jung, who was seated in his sedan chair, made a bow and returned their salutations with a smile, proceeding to address them and to treat them, as he had done hitherto, as old friends, without any airs of self-importance.

“My daughter's funeral has,” observed Chia Chen, “put your Highness to the trouble of coming, an honour which we, though noble by birth, do not deserve.”

Shih Jung smiled. “With the terms of friendship,” he added, “which have existed for so many generations (between our families), is there any need for such apologies?”

Turning his head round there and then, he gave directions to the senior officer of his household to preside at the sacrifices and to offer libations in his stead; and Chia She and the others stood together on one side and made obeisance in return, and then came in person again and gave expression to their gratitude for his bounty.

Shih Jung was most affable and complaisant. “Which is the gentleman,” he inquired of Chia Chen, “who was born with a piece of jade in his mouth? I've long had a wish to have the pleasure of seeing him, and as he's sure to be on the spot on an occasion like this, why shouldn't you invite him to come round?”

Chia Chen speedily drew back, and bidding Pao-yü change his mourning clothes, he led him forward and presented him.

Pao-yü had all along heard that Shih Jung was a worthy Prince, perfect in ability as well as in appearance, pleasant and courteous, not bound down by any official custom or state rite, so that he had repeatedly felt a keen desire to meet him. With the sharp control, however, which his father exercised over him, he had not been able to gratify his wish. But on this occasion, he saw on the contrary that he came to call him, and it was but natural that he should be delighted. Whilst advancing, he scrutinised Shih Jung with the corner of his eye, who, seated as he was in the sedan chair, presented an imposing sight.

page 211

But, reader, what occurred on his approach is not yet known, but listen to the next chapter, which will divulge it.

CHAPTER XV.

Lady Peng, nee Wang, exercises her authority in the Iron Fence Temple.

Ch'in Ching-ch'ing (Ch'ing Chung) amuses himself in the Man-t'ou (Bread) nunnery.

But we shall now resume our story. When Pao-yü raised his eyes, he noticed that Shih Jung, Prince of Pei Ching, wore on his head a princely cap with pure white tassels and silvery feathers, that he was appareled in a white ceremonial robe, (with a pattern representing) the toothlike ripple of a river and the waters of the sea, embroidered with five-clawed dragons; and that he was girded with a red leather belt, inlaid with white jade. That his face was like a beauteous gem; that his eyes were like sparkling stars; and that he was, in very truth, a human being full of graceful charms.

Pao-yü hastily pressed forward and made a reverent obeisance, and Shih Jung lost no time in extending his arms from inside the sedan-chair, and embracing him. At a glance, he saw that Pao-yü had on his head a silver cap, to which the hair was attached, that he had, round his forehead, a flap on which were embroidered a couple of dragons issuing from the sea, that he wore a white archery-sleeved robe, ornamented with dragons, and that his waist was encircled by a silver belt, inlaid with pearls; that his face resembled vernal flowers and that his eyes were like drops of lacquer.

Shih Jung smiled. "Your name is," he said, "no trumped-up story; for you, verily, resemble a precious gem; but where's the valuable trinket you had in your mouth?" he inquired.

As soon as Pao-yü heard this inquiry, he hastened to produce the jade from inside his clothes and to hand it over to Shih Jung. Shih Jung minutely examined it; and having also read the motto on it, he consequently ascertained whether it was really efficacious or not.

"It's true that it's said to be," Pao-yü promptly explained, "but it hasn't yet been put to the test."

Shih Jung extolled it with unbounded praise, and, as he did so, he set the variegated tassels in proper order, and, with his own hands, attached it on to Pao-yü's neck. Taking also his hand in his, he inquired of Pao-yü what was his age? and what books he was reading at present, to each of which questions Pao-yü gave suitable answer.

page 212

Shih Jung perceiving the perspicacity of his speech and the propriety of his utterances, simultaneously turned towards Chia Chen and observed with a smile on his face: "Your worthy son is, in very truth, like the young of a dragon or like the nestling of a phoenix! and this isn't an idle compliment which I, a despicable prince, utter in your venerable presence! But how much more glorious will be, in the future, the voice of the young phoenix than that of the old phoenix, it isn't easy to ascertain."

Chia Chen forced a smile: "My cur-like son," he replied, "cannot presume to such bountiful praise and golden commendation; but if, by the virtue of your Highness' excess of happiness, he does indeed realise your words, he will be a source of joy to us all!"

"There's one thing, however," continued Shih Jung; "with the excellent abilities which your worthy scion possesses, he's sure, I presume, to be extremely loved by her dowager ladyship, (his grandmother), and by all classes. But for young men of our age it's a great drawback to be doated upon, for with over-fondness, we cannot help utterly frustrating the benefits of education. When I, a despicable prince, was young, I walked in this very track, and I presume that your honourable son cannot likewise but do the same. By remaining at home, your worthy scion will find it difficult to devote his attention to study; and he will not reap any harm, were he to come, at frequent intervals, to my humble home; for though my deserts be small, I nevertheless enjoy the great honour of the acquaintance of all the scholars of note in the Empire, so that, whenever any of them visit the capital, not one of them is there who does not lower his blue eyes upon me. Hence it is that in my mean abode, eminent worthies rendezvous; and were your esteemed son to come, as often as he can, and converse with them and meet them, his knowledge would, in that case, have every opportunity of making daily strides towards

improvement.”

Chia Chen speedily bent his body and expressed his acquiescence, by way of reply; whereupon Shih Jung went further, and taking off from his wrist a chaplet of pearls, he presented it to Pao-yü.

“This is the first time we meet,” he observed. “Our meeting was so unexpected that I have no suitable congratulatory present to offer you. This was conferred upon me by His Majesty, and is a string of chaplet-pearls, scented with Ling Ling, which will serve as a temporary token of respectful congratulations.”

Pao-yü hastened to receive it from his hands, and turning round, he reverently presented it to Chia Chen. Chia Chen and Pao-yü jointly returned thanks; and forthwith Chia She, Chia Chen and the rest came forward in a body, and requested the Prince to turn his chair homewards.

page 213

“The departed,” expostulated Shih Jung, “has already ascended the spiritual regions, and is no more a mortal being in this dusty world exposed to vicissitude like you and I. Although a mean prince like me has been the recipient of the favour of the Emperor, and has undeservedly been called to the princely inheritance, how could I presume to go before the spiritual hearse and return home?”

Chia She and the others, perceiving how persistent he was in his refusal had no course but to take their leave, express their sense of gratitude and to rejoin the cortege. They issued orders to their servants to stop the band, and to hush the music, and making the procession go by, they at length left the way clear for Shih Jung to prosecute his way.

But we will now leave him and resume our account of the funeral of the Ning mansion. All along its course the road was plunged in unusual commotion. As soon as they reached the city gates Chia She, Chia Cheng, Chia Chen, and the others again received donations from all their fellow officers and subordinates, in sacrificial sheds erected by their respective families, and after they returned thanks to one after another, they eventually issued from the city walls, and proceeded eventually

along the highway, in the direction of the Temple of the Iron Fence. Chia Chen, at this time, went, together with Chia Jung, up to all their seniors, and pressed them to get into their sedan chairs, and to ride their horses; and Chia She and all of the same age as himself were consequently induced to mount into their respective carriages or chairs. Chia Chen and those of the same generation were likewise about to ride their horses, when lady Feng, through her solicitude on Pao-yü's account, gave way to fears lest now that they had reached the open country, he should do as he pleased, and not listen to the words of any of the household, and lest Chia Chen should not be able to keep him in check; and, as she dreaded that he might go astray, she felt compelled to bid a youth call him to her; and Pao-yü had no help but to appear before her curricula.

“My dear brother,” lady Feng remarked smiling, “you are a respectable person, and like a girl in your ways, and shouldn't imitate those monkeys on horseback! do get down and let both you and I sit together in this carriage; and won't that be nice?”

At these words, Pao-yü readily dismounted and climbed up into the carriage occupied by lady Feng; and they both talked and laughed, as they continued their way.

But not a long time elapsed before two men, on horseback, were seen approaching from the opposite direction. Coming straight up to lady Feng's vehicle they dismounted, and said, as they leaned on the sides of her carriage,

page 214

“There's a halting place here, and will it not please your ladyship to have a rest and change?”

Lady Feng directed them to ask the two ladies Hsing and Wang what they would like to do, and the two men explained: “These ladies have signified that they had no desire to rest, and they wish your ladyship to suit your convenience.”

Lady Feng speedily issued orders that they should have a rest, before

they prosecuted their way, and the servant youth led the harnessed horses through the crowd of people and came towards the north, while Pao-yü, from inside the carriage, urgently asked that Mr. Ch'in should be requested to come.

Ch'in Chung was at this moment on horseback following in the track of his father's carriage, when unexpectedly he caught sight of Pao-yü's page, come at a running pace and invite him to have some refreshment. Ch'in Chung perceived from a distance that the horse, which Pao-yü had been riding, walked behind lady Feng's vehicle, as it went towards the north, with its saddle and bridles all piled up, and readily concluding that Pao-yü must be in the same carriage with that lady, he too turned his horse and came over in haste and entered, in their company, the door of a farm-house.

This dwelling of the farmer's did not contain many rooms so that the women and girls had nowhere to get out of the way; and when the village lasses and country women perceived the bearing and costumes of lady Feng, Pao-yü, and Ch'in Chung, they were inclined to suspect that celestial beings had descended into the world.

Lady Feng entered a thatched house, and, in the first place, asked Pao-yü and the rest to go out and play. Pao-yü took the hint, and, along with Ch'in Chung, he led off the servant boys and went to romp all over the place.

The various articles in use among the farmers they had not seen before, with the result that after Pao-yü had inspected them, he thought them all very strange; but he could neither make out their names nor their uses. But among the servant boys, there were those who knew, and they explained to them, one after another, what they were called, as well as what they were for. As Pao-yü, after this explanation, nodded his head; "It isn't strange," he said, "that an old writer has this line in his poetical works, 'Who can realise that the food in a bowl is, grain by grain, all the fruit of labour.' This is indeed so!" As he spoke, they had come into another house; and at the sight of a spinning wheel on a stove-bed, they thought it still more strange and wonderful, but the servant boys again told them that it was used for spinning the yarn to weave cloth with, and Pao-yü speedily jumping

on to the stove-bed, set to work turning the wheel for the sake of fun, when a village lass of about seventeen or eighteen years of age came forward, and asked them not to meddle with it and spoil it.

The servant boys promptly stopped her interference; but Pao-yü himself desisted, as he added: "It's because I hadn't seen one before that I came to try it for fun."

"You people can't do it," rejoined the lass, "let me turn it for you to see."

Ch'in Chung secretly pulled Pao-yü and remarked, "It's great fun in this village!" but Pao-yü gave him a nudge and observed, "If you talk nonsense again, I'll beat you." Watching intently, as he uttered these words, the village girl who started reeling the thread, and presented, in very truth, a pretty sight. But suddenly an old woman from the other side gave a shout. "My girl Secunda, come over at once;" and the lass discarded the spinning-wheel and hastily went on her way.

Pao-yü was the while feeling disappointed and unhappy, when he espied a servant, whom lady Feng had sent, come and call them both in. Lady Feng had washed her hands and changed her costume; and asked him whether he would change or not, and Pao-yü, having replied "No! it doesn't matter after all if I don't change," the female attendants served tea, cakes and fruits and also poured the scented tea. Lady Feng and the others drank their tea, and waiting until they had put the various articles by, and made all the preparations, they promptly started to get into their carriages. Outside, Wang Erh had got ready tips and gave them to the people of the farm, and the farm women and all the inmates went up to them to express their gratitude; but when Pao-yü came to look carefully, he failed to see anything of the lass who had reeled the thread. But they had not gone far before they caught sight of this girl Secunda coming along with a small child in her arms, who, they concluded, was her young brother, laughing and chatting, in company with a few young girls.

Pao-yü could not suppress the voice of love, but being seated in the carriage, he was compelled to satisfy himself by following her with his

eyes. Soon however the vehicle sped on as rapidly as a cloud impelled by the wind, so that when he turned his head round, there was already no vestige to be seen of her; but, while they were bandying words, they had unexpectedly overtaken the great concourse of the cortege.

Likewise, at an early stage men were stationed ahead, with Buddhist drums and gold cymbals, with streamers, and jewelled coverings; and the whole company of bonzes, belonging to the Iron Fence Temple, had already been drawn out in a line by the sides of the road. In a short while, they

page 216

reached the interior of the temple, where additional sacrifices were offered and Buddhistic services performed; and where altars had again been erected to burn incense on. The coffin was deposited in a side room of the inner court; and Pao Chu got ready a bed-room in which she could keep her watch.

In the outer apartments, Chia Chen did the honours among the whole party of relatives and friends, some of whom asked to be allowed to stay for their meals, while others at this stage took their leave. And after they had one by one returned thanks, the dukes, marquises, earls, viscounts and barons, each in respective batches, (got up to go,) and they kept on leaving from between 1 and 3 p.m. before they had finally all dispersed.

In the inner Chambers, the ladies were solely entertained and attended to by lady Feng. First to make a move were the consorts of officials; and noon had also come, by the time the whole party of them had taken their departure. Those that remained were simply a few relatives of the same clan and others like them, who eventually left after the completion of the three days' rationalistic liturgies.

The two ladies Hsing and Wang, well aware at this time that lady Feng could on no account return home, desired to enter the city at once; and madame Wang wanted to take Pao-yü home; but Pao-yü, who had, on an unexpected occasion, come out into the country, entertained, of course, no wish to go back; and he would agree to nothing else than to stay behind with lady Feng, so that madame Wang had no alternative but

to hand him over to her charge and to start.

This Temple of the Iron Fence had, in fact, been erected in days gone by, at the expense of the two dukes Ning and Jung; and there still remained up to these days, acres of land, from which were derived the funds for incense and lights for such occasions, on which the coffins of any members, old or young, (who died) in the capital, had to be deposited in this temple; and the inner and outer houses, in this compound were all kept in readiness and good order, for the accommodation of those who formed part of the cortege.

At this time, as it happened, the descendants mustered an immense crowd, and among them were poor and rich of various degrees, or with likes and dislikes diametrically opposed. There were those, who, being in straitened circumstances at home, and easily contented, readily took up their quarters in the temple. And there were those with money and position, and with extravagant ideas, who maintained that the accommodation in the temple was not suitable, and, of course, went in search of additional quarters, either in country houses, or in convents, where they could have their meals and retire, after the ceremonies were over.

page 217

On the occasion of Mrs. Ch'in's funeral, all the members of the clan put up temporarily in the Iron Fence Temple; lady Feng alone looked down upon it as inconvenient, and consequently despatched a servant to go and tell Ch'ing Hsü, a nun in the Bread Convent, to empty two rooms for her to go and live in.

This Bread Convent had at one time been styled the Shui Yueh nunnery (water moon); but as good bread was made in that temple, it gave rise to this nickname.

This convent was not very distant from the Temple of the Iron Fence, so that as soon as the bonzes brought their functions to a close, and the sacrifice of evening was offered, Chia Chen asked Chia Jung to request lady Feng to retire to rest; and as lady Feng perceived that there still remained several sisters-in-law to keep company to the female relatives,

she readily, of her own accord, took leave of the whole party, and, along with Pao-yü and Ch'in Chung, came to the Water Moon Convent.

Ch'in Yeh, it must be noticed, was advanced in years and a victim to many ailments, so that he was unable to remain in the temple long, and he bade Ch'in Chung tarry until the coffin had been set in its resting place, with the result that Ch'in Chung came along, at the same time as lady Feng and Pao-yü, to the Water Moon Convent, where Ch'ing Hsü appeared, together with two neophytes, Chih Shan and Chih Neng, to receive them. After they had exchanged greetings, lady Feng and the others entered the "chaste" apartments to change their clothes and wash their hands; and when they had done, as she perceived how much taller in stature Chih Neng had grown and how much handsomer were her features, she felt prompted to inquire, "How is it that your prioress and yourselves haven't been all these days as far as our place?"

"It's because during these days we haven't had any time which we could call our own," explained Ch'ing Hsü. "Owing to the birth of a son in Mr. Hu's mansion, dame Hu sent over about ten taels and asked that we should invite several head-nuns to read during three days the service for the churching of women, with the result that we've been so very busy and had so little leisure, that we couldn't come over to pay our respects to your ladyship."

But leaving aside the old nun, who kept lady Feng company, we will now return to the two lads Pao-yü and Ch'in Chung. They were up to their pranks in the main building of the convent, when seeing Chih Neng come over: "Here's Neng Erh," Pao-yü exclaimed with a smile.

"Why notice a creature like her?" remarked Ch'in Chung; to which Pao-yü rejoined laughingly: "Don't be sly! why then did you the other day,

page 218

when you were in the old lady's rooms, and there was not a soul present, hold her in your arms? and do you want to fool me now?"

"There was nothing of the kind," observed Ch'in Chung smiling.

"Whether there was or not," replied Pao-yü, "doesn't concern me; but if you will stop her and tell her to pour a cup of tea and bring it to me to drink, I'll then keep hands off."

"This is indeed very strange!" Ch'in Chung answered laughing; "do you fear that if you told her to pour you one, that she wouldn't; and what need is there that I should tell her?"

"If I ask her," Pao-yü observed, "to pour it, she wouldn't be as ready as she would were you to tell her about it."

Ch'in Chung had no help but to speak. "Neng Erh!" he said, "bring a cup of tea."

This Neng Erh had, since her youth, been in and out of the Jung mansion, so that there was no one that she did not know; and she had also, time after time, romped and laughed with Pao-yü and Ch'in Chung. Being now grown up she gradually came to know the import of love, and she readily took a fancy to Ch'in Chung, who was an amorous being. Ch'in Chung too returned her affection, on account of her good looks; and, although he and she had not had any very affectionate tete-a-tetes, they had, however, long ago come to understand each other's feelings and wishes.

Chih Neng walked away and returned after having poured the tea.

"Give it to me," Ch'in Chung cried out smirkingly; while Pao-yü likewise shouted: "Give it to me."

Chih Neng compressed her lips and sneeringly rejoined, "Are you going to have a fight even over a cup of tea? Is it forsooth likely that there's honey in my hand?"

Pao-yü was the first to grasp and take over the cup, but while drinking it, he was about to make some inquiry, when he caught sight of Chih Shan, who came and called Chih Neng away to go and lay the plates with fruit on the table. Not much time elapsed before she came round to request the two lads to go and have tea and refreshments; but would they eat such things as were laid before them? They simply sat for a while and

came out again and resumed their play.

Lady Feng too stayed for a few moments, and then returned, with the old nun as her escort, into the "unsullied" rooms to lie down. By this time, all the matrons and married women discovered that there was nothing else to be done, and they dispersed in succession, retiring each to rest. There only remained in attendance several young girls who enjoyed her confidence,

page 219

and the old nun speedily availed herself of the opportunity to speak. "I've got something," she said, "about which I mean to go to your mansion to beg of madame Wang; but I'll first request you, my lady, to tell me how to set to work."

"What's it?" ascertained lady Feng.

"O-mi-to-fu!" exclaimed the old nun, "It's this; in days gone by, I first lived in the Ch'ang An district. When I became a nun and entered the monastery of Excellent Merit, there lived, at that time, a subscriber, Chang by surname, a very wealthy man. He had a daughter, whose infant name was Chin Ko; the whole family came in the course of that year to the convent I was in, to offer incense, and as luck would have it they met Li Ya-wei, a brother of a secondary wife of the Prefect of the Ch'ang An Prefecture. This Li Ya-wei fell in love at first sight with her, and would wed Chin Ko as his wife. He sent go-betweens to ask her in marriage, but, contrary to his expectations, Chin Ko had already received the engagement presents of the son of the ex-Major of the Ch'ang An Prefecture. The Chang family, on the other hand, were afraid that if they withdrew from the match, the Major would not give up his claim, and they therefore replied that she was already promised to another. But, who would have thought it, this Mr. Li was seriously bent upon marrying the young lady. But while the Chang family were at a loss what plan to devise, and both parties were in a dilemma, the family of the Major came unexpectedly to hear of the news; and without even looking thoroughly into the matter, they there and then had recourse to insult and abuse. 'Is a girl,' they insinuated, 'to be promised to the sons of several families!' And obstinately refusing to allow the restitution of the betrothal presents,

they at once had recourse to litigation and brought an action (against the girl's people.) That family was at their wits' end, and had no alternative but to find some one to go to the capital to obtain means of assistance; and, losing all patience, they insisted upon the return of the presents. I believe that the present commander of the troops at Ch'ang An, Mr. Yün, is on friendly terms with your honourable family, and could one solicit madame Wang to put in a word with Mr. Chia Cheng to send a letter and ask Mr. Yün to speak to that Major, I have no fear that he will not agree. Should (your ladyship) be willing to take action, the Chang family are even ready to present all they have, though it may entail the ruin of their estate."

"This affair is, it's true, of no great moment," lady Feng replied smiling, after hearing this appeal; "but the only thing is that madame Wang does no longer attend to matters of this nature."

"If madame doesn't heed them," suggested the old nun, "you, my lady, can safely assume the direction."

page 220

"I'm neither in need of any money to spend," added lady Feng with a smirk, "nor do I undertake such matters!"

These words did not escape Ching Hsü's ear; they scattered to the winds her vain hopes. After a minute or so she heaved a sigh.

"What you say may be true enough," she remarked; "but the Chang family are also aware that I mean to come and make my appeal to your mansion; and were you now not to manage this affair, the Chang family having no idea that the lack of time prevents any steps being taken and that no importance is attached to their presents, it will appear, on the contrary, as if there were not even this little particle of skill in your household."

At these words lady Feng felt at once inspirited. "You've known of old," she added, "that I've never had any faith in anything concerning retribution in the Court of Judgment in the unseen or in hell; and that whatever I say that I shall do, that I do; tell them therefore to bring three

thousand taels; and I shall then remedy this grievance of theirs.”

The old nun upon hearing this remark was so exceedingly delighted, that she precipitately exclaimed, “They've got it, they've got it! there will be no difficulty about it.”

“I'm not,” lady Feng went on to add, “like those people, who afford help and render assistance with an eye to money; these three thousand taels will be exclusively devoted for the travelling expenses of those youths, who will be sent to deliver messages and for them to make a few cash for their trouble; but as for me I don't want even so much as a cash. In fact I'm able at this very moment to produce as much as thirty thousand taels.”

The old nun assented with alacrity, and said by way of reply, “If that be so, my lady, do display your charitable bounty at once to-morrow and bring things to an end.”

“Just see,” remarked lady Feng, “how hard pressed I am; which place can do without me? but since I've given you my word, I shall, needless to say, speedily bring the matter to a close.”

“A small trifle like this,” hinted the old nun, “would, if placed in the hands of any one else, flurry her to such an extent that she would be quite at a loss what to do; but in your hands, my lady, even if much more were superadded, it wouldn't require as much exertion as a wave of your hand. But the proverb well says: 'that those who are able have much to do;' for madame Wang, seeing that your ladyship manages all concerns, whether large or small, properly, has still more shoved the burden of everything on your shoulders, my lady; but you should, it's but right, also take good care of your precious health.”

page 221

This string of flattery pleased lady Feng more and more, so that heedless of fatigue she went on to chat with still greater zest.

But, thing unthought of, Ch'in Chung availed himself of the darkness, as well as of the absence of any one about, to come in quest of Chih Neng.

As soon as he reached the room at the back, he espied Chih Neng all alone inside washing the tea cups; and Ch'in Chung forthwith seized her in his arms and implanted kisses on her cheek. Chih Neng got in a dreadful state, and stamping her feet, cried, "What are you up to?" and she was just on the point of shouting out, when Ch'in Chung rejoined: "My dear girl! I'm nearly dead from impatience, and if you don't again to-day accept my advances, I shall this very moment die on this spot."

"What you're bent upon," added Chih Neng, "can't be effected; not unless you wait until I've left this den and parted company from these people, when it will be safe enough."

"This is of course easy enough!" remonstrated Ch'in Chung; "but the distant water cannot extinguish the close fire!"

As he spoke, with one puff, he put out the light, plunging the whole room in pitch darkness; and seizing Chih Neng, he pushed her on to the stove-couch and started a violent love affair. Chih Neng could not, though she strained every nerve, escape his importunities; nor could she very well shout, so that she felt compelled to humour him; but while he was in the midst of his ecstatic joy, they perceived a person walk in, who pressed both of them down, without uttering even so much as a sound, and plunged them both in such a fright that their very souls flew away and their spirits wandered from their bodies; and it was after the third party had burst out laughing with a spurting sound that they eventually became aware that it was Pao-yü; when, springing to his feet impetuously, Ch'in Chung exclaimed full of resentment, "What's this that you're up to!"

"If you get your monkey up," retorted Pao-yü, "why, then let you and I start bawling out;" which so abashed Chih Neng that she availed herself of the gloomy light to make her escape; while Pao-yü had dragged Ch'in Chung out of the room and asked, "Now then, do you still want to play the bully!"

"My dear fellow," pleaded Ch'in Chung smilingly, "whatever you do don't shout out and let every one know; and all you want, I'll agree to."

"We needn't argue just now," Pao-yü observed with a grin; "wait a while, and when all have gone to sleep, we can minutely settle accounts

together.”

Soon it was time to ease their clothes, and go to bed; and lady Feng occupied the inner room; Ch'in Chung and Pao-yü the outer; while the

page 222

whole ground was covered with matrons of the household, who had spread their bedding, and sat watching. As lady Feng entertained fears that the jade of Spiritual Perception might be lost, she waited until Pao-yü fell asleep, when having directed a servant to bring it to her, she placed it under the side of her own pillow.

What accounts Pao-yü settled with Ch'in Chung cannot be ascertained; and as in the absence of any positive proof what is known is based upon surmises, we shall not venture to place it on record.

Nothing worth noticing occurred the whole night; but the next day, as soon as the morning dawned, dowager lady Chia and madame Wang promptly despatched servants to come and see how Pao-yü was getting on; and to tell him likewise to put on two pieces of extra clothing, and that if there was nothing to be done it would be better for him to go back.

But was it likely that Pao-yü would be willing to go back? Besides Ch'in Chung, in his inordinate passion for Chih Neng, instigated Pao-yü to entreat lady Feng to remain another day. Lady Feng pondered in her own mind that, although the most important matters connected with the funeral ceremonies had been settled satisfactorily, there were still a few minor details, for which no provision had been made, so that could she avail herself of this excuse to remain another day would she not win from Chia Chen a greater degree of approbation, in the second place, would she not be able further to bring Ch'ing Hsü's business to an issue, and, in the third place, to humour Pao-yü's wish? In view of these three advantages, which would accrue, “All that I had to do, I have done,” she readily signified to Pao-yü, “and if you be bent upon running about in here, you'll unavoidably place me in still greater trouble; so that we must for certain start homewards to-morrow.”

“My dear cousin, my own dear cousin,” urgently entreated Pao-yü, when

he heard these words, "let's stay only this one day, and to-morrow we can go back without fail."

They actually spent another night there, and lady Feng availed herself of their stay to give directions that the case which had been entrusted to her the previous day by the old nun should be secretly communicated to Lai Wang Erh. Lai Wang's mind grasped the import of all that was said to him, and, having entered the city with all despatch, he went in search of the gentleman, who acted as secretary (in Mr. Yün's office), pretending that he had been directed by Mr. Chia Lien to come and ask him to write a letter and to send it that very night to the Ch'ang An magistrate. The distance amounted to no more than one hundred li, so that in the space of two days everything was brought to a satisfactory settlement. The general, whose name was Yün Kuang, had been for a long time under obligations to the Chia family, so that he naturally could not refuse his co-operation in such

page 223

small trifles. When he had handed his reply, Wang Erh started on his way back; where we shall leave him and return to lady Feng.

Having spent another day, she on the morrow took leave of the old nun, whom she advised to come to the mansion after the expiry of three days to fetch a reply.

Ch'in Chung and Chih Neng could not, by any means, brook the separation, and they secretly agreed to a clandestine assignation; but to these details we need not allude with any minuteness; sufficient to say that they had no alternative but to bear the anguish and to part.

Lady Feng crossed over again to the temple of the Iron Fence and ascertained how things were progressing. But as Pao Chu was obstinate in her refusal to return home, Chia Chen found himself under the necessity of selecting a few servants to act as her companions. But the reader must listen to what is said in the next chapter by way of explanation.

CHAPTER XVI.

Chia Yuan-ch'un is, on account of her talents, selected to enter the Feng Ts'ao Palace.

Ch'in Ching-ch'ing departs, in the prime of life, by the yellow spring road.

But we must now return to the two lads, Ch'in Chung and Pao-yü. After they had passed, along with lady Feng from the Temple of the Iron Fence, whither she had gone to see how things were getting on, they entered the city in their carriages. On their arrival at home, they paid their obeisance to dowager lady Chia, madame Wang and the other members of the family, whence they returned to their own quarters, where nothing worth mentioning transpired during the night.

On the next day, Pao-yü perceiving that the repairs to the outer schoolroom had been completed, settled with Ch'in Chung that they should have evening classes. But as it happened that Ch'in Chung, who was naturally of an extremely delicate physique, caught somewhat of a chill in the country and clandestinely indulged, besides, in an intimacy with Chih Neng, which unavoidably made him fail to take good care of himself, he was, shortly after his return, troubled with a cough and a feverish cold, with nausea for drink and food, and fell into such an extremely poor state of health that he simply kept indoors and nursed himself, and was not in a fit condition to go to school. Pao-yü's spirits were readily damped, but as

page 224

there was likewise no remedy he had no other course than to wait until his complete recovery, before he could make any arrangements.

Lady Feng had meanwhile received a reply from Yün Kuang, in which he informed her that everything had been satisfactorily settled, and the old nun apprised the Chang family that the major had actually suppressed his indignation, hushed his complaints, and taken back the presents of the previous engagement. But who would have ever anticipated that a father and mother, whose hearts were set upon position and their ambition upon wealth, could have brought up a daughter so conscious of propriety and so full of feeling as to seize the first opportunity, after she had heard that she had been withdrawn from her

former intended, and been promised to the Li family, to stealthily devise a way to commit suicide, by means of a handkerchief. The son of the Major, upon learning that Chin Ko had strangled herself, there and then jumped into the river and drowned himself, as he too was a being full of love. The Chang and Li families were, sad to relate, very much cut up, and, in very truth, two lives and money had been sacrificed all to no use.

Lady Feng, however, during this while, quietly enjoyed the three thousand taels, and madame Wang did not have even so much as the faintest idea of the whole matter. But ever since this occasion, lady Feng's audacity acquired more and more strength; and the actions of this kind, which she, in after days, performed, defy enumeration.

One day, the very day on which Chia Cheng's birthday fell, while the members of the two households of Ning and Jung were assembled together offering their congratulations, and unusual bustle and stir prevailed, a gatekeeper came in, at quite an unexpected moment, to announce that Mr. Hsia, Metropolitan Head Eunuch of the six palaces, had come with the special purpose of presenting an edict from his Majesty; a bit of news which plunged Chia She, Chia Cheng and the whole company into great consternation, as they could not make out what was up. Speedily interrupting the theatrical performance, they had the banquet cleared, and the altar laid out with incense, and opening the centre gate they fell on their knees to receive the edict.

Soon they caught sight of the head eunuch, Hsia Ping-chung, advancing on horseback, and besides himself, a considerable retinue of eunuchs. The eunuch Hsia did not, in fact, carry any mandate or present any decree; but straightway advancing as far as the main hall, he dismounted, and, with a face beaming with smiles, he walked into the Hall and took his stand on the southern side.

“I have had the honour,” he said, “of receiving a special order to at once summon Chia Cheng to present himself at Court and be admitted in His Majesty's presence in the Lin Ching Hall.”

page 225

When he had delivered this message, he did not so much as take any tea, but forthwith mounted his horse and took his leave.

Chia Cheng and the others could not even conceive what omen this summons implied, but he had no alternative but to change his clothes with all haste and to present himself at Court, while dowager lady Chia and the inmates of the whole household were, in their hearts, a prey to such perplexity and uncertainty that they incessantly despatched messengers on flying steeds to go and bring the news.

After the expiry of four hours, they suddenly perceived Lai Ta and three or four other butlers run in, quite out of breath, through the ceremonial gate and report the glad tidings. "We have received," they added, "our master's commands, to hurriedly request her venerable ladyship to take madame Wang and the other ladies into the Palace, to return thanks for His Majesty's bounty;" and other words to the same purport.

Dowager lady Chia was, at this time, standing, with agitated heart, under the verandah of the Large Hall waiting for tidings, whilst the two ladies, mesdames Hsing and Wang, Mrs. Yu, Li Wan, lady Feng, Ying Ch'un and her sisters, even up to Mrs. Hsüeh and the rest, were congregated in one place ascertaining what was the news. Old lady Chia likewise called Lai Ta in and minutely questioned him as to what had happened. "Your servants," replied Lai Ta, "simply stood waiting outside the Lin Chuang gate, so that we were in total ignorance of what was going on inside, when presently the Eunuch Hsia came out and imparted to us the glad tidings; telling us that the eldest of the young ladies in our household had been raised, by His Majesty, to be an overseer in the Feng Ts'ao Palace, and that he had, in addition, conferred upon her the rank of worthy and virtuous secondary consort. By and by, Mr. Chia Cheng came out and also told us the same thing. Master is now gone back again to the Eastern Palace, whither he requests your venerable ladyship to go at once and offer thanks for the Imperial favour."

When old lady Chia and the other members of the family heard these tidings they were at length reassured in their minds, and so elated were they all in one moment that joy was visible in their very faces. Without loss of time, they commenced to don the gala dresses suitable to their rank; which done, old lady Chia led the way for the two ladies, mesdames Hsing and Wang, as well as for Mrs. Yu; and their official chairs, four of them in all, entered the palace like a trail of fish; while Chia She and Chia Chen, who had likewise changed their clothes for their court dress, took Chia Se and Chia Jung along and proceeded in attendance upon dowager lady Chia.

Indeed, of the two households of Ning and Jung, there was not one, whether high or low, woman or man, who was not in a high state of exulta-

page 226

tion, with the exception of Pao-yü, who behaved just as if the news had not reached his ears; and can you, reader, guess why? The fact is that Chih Neng, of the Water Moon Convent, had recently entered the city in a surreptitious manner in search of Ch'in Chung; but, contrary to expectation, her visit came to be known by Ch'in Yeh, who drove Chih Neng away and laid hold of Ch'in Chung and gave him a flogging. But this outburst of temper of his brought about a relapse of his old complaint, with the result that in three or five days, he, sad to say, succumbed. Ch'in Chung had himself ever been in a delicate state of health and had besides received a caning before he had got over his sickness, so that when he now saw his aged father pass away from the consequences of a fit of anger, he felt, at this stage, so full of penitence and distress that the symptoms of his illness were again considerably aggravated. Hence it was that Pao-yü was downcast and unhappy at heart, and that nothing could, in spite of the promotion of Yuan Ch'un by imperial favour, dispel the depression of his spirits.

Dowager lady Chia and the rest in due course offered thanks and returned home, the relatives and friends came to present their congratulations, great stir and excitement prevailed during these few days in the two mansions of Ning and Jung, and every one was in high glee; but he alone looked upon everything as if it were nothing; taking not the least interest in anything; and as this reason led the whole family to sneer at him, the result was that he got more and more doltish.

Luckily, however, Chia Lien and Tai-yü were on their way back, and had despatched messengers, in advance, to announce the news that they would be able to reach home the following day, so that when Pao-yü heard the tidings, he was at length somewhat cheered. And when he came to institute minute inquiries, he eventually found out: "that Chia Yü-ts'un was also coming to the capital to have an audience with His Majesty, that it was entirely because Wang Tzu-t'eng had repeatedly laid before the Throne memorials recommending him that he was coming on this occasion to wait in the metropolis for a vacancy which he could fill up; that as he was a kinsman of Chia Lien's, acknowledging the same ancestors as he did, and he stood, on the other hand, with Tai-yü, in the

relationship of tutor and pupil, he was in consequence following the same road and coming as their companion; that Lin Ju-hai had already been buried in the ancestral vault, and that every requirement had been attended to with propriety; that Chia Lien, on this voyage to the capital, would, had he progressed by the ordinary stages, have been over a month before he could reach home, but that when he came to hear the good news about Yuan Ch'un, he pressed on day and night to enter the capital; and that the whole journey had been throughout, in every respect, both pleasant and propitious."

page 227

But Pao-yü merely ascertained whether Tai-yü was all right, and did not even so much as trouble his mind with the rest of what he heard; and he remained on the tiptoe of expectation, till noon of the morrow; when, in point of fact, it was announced that Mr. Lien, together with Miss Lin, had made their entrance into the mansion. When they came face to face, grief and joy vied with each other; and they could not help having a good cry for a while; after which followed again expressions of sympathy and congratulations; while Pao-yü pondered within himself that Tai-yü had become still more surpassingly handsome.

Tai-yü had also brought along with her a good number of books, and she promptly gave orders that the sleeping rooms should be swept, and that the various nicknacks should be put in their proper places. She further produced a certain quantity of paper, pencils and other such things, and distributed them among Pao Ch'ai, Ying Ch'un, Pao-yü and the rest; and Pao-yü also brought out, with extreme care, the string of Ling-ling scented beads, which had been given to him by the Prince of Pei Ching, and handed them, in his turn, to Tai-yü as a present.

"What foul man has taken hold of them?" exclaimed Tai-yü. "I don't want any such things;" and as she forthwith dashed them down, and would not accept them, Pao-yü was under the necessity of taking them back. But for the time being we will not allude to them, but devote our attention to Chia Lien.

Having, after his arrival home, paid his salutations to all the inmates, he retired to his own quarters at the very moment that lady Feng had multifarious duties to attend to, and had not even a minute to spare; but, considering that Chia Lien had returned from a distant journey, she could not do otherwise than put by what she had to do, and to greet him and wait on him.

“Imperial uncle,” she said, in a jocose manner, when she realised that there was no outsider present in the room, “I congratulate you! What fatigue and hardship you, Imperial uncle, have had to bear throughout the whole journey, your humble servant heard yesterday, when the courier sent ahead came and announced that Your Highness would this day reach this mansion. I have merely got ready a glass of mean wine for you to wipe down the dust with, but I wonder, whether Your Highness will deign to bestow upon it the lustre of your countenance, and accept it.”

Chia Lien smiled. “How dare I presume to such an honour,” he added by way of rejoinder; “I’m unworthy of such attention! Many thanks, many thanks.”

page 228

P'ing Erh and the whole company of waiting-maids simultaneously paid their obeisance to him, and this ceremony concluded, they presented tea. Chia Lien thereupon made inquiries about the various matters, which had transpired in their home after his departure, and went on to thank lady Feng for all the trouble she had taken in the management of them.

“How could I control all these manifold matters,” remarked lady Feng; “my experience is so shallow, my speech so dull and my mind so simple, that if any one showed me a club, I would mistake it for a pin. Besides, I’m so tender-hearted that were any one to utter a couple of glib remarks, I couldn’t help feeling my heart give way to compassion and sympathy. I’ve had, in addition, no experience in any weighty questions; my pluck is likewise so very small that when madame Wang has felt in the least displeased, I have not been able to close my eyes and sleep. Urgently did I more than once resign the charge, but her ladyship wouldn’t again agree to it; maintaining, on the contrary, that my object was to be at ease, and that I was not willing to reap experience. Leaving aside that she doesn’t know that I take things so much to heart, that I can scoop the perspiration in handfuls, that I daren’t utter one word more than is proper, nor venture to recklessly take one step more than I ought to, you know very well which of the women servants, in charge of the menage in our household, is easy to manage! If ever I make the slightest mistake, they laugh at me and poke fun at me; and if I incline a little one way, they show their displeasure by innuendoes; they sit by and look on, they use every means to do harm, they stir up trouble, they stand by on safe ground and look on and don’t give a helping hand to lift

any one they have thrown over, and they are, one and all of them, old hands in such tricks. I'm moreover young in years and not able to keep people in check, so that they naturally don't show any regard for me! What is still more ridiculous is that after the death of Jung Erh's wife in that mansion, brother Chen, time and again, begged madame Wang, on his very knees, to do him the favour to ask me to lend him a hand for several days. I repeatedly signified my refusal, but her ladyship gave her consent in order to oblige him, so that I had no help but to carry out her wish; putting, as is my wont, everything topsy-turvey, and making matters worse than they were; with the result that brother Chen up to this day bears me a grudge and regrets having asked for my assistance. When you see him to-morrow, do what you can to excuse me by him. 'Young as she is,' tell him, 'and without experience of the world, who ever could have instigated Mr. Chia Cheng to make such a mistake as to choose her.'"

While they were still chatting, they heard people talking in the outer apartments, and lady Feng speedily inquired who it was. P'ing Erh entered the room to reply. "Lady Hsüeh," she said, "has sent sister Hsiang Ling

page 229

over to ask me something; but I've already given her my answer and sent her back."

"Quite so," interposed Chia Lien with a smile. "A short while ago I went to look up Mrs. Hsüeh and came face to face with a young girl, whose features were supremely perfect, and as I suspected that, in our household, there was no such person, I asked in the course of conversation, Mrs. Hsüeh about her, and found out eventually that this was the young waiting-maid they had purchased on their way to the capital, Hsiang Ling by name, and that she had after all become an inmate of the household of that big fool Hsüeh. Since she's had her hair dressed as a married woman she does look so much more pre-eminently beautiful! But that big fool Hsüeh has really brought contamination upon her."

"Ai!" exclaimed lady Feng, "here you are back from a trip to Suchow and Hang Chow, where you should have seen something of the world! and have you still an eye as envious and a heart so covetous? Well, if you wish to bestow your love on her, there's no difficulty worth speaking of. I'll take P'ing Erh over and exchange her for her; what do you say to that? that old brother Hsüeh is also one of those men, who, while eating what there is in the bowl, keeps an eye on what

there is in the pan! For the last year or so, as he couldn't get Hsiang Ling to be his, he made ever so many distressing appeals to Mrs. Hsüeh; and Mrs. Hsüeh while esteeming Hsiang Ling's looks, though fine, as after all a small matter, (thought) her deportment and conduct so far unlike those of other girls, so gentle and so demure that almost the very daughters of masters and mistresses couldn't attain her standard, that she therefore went to the trouble of spreading a banquet, and of inviting guests, and in open court, and in the legitimate course, she gave her to him for a secondary wife. But half a month had scarcely elapsed before he looked upon her also as a good-for-nothing person as he did upon a large number of them! I can't however help feeling pity for her in my heart.”

Scarcely had she time to conclude what she had to say when a youth, on duty at the second gate, transmitted the announcement that Mr. Chia Cheng was in the Library waiting for Mr. Secundus. At these words, Chia Lien speedily adjusted his clothes, and left the apartment; and during his absence, lady Feng inquired of P'ing Erh what Mrs. Hsüeh wanted a few minutes back, that she sent Hsiang Ling round in such a hurry.

“What Hsiang Ling ever came?” replied P'ing Erh. “I simply made use of her name to tell a lie for the occasion. Tell me, my lady, (what's come to) Wang Erh's wife? why she's got so bad that there's even no common sense left in her!” Saying this she again drew near lady Feng's side, and

page 230

in a soft tone of voice, she continued: “That interest of yours, my lady, she doesn't send later, nor does she send it sooner; but she must send it round the very moment when master Secundus is at home! But as luck would have it, I was in the hall, so that I came across her; otherwise, she would have walked in and told your ladyship, and Mr. Secundus would naturally have come to know about it! And our master would, with that frame of mind of his, have fished it out and spent it, had the money even been at the bottom of a pan full of oil! and were he to have heard that my lady had private means, would he not have been still more reckless in spending? Hence it was that, losing no time in taking the money over, I had to tell her a few words which, who would have thought, happened to be overheard by your ladyship; that's why, in the presence of master Secundus, I simply explained that Hsiang Ling had come!”

These words evoked a smile from lady Feng. “Mrs. Hsueh, I thought to myself,”

she observed, “knows very well that your Mr. Secundus has come, and yet, regardless of propriety, she, instead (of keeping her at home), sends some one over from her inner rooms! and it was you after all, you vixen, playing these pranks!”

As she uttered this remark, Chia Lien walked in, and lady Feng issued orders to serve the wine and the eatables, and husband and wife took their seats opposite to each other; but notwithstanding that lady Feng was very partial to drink, she nevertheless did not have the courage to indulge her weakness, but merely partook of some to keep him company. Chia Lien's nurse, dame Chao, entered the room, and Chia Lien and lady Feng promptly pressed her to have a glass of wine, and bade her sit on the stove-couch, but dame Chao was obstinate in her refusal. P'ing Erh and the other waiting-maids had at an early hour placed a square stool next to the edge of the couch, where was likewise a small footstool, and on this footstool dame Chao took a seat, whereupon Chia Lien chose two dishes of delicacies from the table, which he handed her to place on the square stool for her own use.

“Dame Chao,” lady Feng remarked, “couldn't very well bite through that, for mind it might make her teeth drop! This morning,” she therefore asked of P'ing Erh, “I suggested that that shoulder of pork stewed with ham was so tender as to be quite the thing to be given to dame Chao to eat; and how is it you haven't taken it over to her? But go at once and tell them to warm it and bring it in! Dame Chao,” she went on, “just you taste this Hui Ch'üan wine brought by your foster-son.”

“I'll drink it,” replied dame Chao, “but you, my lady, must also have a cup: what's there to fear? the one thing to guard against is any excess, that's all! But I've now come over, not for any wine or eatables; on the contrary, there's a serious matter, which I would ask your ladyship to im-

page 231

press on your mind, and to show me some regard, for this master of ours is only good to utter fine words, but when the time (to act) does come, he forgets all about us! As I have had the good fortune to nurse him in his infancy and to bring him up to this age, 'I too have grown old in years,' I said to him, 'and all that belong to me are those two sons, and do look upon them with some particular favour!' With any one else I shouldn't have ventured to open my mouth, but him

I anyway entreated time and again on several occasions. His assent was of course well and good, but up to this very moment he still withholds his help. Now besides from the heavens has dropped such a mighty piece of good luck; and in what place will there be no need of servants? that's why I come to tell you, my lady, as is but right, for were I to depend upon our master, I fear I shall even die of starvation."

Lady Feng laughed. "You'd better," she suggested, "put those two elder foster brothers of his both under my charge! But you've nursed that foster-son from his babyhood, and don't you yet know that disposition of his, how that he takes his skin and flesh and sticks it, (not on the body of a relative), but, on the contrary, on that of an outsider and stranger? (to Chia Lien.) Which of those foster brothers whom you have now discarded, isn't clearly better than others? and were you to have shown them some favour and consideration, who would have ventured to have said 'don't?' Instead of that, you confer benefits upon thorough strangers, and all to no purpose whatever! But these words of mine are also incorrect, eh? for those whom we regard as strangers you, contrariwise, will treat just as if they were relatives!"

At these words every one present in the room burst out laughing; even nurse Chao could not repress herself; and as she invoked Buddha,—“In very truth,” she exclaimed, “in this room has sprung up a kind-hearted person! as regards relatives and strangers, such foolish distinctions aren't drawn by our master; and it's simply because he's full of pity and is tenderhearted that he can't put off any one who gives vent to a few words of entreaty, and nothing else!”

“That's quite it!” rejoined lady Feng smiling sarcastically, “to those whom he looks upon as relatives, he's kindhearted, but with me and his mother he's as hard as steel.”

“What you say, my lady, is very considerate,” remarked nurse Chao, “and I'm really so full of delight that I'll have another glass of good wine! and, if from this time forward, your ladyship will act as you think best, I'll have then nothing to be sorry for!”

Chia Lien did not at this juncture feel quite at his ease, but he could do no more than feign a smile. “You people,” he said, “should leave off talking nonsense, and bring the eatables at once and let us have our meal, as I

have still to go on the other side and see Mr. Chia Chen, to consult with him about business.”

“To be sure you have,” ventured lady Feng, “and you shouldn't neglect your legitimate affairs; but what did Mr. Chia Chen tell you when he sent for you just a while back?”

“It was about the visit (of Yuan Ch'un) to her parents,” Chia Lien explained.

“Has after all permission for the visit been granted?” lady Feng inquired with alacrity.

“Though not quite granted,” Chia Lien replied joyously, “it's nevertheless more or less an accomplished fact.”

“This is indeed evidence of the great bounty of the present Emperor!” lady Feng observed smirkingly; “one doesn't hear in books, or see in plays, written from time to time, any mention of such an instance, even so far back as the days of old!”

Dame Chao took up again the thread of the conversation. “Indeed it's so!” she interposed; “But I'm in very truth quite stupid from old age, for I've heard every one, high and low, clamouring during these few days, something or other about 'Hsing Ch'in' or no 'Hsing Ch'in,' but I didn't really pay any heed to it; and now again, here's something more about this 'Hsing Ch'in,' but what's it all about, I wonder?”

“The Emperor at present on the Throne,” explained Chia Lien, “takes into consideration the feelings of his people. In the whole world, there is (in his opinion), no more essential thing than filial piety; maintaining that the feelings of father, mother, son and daughter are indiscriminately subject to one principle, without any distinction between honorable and mean. The present Emperor himself day and night waits upon their majesties his Father and the Empress Dowager, and yet cannot, in the least degree, carry out to the full his ideal of filial piety. The secondary consorts, meritorious persons and other inmates of the Palace, he remembered, had entered within its precincts many years back, casting aside fathers and mothers, so how could they not help thinking of them?”

Besides, the fathers and mothers, who remain at home must long for their daughters, of whom they cannot get even so much as a glimpse, and if, through this solicitude, they were to contract any illness, the harmony of heaven would also be seriously impaired, so for this reason, he memorialised the Emperor, his father, and the Empress Dowager that every month, on the recurrence of the second and sixth days, permission should be accorded to the relatives of the imperial consorts to enter the palace and make application to see their daughters. The Emperor, his father, and Empress Dowager were, forthwith, much delighted by this representation, and eulogised, in high terms, the piety and generosity of the

page 233

present Emperor, his regard for the will of heaven and his research into the nature of things. Both their sacred Majesties consequently also issued a decree to the effect: that the entrance of the relatives of the imperial consorts into the Palace could not but interfere with the dignity of the state, and the rules of conventional rites, but that as the mothers and daughters could not gratify the wishes of their hearts, Their Majesties would, after all, show a high proof of expedient grace, and issue a special command that: 'exclusive of the generous bounty, by virtue of which the worthy relations of the imperial consorts could enter the palace on the second and sixth days, any family, having extensive accommodation and separate courts suitable for the cantonment of the imperial body-guard, could, without any detriment, make application to the Inner Palace, for the entrance of the imperial chair into the private residences, to the end that the personal feelings of relations might be gratified, and that they should collectively enjoy the bliss of a family reunion.' After the issue of this decree, who did not leap from grateful joy! The father of the honourable secondary consort Chou has now already initiated works, in his residence, for the repairs to the separate courts necessary for the visiting party. Wu T'ien-yu too, the father of Wu, the distinguished consort, has likewise gone outside the city walls in search of a suitable plot of ground; and don't these amount to well-nigh accomplished facts?"

"O-mi-to-fu!" exclaimed dame Chao. "Is it really so? but from what you say, our family will also be making preparations for the reception of the eldest young lady!"

"That goes without saying," added Chia Lien, "otherwise, for what purpose

could we be in such a stir just now?"

"It's of course so!" interposed lady Feng smiling, "and I shall now have an opportunity of seeing something great of the world. My misfortune is that I'm young by several years; for had I been born twenty or thirty years sooner, all these old people wouldn't really be now treating me contemptuously for not having seen the world! To begin with, the Emperor Tai Tsu, in years gone by, imitated the old policy of Shun, and went on a tour, giving rise to more stir than any book could have ever produced; but I happen to be devoid of that good fortune which could have enabled me to come in time."

"Ai ya, ya!" ejaculated dame Chao, "such a thing is rarely met with in a thousand years! I was old enough at that time to remember the occurrence! Our Chia family was then at Ku Su, Yangchow and all along that line, superintending the construction of ocean vessels, and the repairs to the seaboard. This was the only time in which preparations were made

page 234

for the reception of the Emperor, and money was lavished in quantities as great as the billowing waters of the sea!"

This subject once introduced, lady Feng took up the thread of the conversation with vehemence. "Our Wang family," she said, "did also make preparations on one occasion. At that time my grandfather was in sole charge of all matters connected with tribute from various states, as well as with general levees, so that whenever any foreigners arrived, they all came to our house to be entertained, while the whole of the goods, brought by foreign vessels from the two Kuang provinces, from Fukien, Yunnan and Chekiang, were the property of our family."

"Who isn't aware of these facts?" ventured dame Chao; "there is up to this day a saying that, 'in the eastern sea, there was a white jade bed required, and the dragon prince came to request Mr. Wang of Chin Ling (to give it to him)!' This saying relates to your family, my lady, and remains even now in vogue. The Chen family of Chiang Nan has recently held, oh such a fine old standing! it alone has entertained the Emperor on four occasions! Had we not seen these things with our own eyes, were we to tell no matter whom, they wouldn't surely ever believe them! Not to speak of the money, which was as plentiful as mud, all

things, whether they were to be found in the world or not, were they not heaped up like hills, and collected like the waters of the sea? But with the four characters representing sin and pity they didn't however trouble their minds.”

“I've often heard,” continued lady Feng, “my eldest uncle say that things were in such a state, and how couldn't I believe? but what surprises me is how it ever happened that this family attained such opulence and honour!”

“I'll tell your ladyship and all in one sentence,” replied nurse Chao. “Why they simply took the Emperor's money and spent it for the Emperor's person, that's all! for what family has such a lot of money as to indulge in this useless extravagance?”

While they were engaged in this conversation, a servant came a second time, at the instance of madame Wang, to see whether lady Feng had finished her meal or not; and lady Feng forthwith concluding that there must be something waiting for her to attend to, hurriedly rushed through her repast. She had just rinsed her mouth and was about to start when the youths, on duty at the second gate, also reported that the two gentlemen, Mr. Chia Jung and Mr. Chia Se, belonging to the Eastern mansion, had arrived.

Chia Lien had, at length, rinsed his mouth; but while P'ing Erh presented a basin for him to wash his hands, he perceived the two young men walk in, and readily inquired of them what they had to say.

page 235

Lady Feng was, on account (of their arrival), likewise compelled to stay, and she heard Chia Jung take the lead and observe: “My father has sent me to tell you, uncle, that the gentlemen, have already decided that the whole extent of ground, starting from the East side, borrowing (for the occasion) the flower garden of the Eastern mansion, straight up to the North West, had been measured and found to amount in all to three and a half li; that it will be suitable for the erection of extra accommodation for the visiting party; that they have already commissioned an architect to draw a plan, which will be ready by to-morrow; that as you, uncle, have just returned home, and must unavoidably feel fatigued, you need not go over to our house, but that if you have anything to say you should please come tomorrow morning, as early as you can, and consult verbally with him.”

“Thank uncle warmly,” Chia Lien rejoined smilingly, “for the trouble he has taken in thinking of me; I shall, in that case, comply with his wishes and not go over. This plan is certainly the proper one, for while trouble will thus be saved, the erection of the quarters will likewise be an easy matter; for had a distinct plot to be selected and to be purchased, it would involve far greater difficulties. What's more, things wouldn't, after all, be what they properly should be. When you get back, tell your father that this decision is the right one, and that should the gentlemen have any further wish to introduce any change in their proposals, it will rest entirely with my uncle to prevent them, as it's on no account advisable to go and cast one's choice on some other plot; that to-morrow as soon as it's daylight, I'll come and pay my respects to uncle, when we can enter into further details in our deliberations!”

Chia Jung hastily signified his assent by several yes's, and Chia Se also came forward to deliver his message. “The mission to Ku Su,” he explained, “to find tutors, to purchase servant girls, and to obtain musical instruments, and theatrical properties and the like, my uncle has confided to me; and as I'm to take along with me the two sons of a couple of majordomos, and two companions of the family, besides, Tan P'ing-jen and Pei Ku-hsiu, he has, for this reason, enjoined me to come and see you, uncle.”

Upon hearing this, Chia Lien scrutinised Chia Se. “What!” he asked, “are you able to undertake these commissions? These matters are, it's true, of no great moment; but there's something more hidden in them!”

Chia Se smiled. “The best thing I can do,” he remarked, “will be to execute them in my novice sort of way, that's all.”

Chia Jung was standing next to lady Feng, out of the light of the lamp, and stealthily pulled the lapel of her dress. Lady Feng understood the hint, and putting on a smiling expression, “You are too full of fears!” she

page 236

interposed. “Is it likely that our uncle Chen doesn't, after all, know better than we do what men to employ, that you again give way to apprehensions that he isn't up to the mark! but who are those who are, in every respect, up to the mark? These young fellows have grown up already to this age, and if they haven't eaten any pork, they have nevertheless seen a pig run. If Mr. Chen has deputed him to

go, he is simply meant to sit under the general's standard; and do you imagine, forsooth, that he has, in real earnest, told him to go and bargain about the purchase money, and to interview the brokers himself? My own idea is that (the choice) is a very good one."

"Of course it is!" observed Chia Lien; "but it isn't that I entertain any wish to be factious; my only object is to devise some plan or other for him. Whence will," he therefore went on to ask, "the money required for this purpose come from?"

"A little while ago the deliberations reached this point," rejoined Chia Se; "and Mr. Lai suggested that there was no necessity at all to take any funds from the capital, as the Chen family, in Chiang Nan, had still in their possession Tls. 50,000 of our money. That he would to-morrow write a letter of advice and a draft for us to take along, and that we should, first of all, obtain cash to the amount of Tls. 30,000, and let the balance of Tls. 20,000 remain over, for the purchase of painted lanterns, and coloured candles, as well as for the outlay for every kind of portieres, banners, curtains and streamers."

Chia Lien nodded his head. "This plan is first-rate!" he added.

"Since that be so," observed lady Feng, as she addressed herself to Chia Se, "I've two able and reliable men; and if you would take them with you, to attend to these matters, won't it be to your convenience?"

Chia Se forced a smile. "I was just on the point," he rejoined, "of asking you, aunt, for the loan of two men, so that this suggestion is a strange coincidence."

As he went on to ascertain what were their names, lady Feng inquired what they were of nurse Chao. But nurse Chao had, by this time, become quite dazed from listening to the conversation, and P'ing Erh had to give her a push, as she smiled, before she returned to consciousness. "The one," she hastened to reply, "is called Chao T'ien-liang and the other Chao T'ien-tung."

"Whatever you do," suggested lady Feng, "don't forget them; but now I'm off to look after my duties."

With these words, she left the room, and Chia Jung promptly followed her out, and with gentle voice he said to her: "Of whatever you want, aunt, issue orders that a list be drawn up, and I'll give it to my brother to take with him, and he'll

carry out your commissions according to the list.”

page 237

“Don't talk nonsense!” replied lady Feng laughing; “I've found no place, as yet, where I could put away all my own things; and do the stealthy practices of you people take my fancy?”

As she uttered these words she straightway went her way.

Chia Se, at this time, likewise, asked Chia Lien: “If you want anything (in the way of curtains), I can conveniently have them woven for you, along with the rest, and bring them as a present to you.”

“Don't be in such high glee!” Chia Lien urged with a grin, “you've but recently been learning how to do business, and have you come first and foremost to excel in tricks of this kind? If I require anything, I'll of course write and tell you, but we needn't talk about it.”

Having finished speaking, he dismissed the two young men; and, in quick succession, servants came to make their business reports, not limited to three and five companies, but as Chia Lien felt exhausted, he forthwith sent word to those on duty at the second gate not to allow any one at all to communicate any reports, and that the whole crowd should wait till the next day, when he would give his mind to what had to be done.

Lady Feng did not come to retire to rest till the third watch; but nothing need be said about the whole night.

The next morning, at an early hour, Chia Lien got up and called on Chia She and Chia Cheng; after which, he came over to the Ning Kuo mansion; when, in company with the old major-domos and other servants, as well as with several old family friends and companions, he inspected the grounds of the two mansions, and drew plans of the palatial buildings (for the accommodation of the Imperial consort and her escort) on her visit to her parents; deliberating at the same time, on the subject of the works and workmen.

From this day the masons and workmen of every trade were collected to the full number; and the articles of gold, silver, copper, and pewter, as well as the earth,

timber, tiles, and bricks, were brought over, and carried in, in incessant supplies. In the first place, orders were issued to the workmen to demolish the wall and towers of the garden of Concentrated Fragrance, and extend a passage to connect in a straight line with the large court in the East of the Jung mansion; for the whole extent of servants' quarters on the Eastern side of the Jung mansion had previously been pulled down.

The two residences of Ning and Jung were, in these days, it is true, divided by a small street, which served as a boundary line, and there was no communication between them, but this narrow passage was also private property, and not in any way a government street, so that they could easily

page 238

be connected, and as in the garden of Concentrated Fragrance, there was already a stream of running water, which had been introduced through the corner of the Northern wall, there was no further need now of going to the trouble of bringing in another. Although the rockeries and trees were not sufficient, the place where Chia She lived, was an old garden of the Jung mansion, so that the bamboos, trees, and rockeries in that compound, as well as the arbours, railings and other such things could all be very well removed to the front; and by these means, these two grounds, situated as they were besides so very near to each other, could, by being thrown into one, conduce to the saving of considerable capital and labour; for, in spite of some deficiency, what had to be supplied did not amount to much. And it devolved entirely upon a certain old Hu, a man of note, styled Shan Tzu-yeh, to deliberate upon one thing after another, and to initiate its construction.

Chia Cheng was not up to these ordinary matters, so that it fell to Chia She, Chia Chen, Chia Lien, Lai Ta, Lai Sheng, Lin Chih-hsiao, Wu Hsin-teng, Chan Kuang, Ch'eng Jih-hsing and several others to allot the sites, to set things in order, (and to look after) the heaping up of rockeries, the digging of ponds, the construction of two-storied buildings, the erection of halls, the plantation of bamboos and the cultivation of flowers, everything connected with the improvement of the scenery devolving, on the other hand, upon Shan Tzu-yeh to make provision for, and after leaving Court, he would devote such leisure moments as he had to merely going everywhere to give a look at the most important spots, and to consult with Chia She and the others; after which he troubled his mind no more with anything. And as Chia She did nothing else than

stay at home and lie off, whenever any matter turned up, trifling though it may have been as a grain of mustard seed or a bean, Chia Chen and his associates had either to go and report it in person or to write a memorandum of it. Or if he had anything to say, he sent for Chia Lien, Lai Ta and others to come and receive his instructions. Chia Jung had the sole direction of the manufacture of the articles in gold and silver; and as for Chia Se, he had already set out on his journey to Ku Su. Chia Chen, Lai Ta and the rest had also to call out the roll with the names of the workmen, to superintend the works and other duties relative thereto, which could not be recorded by one pen alone; sufficient to say that a great bustle and stir prevailed, but to this subject we shall not refer for a time, but allude to Pao-yü.

As of late there were in the household concerns of this magnitude to attend to, Chia Cheng did not come to examine him in his lessons, so that he was, of course, in high spirits, but, as unfortunately Ch'in Chung's complaint became, day by day, more serious, he was at the same time really

page 239

so very distressed at heart on his account, that enjoyment was for him out of the question.

On this day, he got up as soon as it was dawn, and having just combed his hair and washed his face and hands, he was bent upon going to ask dowager lady Chia to allow him to pay a visit to Ch'in Chung, when he suddenly espied Ming Yen peep round the curtain-wall at the second gate, and then withdraw his head. Pao-yü promptly walked out and inquired what he was up to.

“Mr. Ch'in Chung,” observed Ming Yen, “is not well at all.”

Pao-yü at these words was quite taken aback. “It was only yesterday,” he hastily added, “that I saw him, and he was still bright and cheery; and how is it that he's anything but well now?”

“I myself can't explain,” replied Ming Yen; “but just a few minutes ago an old man belonging to his family came over with the express purpose of giving me the tidings.”

Upon hearing this news, Pao-yü there and then turned round and told dowager

lady Chia; and the old lady issued directions to depute some trustworthy persons to accompany him. "Let him go," (she said), "and satisfy his feelings towards his fellow-scholar; but as soon as he has done, he must come back; and don't let him tarry too long."

Pao-yü with hurried step left the room and came and changed his clothes. But as on his arrival outside, the carriage had not as yet been got ready, he fell into such a state of excitement, that he went round and round all over the hall in quite an erratic manner. In a short while, after pressure had been brought to bear, the carriage arrived, and speedily mounting the vehicle, he drove up to the door of Ch'in Chung's house, followed by Li Kuei, Ming Yen and the other servants. Everything was quiet. Not a soul was about. Like a hive of bees they flocked into the house, to the astonishment of two distant aunts, and of several male cousins of Ch'in Chung, all of whom had no time to effect their retreat.

Ch'in Chung had, by this time, had two or three fainting fits, and had already long ago been changed his mat. As soon as Pao-yü realised the situation, he felt unable to repress himself from bursting forth aloud. Li Kuei promptly reasoned with him. "You shouldn't go on in this way," he urged, "you shouldn't. It's because Mr. Ch'in is so weak that lying flat on the stove-couch naturally made his bones feel uncomfortable; and that's why he has temporarily been removed down here to ease him a little. But if you, sir, go on in this way, will you not, instead of doing him any good, aggravate his illness?"

At these words, Pao-yü accordingly restrained himself, and held his tongue; and drawing near, he gazed at Ch'in Chung's face, which was as

page 240

white as wax, while with closed eyes, he gasped for breath, rolling about on his pillow.

"Brother Ching," speedily exclaimed Pao-yü, "Pao-yü is here!" But though he shouted out two or three consecutive times, Ch'in Chung did not heed him.

"Pao-yü has come!" Pao-yü went on again to cry. But Ch'in Chung's spirit had already departed from his body, leaving behind only a faint breath of superfluous air in his lungs.

He had just caught sight of a number of recording devils, holding a warrant and carrying chains, coming to seize him, but Ch'in Chung's soul would on no account go along with them; and remembering how that there was in his home no one to assume the direction of domestic affairs, and feeling concerned that Chih Neng had as yet no home, he consequently used hundreds of arguments in his entreaties to the recording devils; but alas! these devils would, none of them, show him any favour. On the contrary, they heaped invectives upon Ch'in Chung.

“You're fortunate enough to be a man of letters,” they insinuated, “and don't you know the common saying that: 'if the Prince of Hell call upon you to die at the third watch, who can presume to retain you, a human being, up to the fifth watch?' In our abode, in the unseen, high as well as low, have all alike a face made of iron, and heed not selfish motives; unlike the mortal world, where favouritism and partiality prevail. There exist therefore many difficulties in the way (to our yielding to your wishes).”

While this fuss was going on, Ch'in Chung's spirit suddenly grasped the four words, “Pao-yü has come,” and without loss of time, it went on again to make further urgent appeals. “Gentlemen, spiritual deputies,” it exclaimed; “show me a little mercy and allow me to return to make just one remark to an intimate friend of mine, and I'll be back again.”

“What intimate friend is this again?” the devils observed with one voice.

“I'm not deceiving you, gentlemen,” rejoined Ch'in Chung; “it's the grandson of the duke of Jung Kuo, whose infant name is Pao-yü.”

The Decider of life was, at first, upon hearing these words, so seized with dismay that he vehemently abused the devils sent on the errand.

“I told you,” he shouted, “to let him go back for a turn; but you would by no means comply with my words! and now do you wait until he has summoned a man of glorious fortune and prosperous standing to at last desist?”

page 241

When the company of devils perceived the manner of the Decider of life, they were all likewise so seized with consternation that they bustled with hand and

feet; while with hearts also full of resentment: "You, sir," they replied, "were at one time such a terror, formidable as lightning; and are you not forsooth able to listen with equanimity to the two sounds of 'Pao-yü?' our humble idea is that mortal as he is, and immortal as we are, it wouldn't be to our credit if we feared him!"

But whether Ch'in Chung, after all, died or survived, the next chapter will explain.

CHAPTER XVII.

In the Ta Kuan Garden, (Broad Vista,) the merits of Pao-yü are put to the test, by his being told to write devices for scrolls and tablets. Yuan Ch'un returns to the Jung Kuo mansion, on a visit to her parents, and offers her congratulations to them on the feast of lanterns, on the fifteenth of the first moon.

Ch'in Chung, to resume our story, departed this life, and Pao-yü went on so unceasingly in his bitter lamentations, that Li Kuei and the other servants had, for ever so long, an arduous task in trying to comfort him before he desisted; but on his return home he was still exceedingly disconsolate.

Dowager lady Chia afforded monetary assistance to the amount of several tens of taels; and exclusive of this, she had sacrificial presents likewise got ready. Pao-yü went and paid a visit of condolence to the family, and after seven days the funeral and burial took place, but there are no particulars about them which could be put on record.

Pao-yü, however, continued to mourn (his friend) from day to day, and was incessant in his remembrance of him, but there was likewise no help for it. Neither is it known after how many days he got over his grief.

On this day, Chia Chen and the others came to tell Chia Cheng that the works in the garden had all been reported as completed, and that Mr. Chia She had already inspected them. "It only remains," (they said), "for you, sir, to see them; and should there possibly be anything which is not proper, steps will be at once taken to effect the alterations, so that the tablets and scrolls may conveniently be written."

After Chia Cheng had listened to these words, he pondered for a while. "These tablets and scrolls," he remarked, "present however a difficult task.

page 242

According to the rites, we should, in order to obviate any shortcoming, request the imperial consort to deign and compose them; but if the honourable consort does not gaze upon the scenery with her own eyes, it will also be difficult for her to conceive its nature and indite upon it! And were we to wait until the arrival of

her highness, to request her to honour the grounds with a visit, before she composes the inscriptions, such a wide landscape, with so many pavilions and arbours, will, without one character in the way of a motto, albeit it may abound with flowers, willows, rockeries, and streams, nevertheless in no way be able to show off its points of beauty to advantage.”

The whole party of family companions, who stood by, smiled. “Your views, remarkable sir,” they ventured, “are excellent; but we have now a proposal to make. Tablets and scrolls for every locality cannot, on any account, be dispensed with, but they could not likewise, by any means, be determined upon for good! Were now, for the time being, two, three or four characters fixed upon, harmonising with the scenery, to carry out, for form's sake, the idea, and were they provisionally utilised as mottoes for the lanterns, tablets and scrolls, and hung up, pending the arrival of her highness, and her visit through the grounds, when she could be requested to decide upon the devices, would not two exigencies be met with satisfactorily?”

“Your views are perfectly correct,” observed Chia Cheng, after he had heard their suggestion; “and we should go to-day and have a look at the place so as then to set to work to write the inscriptions; which, if suitable, can readily be used; and, if unsuitable, Yü-ts'un can then be sent for, and asked to compose fresh ones.”

The whole company smiled. “If you, sir, were to compose them to-day,” they ventured, “they are sure to be excellent; and what need will there be again to wait for Yü-ts'un!”

“You people are not aware,” Chia Cheng added with a smiling countenance, “that I've been, even in my young days, very mediocre in the composition of stanzas on flowers, birds, rockeries and streams; and that now that I'm well up in years and have moreover the fatigue and trouble of my official duties, I've become in literary compositions like these, which require a light heart and gladsome mood, still more inapt. Were I even to succeed in composing any, they will unavoidably be so doltish and forced that they would contrariwise be instrumental in making the flowers, trees, garden and pavilions, through their demerits, lose in beauty, and present instead no pleasing feature.”

“This wouldn't anyhow matter,” remonstrated all the family companions, “for after perusing them we can all decide upon them together, each one of us

recommending those he thinks best; which if excellent can

page 243

be kept, and if faulty can be discarded; and there's nothing unfeasible about this!"

"This proposal is most apposite," rejoined Chia Cheng. "What's more, the weather is, I rejoice, fine to-day; so let's all go in a company and have a look."

Saying this, he stood up and went forward, at the head of the whole party; while Chia Chen betook himself in advance into the garden to let every one know of their coming. As luck would have it, Pao-yü—for he had been these last few days thinking of Ch'in Chung and so ceaselessly sad and wounded at heart, that dowager lady Chia had frequently directed the servants to take him into the new garden to play—made his entrance just at this very time, and suddenly became aware of the arrival of Chia Chen, who said to him with a smile, "Don't you yet run away as fast as you can? Mr. Chia Cheng will be coming in a while."

At these words, Pao-yü led off his nurse and the youths, and rushed at once out of the garden, like a streak of smoke; but as he turned a corner, he came face to face with Chia Cheng, who was advancing towards that direction, at the head of all the visitors; and as he had no time to get out of the way, the only course open to him was to stand on one side.

Chia Cheng had, of late, heard the tutor extol him by saying that he displayed special ability in rhyming antithetical lines, and that although he did not like to read his books, he nevertheless possessed some depraved talents, and hence it was that he was induced at this moment to promptly bid him follow him into the garden, with the intent of putting him to the test.

Pao-yü could not make out what his object was, but he was compelled to follow. As soon as they reached the garden gate, and he caught sight of Chia Chen, standing on one side, along with several managers: "See that the garden gate is closed for a time," Chia Cheng exclaimed, "for we'll first see the outside and then go in."

Chia Chen directed a servant to close the gate, and Chia Cheng first looked straight ahead of him towards the gate and espied on the same side as the main

entrance a suite of five apartments. Above, the cylindrical tiles resembled the backs of mud eels. The doors, railings, windows, and frames were all finely carved with designs of the new fashion, and were painted neither in vermilion nor in white colours. The whole extent of the walls was of polished bricks of uniform colour; while below, the white marble on the terrace and steps was engraved with western foreign designs; and when he came to look to the right and to the left, everything was white as snow. At the foot of the white-washed walls, tiger-skin pebbles were, without regard to pattern, promiscuously inserted in the earth

page 244

in such a way as of their own selves to form streaks. Nothing fell in with the custom of gaudiness and display so much in vogue, so that he naturally felt full of delight; and, when he forthwith asked that the gate should be thrown open, all that met their eyes was a long stretch of verdant hills, which shut in the view in front of them.

“What a fine hill, what a pretty hill!” exclaimed all the companions with one voice.

“Were it not for this one hill,” Chia Cheng explained, “whatever scenery is contained in it would clearly strike the eye, as soon as one entered into the garden, and what pleasure would that have been?”

“Quite so,” rejoined all of them. “But without large hills and ravines in one's breast (liberal capacities), how could one attain such imagination!”

After the conclusion of this remark, they cast a glance ahead of them, and perceived white rugged rocks looking, either like goblins, or resembling savage beasts, lying either crossways, or in horizontal or upright positions; on the surface of which grew moss and lichen with mottled hues, or parasitic plants, which screened off the light; while, slightly visible, wound, among the rocks, a narrow pathway like the intestines of a sheep.

“If we were now to go and stroll along by this narrow path,” Chia Cheng suggested, “and to come out from over there on our return, we shall have been able to see the whole grounds.”

Having finished speaking, he asked Chia Chen to lead the way; and he himself, leaning on Pao-yü, walked into the gorge with leisurely step. Raising his head,

he suddenly beheld on the hill a block of stone, as white as the surface of a looking-glass, in a site which was, in very deed, suitable to be left for an inscription, as it was bound to meet the eye.

“Gentlemen,” Chia Cheng observed, as he turned his head round and smiled, “please look at this spot. What name will it be fit to give it?”

When the company heard his remark, some maintained that the two words “Heaped verdure” should be written; and others upheld that the device should be “Embroidered Hill.” Others again suggested: “Vying with the Hsiang Lu;” and others recommended “the small Chung Nan.” And various kinds of names were proposed, which did not fall short of several tens.

All the visitors had been, it must be explained, aware at an early period of the fact that Chia Cheng meant to put Pao-yü's ability to the test, and for this reason they merely proposed a few combinations in common use. But of this intention, Pao-yü himself was likewise cognizant.

After listening to the suggestions, Chia Cheng forthwith turned his head round and bade Pao-yü think of some motto.

page 245

“I've often heard,” Pao-yü replied, “that writers of old opine that it's better to quote an old saying than to compose a new one; and that an old engraving excels in every respect an engraving of the present day. What's more, this place doesn't constitute the main hill or the chief feature of the scenery, and is really no site where any inscription should be put, as it no more than constitutes the first step in the inspection of the landscape. Won't it be well to employ the exact text of an old writer consisting of 'a tortuous path leading to a secluded (nook).' This line of past days would, if inscribed, be, in fact, liberal to boot.”

After listening to the proposed line, they all sang its praise. “First-rate! excellent!” they cried, “the natural talents of your second son, dear friend, are lofty; his mental capacity is astute; he is unlike ourselves, who have read books but are simple fools.”

“You shouldn't,” urged Chia Cheng smilingly, “heap upon him excessive praise; he's young in years, and merely knows one thing which he turns to the use of ten purposes; you should laugh at him, that's all; but we can by and by choose some

device.”

As he spoke, he entered the cave, where he perceived beautiful trees with thick foliage, quaint flowers in lustrous bloom, while a line of limpid stream emanated out of a deep recess among the flowers and trees, and oozed down through the crevice of the rock. Progressing several steps further in, they gradually faced the northern side, where a stretch of level ground extended far and wide, on each side of which soared lofty buildings, intruding themselves into the skies, whose carved rafters and engraved balustrades nestled entirely among the depressions of the hills and the tops of the trees. They lowered their eyes and looked, and beheld a pure stream flowing like jade, stone steps traversing the clouds, a balustrade of white marble encircling the pond in its embrace, and a stone bridge with three archways, the animals upon which had faces disgorging water from their mouths. A pavilion stood on the bridge, and in this pavilion Chia Chen and the whole party went and sat.

“Gentlemen,” he inquired, “what shall we write about this?”

“In the record,” they all replied, “of the 'Drunken Old Man's Pavilion,' written in days of old by Ou Yang, appears this line: 'There is a pavilion pinioned-like,' so let us call this 'the pinioned-like pavilion,' and finish.”

“Pinioned-like,” observed Chia Cheng smiling, “is indeed excellent; but this pavilion is constructed over the water, and there should, after all, be some allusion to the water in the designation. My humble opinion is that of the line in Ou Yang's work, '(the water) drips from between the two peaks,' we should only make use of that single word 'drips.’”

page 246

“First-rate!” rejoined one of the visitors, “capital! but what would really be appropriate are the two characters 'dripping jadelike.’”

Chia Chen pulled at his moustache, as he gave way to reflection; after which, he asked Pao-yü to also propose one himself.

“What you, sir, suggested a while back,” replied Pao-yü, “will do very well; but if we were now to sift the matter thoroughly, the use of the single word 'drip' by Ou Yang, in his composition about the Niang spring, would appear quite

apposite; while the application, also on this occasion, to this spring, of the character 'drip' would be found not quite suitable. Moreover, seeing that this place is intended as a separate residence (for the imperial consort), on her visit to her parents, it is likewise imperative that we should comply with all the principles of etiquette, so that were words of this kind to be used, they would besides be coarse and inappropriate; and may it please you to fix upon something else more recondite and abstruse."

"What do you, gentlemen, think of this argument?" Chia Cheng remarked sneeringly. "A little while ago, when the whole company devised something original, you observed that it would be better to quote an old device; and now that we have quoted an old motto, you again maintain that it's coarse and inappropriate! But you had better give us one of yours."

"If two characters like 'dripping jadelike' are to be used," Pao-yü explained, "it would be better then to employ the two words 'Penetrating Fragrance,' which would be unique and excellent, wouldn't they?"

Chia Cheng pulled his moustache, nodded his head and did not utter a word; whereupon the whole party hastily pressed forward with one voice to eulogize Pao-yü's acquirements as extraordinary.

"The selection of two characters for the tablet is an easy matter," suggested Chia Cheng, "but now go on and compose a pair of antithetical phrases with seven words in each."

Pao-yü cast a glance round the four quarters, when an idea came into his head, and he went on to recite:

*The willows, which enclose the shore, the green borrow from three
bamboos;
On banks apart, the flowers asunder grow, yet one perfume they give.*

Upon hearing these lines, Chia Cheng gave a faint smile, as he nodded his head, whilst the whole party went on again to be effusive in their praise. But forthwith they issued from the pavilions, and crossed the pond, contemplating with close attention each elevation, each stone, each flower, or each tree. And as suddenly they raised their heads, they caught sight, in front of them, of a line of white wall, of numbers of columns, and beautiful cottages, where

flourished hundreds and thousands of verdant bamboos, which screened off the rays of the sun.

“What a lovely place!” they one and all exclaimed.

Speedily the whole company penetrated inside, perceiving, as soon as they had entered the gate, a zigzag arcade, below the steps of which was a raised pathway, laid promiscuously with stones, and on the furthest part stood a diminutive cottage with three rooms, two with doors leading into them and one without. Everything in the interior, in the shape of beds, teapoys, chairs and tables, were made to harmonise with the space available. Leading out of the inner room of the cottage was a small door from which, as they egressed, they found a back-court with lofty pear trees in blossom and banana trees, as well as two very small retiring back-courts. At the foot of the wall, unexpectedly became visible an aperture where was a spring, for which a channel had been opened scarcely a foot or so wide, to enable it to run inside the wall. Winding round the steps, it skirted the buildings until it reached the front court, where it coiled and curved, flowing out under the bamboos.

“This spot,” observed Chia Cheng full of smiles, “is indeed pleasant! and could one, on a moonlight night, sit under the window and study, one would not spend a whole lifetime in vain!”

As he said this, he quickly cast a glance at Pao-yü, and so terrified did Pao-yü feel that he hastily drooped his head. The whole company lost no time in choosing some irrelevant talk to turn the conversation, and two of the visitors prosecuted their remarks by adding that on the tablet, in this spot, four characters should be inscribed.

“Which four characters?” Chia Cheng inquired, laughingly.

“The bequeathed aspect of the river Ch'i!” suggested one of them.

“It's commonplace,” observed Chia Cheng.

Another person recommended “the remaining vestiges of the Chü Garden.”

“This too is commonplace!” replied Chia Cheng.

“Let brother Pao-yü again propound one!” interposed Chia Chen, who stood by.

“Before he composes any himself,” Chia Cheng continued, “his wont is to first discuss the pros and cons of those of others; so it's evident that he's an impudent fellow!”

“He's most reasonable in his arguments,” all the visitors protested, “and why should he be called to task?”

page 248

“Don't humour him so much!” Chia Cheng expostulated. “I'll put up for to-day,” he however felt constrained to tell Pao-yü, “with your haughty manner, and your rubbishy speech, so that after you have, to begin with, given us your opinion, you may next compose a device. But tell me, are there any that will do among the mottoes suggested just now by all the gentlemen?”

“They all seem to me unsuitable!” Pao-yü did not hesitate to say by way of reply to this question.

Chia Cheng gave a sardonic smile. “How all unsuitable?” he exclaimed.

“This,” continued Pao-yü, “is the first spot which her highness will honour on her way, and there should be inscribed, so that it should be appropriate, something commending her sacred majesty. But if a tablet with four characters has to be used, there are likewise devices ready at hand, written by poets of old; and what need is there to compose any more?”

“Are forsooth the devices 'the river Ch'i and the Chu Garden' not those of old authors?” insinuated Chia Cheng.

“They are too stiff,” replied Pao-yü. “Would not the four characters: 'a phoenix comes with dignified air,' be better?”

With clamorous unanimity the whole party shouted: “Excellent!” and Chia Cheng nodding his head; “You beast, you beast!” he ejaculated, “it may well be

said about you that you see through a thin tube and have no more judgment than an insect! Compose another stanza," he consequently bade him; and Pao-yü recited:

*In the precious tripod kettle, tea is brewed, but green is still the
smoke!*

*O'er is the game of chess by the still window, but the fingers are yet
cold.*

Chia Cheng shook his head. "Neither does this seem to me good!" he said; and having concluded this remark he was leading the company out, when just as he was about to proceed, he suddenly bethought himself of something.

"The several courts and buildings and the teapoys, sideboards, tables and chairs," he added, "may be said to be provided for. But there are still all those curtains, screens and portieres, as well as the furniture, nicknacks and curios; and have they too all been matched to suit the requirements of each place?"

"Of the things that have to be placed about," Chia Chen explained, a good number have, at an early period, been added, and of course when the time comes everything will be suitably arranged. As for the curtains, screens, and portieres, which have to be hung up, I heard yesterday brother Lien say that they are not as yet complete, that when the works were first

page 249

taken in hand, the plan of each place was drawn, the measurements accurately calculated and some one despatched to attend to the things, and that he thought that yesterday half of them were bound to come in.

Chia Cheng, upon hearing this explanation, readily remembered that with all these concerns Chia Chen had nothing to do; so that he speedily sent some one to go and call Chia Lien.

Having arrived in a short while, "How many sorts of things are there in all?" Chia Cheng inquired of him. "Of these how many kinds have by this time been got ready? and how many more are short?"

At this question, Chia Lien hastily produced, from the flaps of his boot, a paper

pocket-book, containing a list, which he kept inside the tops of his boot. After perusing it and reperusing it, he made suitable reply. "Of the hundred and twenty curtains," he proceeded, "of stiff spotted silks, embroidered with dragons in relief, and of the curtains large and small, of every kind of damask silk, eighty were got yesterday, so that there still remain forty of them to come. The two portieres were both received yesterday; and besides these, there are the two hundred red woollen portieres, two hundred portieres of Hsiang Fei bamboo; two hundred door-screens of rattan, with gold streaks, and of red lacquered bamboo; two hundred portieres of black lacquered rattan; two hundred door-screens of variegated thread-netting with clusters of flowers. Of each of these kinds, half have come in, but the whole lot of them will be complete no later than autumn. Antimacassars, table-cloths, flounces for the beds, and cushions for the stools, there are a thousand two hundred of each, but these likewise are ready and at hand."

As he spoke, they proceeded outwards, but suddenly they perceived a hill extending obliquely in such a way as to intercept the passage; and as they wound round the curve of the hill faintly came to view a line of yellow mud walls, the whole length of which was covered with paddy stalks for the sake of protection, and there were several hundreds of apricot trees in bloom, which presented the appearance of being fire, spurted from the mouth, or russet clouds, rising in the air. Inside this enclosure, stood several thatched cottages. Outside grew, on the other hand, mulberry trees, elms, mallows, and silkworm oaks, whose tender shoots and new twigs, of every hue, were allowed to bend and to intertwine in such a way as to form two rows of green fence. Beyond this fence and below the white mound, was a well, by the side of which stood a well-sweep, windlass and such like articles; the ground further down being divided into parcels, and apportioned into fields, which, with the fine vegetables and cabbages in flower, presented, at the first glance, the aspect of being illimitable.

page 250

"This is," Chia Cheng observed chuckling, "the place really imbued with a certain amount of the right principle; and laid out, though it has been by human labour, yet when it strikes my eye, it so moves my heart, that it cannot help arousing in me the wish to return to my native place and become a farmer. But let us enter and rest a while."

As he concluded these words, they were on the point of walking in, when they

unexpectedly discerned a stone, outside the trellis gate, by the roadside, which had also been left as a place on which to inscribe a motto.

“Were a tablet,” argued the whole company smilingly, “put up high in a spot like this, to be filled up by and by, the rustic aspect of a farm would in that case be completely done away with; and it will be better, yea far better to erect this slab on the ground, as it will further make manifest many points of beauty. But unless a motto could be composed of the same excellence as that in Fan Shih-hu's song on farms, it will not be adequate to express its charms!”

“Gentlemen,” observed Chia Cheng, “please suggest something.”

“A short while back,” replied the whole company, “your son, venerable brother, remarked that devising a new motto was not equal to quoting an old one, and as sites of this kind have been already exhausted by writers of days of old, wouldn't it be as well that we should straightway call it the 'apricot blossom village?' and this will do splendidly.”

When Chia Cheng heard this remark, he smiled and said, addressing himself to Chia Chen: “This just reminds me that although this place is perfect in every respect, there's still one thing wanting in the shape of a wine board; and you had better then have one made to-morrow on the very same pattern as those used outside in villages; and it needn't be anything gaudy, but hung above the top of a tree by means of bamboos.”

Chia Chen assented. “There's no necessity,” he went on to explain, “to keep any other birds in here, but only to rear a few geese, ducks, fowls and such like; as in that case they will be in perfect keeping with the place.”

“A splendid idea!” Chia Cheng rejoined, along with all the party.

“‘Apricot blossom village’ is really first-rate,” continued Chia Cheng as he again addressed himself to the company; “but the only thing is that it encroaches on the real designation of the village; and it will be as well to wait (until her highness comes), when we can request her to give it a name.”

“Certainly!” answered the visitors with one voice; “but now as far as a name goes, for mere form, let us all consider what expressions will be suitable to employ.”

Pao-yü did not however give them time to think; nor did he wait for Chia Cheng's permission, but suggested there and then: "In old poetical works there's this passage: 'At the top of the red apricot tree hangs the flag of an inn,' and wouldn't it be advisable, on this occasion, to temporarily adopt the four words: 'the sign on the apricot tree is visible'?"

"'Is visible' is excellent," suggested the whole number of them, "and what's more it secretly accords with the meaning implied by 'apricot blossom village.'"

"Were the two words 'apricot blossom' used for the name of the village, they would be too commonplace and unsuitable;" added Pao-yü with a sardonic grin, "but there's another passage in the works of a poet of the T'ang era: 'By the wooden gate near the water the corn-flower emits its fragrance;' and why not make use of the motto 'corn fragrance village,' which will be excellent?"

When the company heard his proposal, they, with still greater vigour, unanimously combined in crying out "Capital!" as they clapped their hands.

Chia Cheng, with one shout, interrupted their cries, "You ignorant child of wrath!" he ejaculated; "how many old writers can you know, and how many stanzas of ancient poetical works can you remember, that you will have the boldness to show off in the presence of all these experienced gentlemen? (In allowing you to give vent to) all the nonsense you uttered my object was no other than to see whether your brain was clear or muddled; and all for fun's sake, that's all; and lo, you've taken things in real earnest!"

Saying this, he led the company into the interior of the hall with the mallows. The windows were pasted with paper, and the bedsteads made of wood, and all appearance of finery had been expunged, and Chia Cheng's heart was naturally much gratified; but nevertheless, scowling angrily at Pao-yü, "What do you think of this place?" he asked.

When the party heard this question, they all hastened to stealthily give a nudge to Pao-yü, with the express purpose of inducing him to say it was nice; but Pao-yü gave no ear to what they all urged. "It's by far below the spot," he readily replied, "designated 'a phoenix comes with dignified air.'"

“You ignorant stupid thing!” exclaimed Chia Cheng at these words; “what you simply fancy as exquisite, with that despicable reliance of yours upon luxury and display, are two-storied buildings and painted pillars! But how can you know anything about this aspect so pure and unobtrusive, and this is all because of that failing of not studying your books!”

page 252

“Sir,” hastily answered Pao-yü, “your injunctions are certainly correct; but men of old have often made allusion to 'natural;' and what is, I wonder, the import of these two characters?”

The company had perceived what a perverse mind Pao Yü possessed, and they one and all were much surprised that he should be so silly beyond the possibility of any change; and when now they heard the question he asked, about the two characters representing “natural,” they, with one accord, speedily remarked, “Everything else you understand, and how is it that on the contrary you don't know what 'natural' implies? The word 'natural' means effected by heaven itself and not made by human labour.”

“Well, just so,” rejoined Pao-yü; “but the farm, which is laid out in this locality, is distinctly the handiwork of human labour; in the distance, there are no neighbouring hamlets; near it, adjoin no wastes; though it bears a hill, the hill is destitute of streaks; though it be close to water, this water has no spring; above, there is no pagoda nestling in a temple; below, there is no bridge leading to a market; it rises abrupt and solitary, and presents no grand sight! The palm would seem to be carried by the former spot, which is imbued with the natural principle, and possesses the charms of nature; for, though bamboos have been planted in it, and streams introduced, they nevertheless do no violence to the works executed. 'A natural landscape,' says, an ancient author in four words; and why? Simply because he apprehended that what was not land, would, by forcible ways, be converted into land; and that what was no hill would, by unnatural means, be raised into a hill. And ingenious though these works might be in a hundred and one ways, they cannot, after all, be in harmony.”...

But he had no time to conclude, as Chia Cheng flew into a rage. “Drive him off,” he shouted; (but as Pao-yü) was on the point of going out, he again cried out: “Come back! make up,” he added, “another couplet, and if it isn't clear, I'll for

all this give you a slap on your mouth.”

Pao-yü had no alternative but to recite as follows:

*A spot in which the “Ko” fibre to bleach, as the fresh tide doth swell
the waters green!
A beauteous halo and a fragrant smell the man encompass who the cress
did pluck!*

Chia Cheng, after this recital, nodded his head. “This is still worse!” he remarked, but as he reproved him, he led the company outside, and winding past the mound, they penetrated among flowers, and wending their steps by the willows, they touched the rocks and lingered by the stream. Passing under the trellis with yellow roses, they went into the shed with white roses; they crossed by the pavilion with peonies, and walked through the garden, where the white peony grew; and entering the court with the

page 253

cinnamon roses, they reached the island of bananas. As they meandered and zigzagged, suddenly they heard the rustling sound of the water, as it came out from a stone cave, from the top of which grew parasitic plants drooping downwards, while at its bottom floated the fallen flowers.

“What a fine sight!” they all exclaimed; “what beautiful scenery!”

“Gentlemen,” observed Chia Cheng, “what name do you propose for this place?”

“There's no further need for deliberation,” the company rejoined; “for this is just the very spot fit for the three words 'Wu Ling Spring.'”

“This too is matter-of-fact!” Chia Cheng objected laughingly, “and likewise antiquated.”

“If that won't do,” the party smiled, “well then what about the four characters implying 'An old cottage of a man of the Ch'in dynasty?’”

“This is still more exceedingly plain!” interposed Pao-yü. “The old cottage of a man of the Ch'in dynasty' is meant to imply a retreat from revolution, and how

will it suit this place? Wouldn't the four characters be better denoting 'an isthmus with smart weed, and a stream with flowers'?"

When Chia Cheng heard these words, he exclaimed: "You're talking still more stuff and nonsense?" and forthwith entering the grotto, Chia Cheng went on to ask of Chia Chen, "Are there any boats or not?"

"There are to be," replied Chia Chen, "four boats in all from which to pick the lotus, and one boat for sitting in; but they haven't now as yet been completed."

"What a pity!" Chia Cheng answered smilingly, "that we cannot go in."

"But we could also get into it by the tortuous path up the hill," Chia Chen ventured; and after finishing this remark, he walked ahead to show the way, and the whole party went over, holding on to the creepers, and supporting themselves by the trees, when they saw a still larger quantity of fallen leaves on the surface of the water, and the stream itself, still more limpid, gently and idly meandering along on its circuitous course. By the bank of the pond were two rows of weeping willows, which, intermingling with peach and apricot trees, screened the heavens from view, and kept off the rays of the sun from this spot, which was in real truth devoid of even a grain of dust.

Suddenly, they espied in the shade of the willows, an arched wooden bridge also reveal itself to the eye, with bannisters of vermilion colour. They crossed the bridge, and lo, all the paths lay open before them; but their gaze was readily attracted by a brick cottage spotless and cool-looking; whose walls were constructed of polished bricks, of uniform colour; (whose

page 254

roof was laid) with speckless tiles; and whose enclosing walls were painted; while the minor slopes, which branched off from the main hill, all passed along under the walls on to the other side.

"This house, in a site like this, is perfectly destitute of any charm!" added Chia Cheng.

And as they entered the door, abruptly appeared facing them, a large boulder studded with holes and soaring high in the skies, which was surrounded on all

four sides by rocks of every description, and completely, in fact, hid from view the rooms situated in the compound. But of flowers or trees, there was not even one about; and all that was visible were a few strange kinds of vegetation; some being of the creeper genus, others parasitic plants, either hanging from the apex of the hill, or inserting themselves into the base of the rocks; drooping down even from the eaves of the house, entwining the pillars, and closing round the stone steps. Or like green bands, they waved and flapped; or like gold thread, they coiled and bent, either with seeds resembling cinnabar, or with blossoms like golden olea; whose fragrance and aroma could not be equalled by those emitted by flowers of ordinary species.

“This is pleasant!” Chia Cheng could not refrain from saying; “the only thing is that I don't know very much about flowers.”

“What are here are lianas and ficus pumila!” some of the company observed.

“How ever can the liana and the ficus have such unusual scent?” questioned Chia Cheng.

“Indeed they aren't!” interposed Pao-yü. “Among all these flowers, there are also ficus and liana, but those scented ones are iris, ligularia, and 'Wu' flowers; that kind consist, for the most part, of 'Ch'ih' flowers and orchids; while this mostly of gold-coloured dolichos. That species is the hypericum plant, this the 'Yü Lu' creeper. The red ones are, of course, the purple rue; the green ones consist for certain, of the green 'Chih' plant; and, to the best of my belief, these various plants are mentioned in the 'Li Sao' and 'Wen Hsuan.' These rare plants are, some of them called something or other like 'Huo Na' and 'Chiang Hui;' others again are designated something like 'Lun Tsu' and 'Tz'u Feng;' while others there are whose names sound like 'Shih Fan,' 'Shui Sung' and 'Fu Liu,' which together with other species are to be found in the 'Treatise about the Wu city' by Tso T'ai-chung. There are also those which go under the appellation of 'Lu Ti,' or something like that; while there are others that are called something or other like 'Tan Chiao,' 'Mi Wu'

page 255

and 'Feng Lien;' reference to which is made in the 'Treatise on the Shu city.' But so many years have now elapsed, and the times have so changed (since these treatises were written), that people, being unable to discriminate (the real names)

may consequently have had to appropriate in every case such names as suited the external aspect, so that they may, it is quite possible, have gradually come to be called by wrong designations.”

But he had no time to conclude; for Chia Cheng interrupted him. “Who has ever asked you about it?” he shouted; which plunged Pao-yü into such a fright, that he drew back, and did not venture to utter another word.

Chia Cheng perceiving that on both sides alike were covered passages resembling outstretched arms, forthwith continued his steps and entered the covered way, when he caught sight, at the upper end, of a five-roomed building, without spot or blemish, with folding blinds extending in a connected line, and with corridors on all four sides; (a building) which with its windows so green, and its painted walls, excelled, in spotless elegance, the other buildings they had seen before, to which it presented such a contrast.

Chia Cheng heaved a sigh. “If one were able,” he observed, “to boil his tea and thrum his lyre in here, there wouldn't even be any need for him to burn any more incense. But the execution of this structure is so beyond conception that you must, gentlemen, compose something nice and original to embellish the tablet with, so as not to render such a place of no effect!”

“There's nothing so really pat,” suggested the company smiling; “as 'the orchid-smell-laden breeze' and 'the dew-bedecked epidendrum!’”

“These are indeed the only four characters,” rejoined Chia Cheng, “that could be suitably used; but what's to be said as far as the scroll goes?”

“I've thought of a couplet,” interposed one of the party, “which you'll all have to criticise, and put into ship-shape; its burden is this:

*“The musk-like epidendrum smell enshrouds the court, where shines the
sun with oblique beams;
The iris fragrance is wafted over the isle illumined by the moon's
clear rays.”*

“As far as excellence is concerned, it's excellent,” observed the whole party, “but the two words representing 'with oblique beams' are not felicitous.”

And as some one quoted the line from an old poem:

*The angelica fills the court with tears, what time the sun doth slant.
“Lugubrious, lugubrious!” expostulated the company with one voice.*

page 256

Another person then interposed. “I also have a couplet, whose merits you, gentlemen, can weigh; it runs as follows:

*“Along the three pathways doth float the Yü Hui scented breeze!
The radiant moon in the whole hall shines on the gold orchid!”*

Chia Cheng tugged at his moustache and gave way to meditation. He was just about also to suggest a stanza, when, upon suddenly raising his head, he espied Pao-yü standing by his side, too timid to give vent to a single sound.

“How is it,” he purposely exclaimed, “that when you should speak, you contrariwise don't? Is it likely that you expect some one to request you to confer upon us the favour of your instruction?”

“In this place,” Pao-yü rejoined at these words, “there are no such things as orchids, musk, resplendent moon or islands; and were one to begin quoting such specimens of allusions, to scenery, two hundred couplets could be readily given without, even then, having been able to exhaust the supply!”

“Who presses your head down,” Chia Cheng urged, “and uses force that you must come out with all these remarks?”

“Well, in that case,” added Pao-yü, “there are no fitter words to put on the tablet than the four representing: ‘The fragrance pure of the ligularia and iris.’ While the device on the scroll might be:

*“Sung is the nutmeg song, but beauteous still is the sonnet!
Near the T'u Mei to sleep, makes e'en a dream with fragrance full!”*

“This is,” laughed Chia Cheng sneeringly, “an imitation of the line:

*“A book when it is made of plaintain leaves, the writing green is also
bound to be!”*

“So that there's nothing remarkable about it.”

“Li T'ai-po, in his work on the Phoenix Terrace,” protested the whole party, “copied, in every point, the Huang Hua Lou. But what's essential is a faultless imitation. Now were we to begin to criticise minutely the couplet just cited, we would indeed find it to be, as compared with the line 'A book when it is made of plantain leaves,' still more elegant and of wider application!”

“What an idea?” observed Chia Cheng derisively.

But as he spoke, the whole party walked out; but they had not gone very far before they caught sight of a majestic summer house, towering high peak-like, and of a structure rising loftily with storey upon storey; and completely locked in as they were on every side they were as beautiful as the Jade palace. Far and wide, road upon road coiled and wound; while the green pines swept the eaves, the jady epidendrum encompassed the steps,

page 257

the animals' faces glistened like gold, and the dragons' heads shone resplendent in their variegated hues.

“This is the Main Hall,” remarked Chia Cheng; “the only word against it is that there's a little too much finery.”

“It should be so,” rejoined one and all, “so as to be what it's intended to be! The imperial consort has, it is true, an exalted preference for economy and frugality, but her present honourable position requires the observance of such courtesies, so that (finery) is no fault.”

As they made these remarks and advanced on their way the while, they perceived, just in front of them, an archway project to view, constructed of jadelike stone; at the top of which the coils of large dragons and the scales of small dragons were executed in perforated style.

“What's the device to be for this spot?” inquired Chia Cheng.

“It should be 'fairy land,'” suggested all of them, “so as to be apposite!”

Chia Cheng nodded his head and said nothing. But as soon as Pao-yü caught sight of this spot something was suddenly aroused in his heart and he began to ponder within himself. "This place really resembles something that I've seen somewhere or other." But he could not at the moment recall to mind what year, moon, or day this had happened.

Chia Cheng bade him again propose a motto; but Pao-yü was bent upon thinking over the details of the scenery he had seen on a former occasion, and gave no thought whatever to this place, so that the whole company were at a loss what construction to give to his silence, and came simply to the conclusion that, after the bullying he had had to put up with for ever so long, his spirits had completely vanished, his talents become exhausted and his speech impoverished; and that if he were harassed and pressed, he might perchance, as the result of anxiety, contract some ailment or other, which would of course not be a suitable issue, and they lost no time in combining together to dissuade Chia Cheng.

"Never mind," they said, "to-morrow will do to compose some device; let's drop it now."

Chia Cheng himself was inwardly afraid lest dowager lady Chia should be anxious, so that he hastily remarked as he forced a smile. "You beast, there are, after all, also occasions on which you are no good! but never mind! I'll give you one day to do it in, and if by to-morrow you haven't been able to compose anything, I shall certainly not let you off. This is the first and foremost place and you must exercise due care in what you write."

Saying this, he sallied out, at the head of the company, and cast another glance at the scenery.

page 258

Indeed from the time they had entered the gate up to this stage, they had just gone over five or six tenths of the whole ground, when it happened again that a servant came and reported that some one had arrived from Mr. Yü-'ts'un's to deliver a message. "These several places (which remain)," Chia Cheng observed with a smile, "we have no time to pass under inspection; but we might as well nevertheless go out at least by that way, as we shall be able, to a certain degree, to have a look at the general aspect."

With these words, he showed the way for the family companions until they reached a large bridge, with water entering under it, looking like a curtain made of crystal. This bridge, the fact is, was the dam, which communicated with the river outside, and from which the stream was introduced into the grounds.

“What's the name of this water-gate?” Chia Cheng inquired.

“This is,” replied Pao-yü, “the main stream of the Hsin Fang river, and is therefore called the Hsin Fang water-gate.”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed Chia Cheng. “The two words Hsin Fang must on no account be used!”

And as they speedily advanced on their way, they either came across elegant halls, or thatched cottages; walls made of piled-up stone, or gates fashioned of twisted plants; either a secluded nunnery or Buddhist fane, at the foot of some hill; or some unsullied houses, hidden in a grove, tenanted by rationalistic priestesses; either extensive corridors and winding grottoes; or square buildings, and circular pavilions. But Chia Cheng had not the energy to enter any of these places, for as he had not had any rest for ever so long, his legs felt shaky and his feet weak.

Suddenly they also discerned ahead of them a court disclose itself to view.

“When we get there,” Chia Cheng suggested, “we must have a little rest.” Straightway as he uttered the remark, he led them in, and winding round the jade-green peach-trees, covered with blossom, they passed through the bamboo fence and flower-laden hedge, which were twisted in such a way as to form a circular, cavelike gateway, when unexpectedly appeared before their eyes an enclosure with whitewashed walls, in which verdant willows drooped in every direction.

Chia Cheng entered the gateway in company with the whole party. Along the whole length of both sides extended covered passages, connected with each other; while in the court were laid out several rockeries. In one quarter were planted a number of banana trees; on the opposite stood a plant of begonia from Hsi Fu. Its appearance was like an open umbrella. The gossamer hanging (from its branches) resembled golden threads. The corollas (seemed) to spurt out cinnabar.

“What a beautiful flower! what a beautiful flower!” ejaculated the whole party with one voice; “begonias are verily to be found; but never before have we seen anything the like of this in beauty.”

“This is called the maiden begonia and is, in fact, a foreign species,” Chia Cheng observed. “There's a homely tradition that it is because it emanates from the maiden kingdom that its flowers are most prolific; but this is likewise erratic talk and devoid of common sense.”

“They are, after all,” rejoined the whole company, “so unlike others (we have seen), that what's said about the maiden kingdom is, we are inclined to believe, possibly a fact.”

“I presume,” interposed Pao-yü, “that some clever bard or poet, (perceiving) that this flower was red like cosmetic, delicate as if propped up in sickness, and that it closely resembled the nature of a young lady, gave it, consequently, the name of maiden! People in the world will propagate idle tales, all of which are unavoidably treated as gospel!”

“We receive (with thanks) your instructions; what excellent explanation!” they all remarked unanimously, and as they expressed these words, the whole company took their seats on the sofas under the colonnade.

“Let's think of some original text or other for a motto,” Chia Cheng having suggested, one of the companions opined that the two characters: “Banana and stork” would be felicitous; while another one was of the idea that what would be faultless would be: “Collected splendour and waving elegance!”

“‘Collected splendour and waving elegance’ is excellent,” Chia Cheng observed addressing himself to the party; and Pao-yü himself, while also extolling it as beautiful, went on to say: “There's only one thing however to be regretted!”

“What about regret?” the company inquired.

“In this place,” Pao-yü explained, “are set out both bananas as well as begonias, with the intent of secretly combining in them the two properties of red and

green; and if mention of one of them be made, and the other be omitted, (the device) won't be good enough for selection.”

“What would you then suggest?” Chia Cheng asked.

“I would submit the four words, 'the red (flowers) are fragrant, the green (banana leaves) like jade,' which would render complete the beauties of both (the begonias and bananas).”

“It isn't good! it isn't good!” Chia Cheng remonstrated as he shook his head; and while passing this remark, he conducted the party into the house, where they noticed that the internal arrangements effected differed

page 260

from those in other places, as no partitions could, in fact, be discerned. Indeed, the four sides were all alike covered with boards carved hollow with fretwork, (in designs consisting) either of rolling clouds and hundreds of bats; or of the three friends of the cold season of the year, (fir, bamboo and almond); of scenery and human beings, or of birds or flowers; either of clusters of decoration, or of relics of olden times; either of ten thousand characters of happiness or of ten thousand characters of longevity. The various kinds of designs had been all carved by renowned hands, in variegated colours, inlaid with gold, and studded with precious gems; while on shelf upon shelf were either arranged collections of books, or tripods were laid out; either pens and inkslabs were distributed about, or vases with flowers set out, or figured pots were placed about; the designs of the shelves being either round or square; or similar to sunflowers or banana leaves; or like links, half overlapping each other. And in very truth they resembled bouquets of flowers or clusters of tapestry, with all their fretwork so transparent. Suddenly (the eye was struck) by variegated gauzes pasted (on the wood-work), actually forming small windows; and of a sudden by fine thin silks lightly overshadowing (the fretwork) just as if there were, after all, secret doors. The whole walls were in addition traced, with no regard to symmetry, with outlines of the shapes of curios and nick-nacks in imitation of lutes, double-edged swords, hanging bottles and the like, the whole number of which, though (apparently) suspended on the walls, were all however on a same level with the surface of the partition walls.

“What fine ingenuity!” they all exclaimed extollingly; “what a labour they must

have been to carry out!”

Chia Cheng had actually stepped in; but scarcely had they reached the second stage, before the whole party readily lost sight of the way by which they had come in. They glanced on the left, and there stood a door, through which they could go. They cast their eyes on the right, and there was a window which suddenly impeded their progress. They went forward, but there again they were obstructed by a bookcase. They turned their heads round, and there too stood windows pasted with transparent gauze and available door-ways: but the moment they came face to face with the door, they unexpectedly perceived that a whole company of people had likewise walked in, just in front of them, whose appearance resembled their own in every respect. But it was only a mirror. And when they rounded the mirror, they detected a still larger number of doors.

“Sir,” Chia Chen remarked with a grin; “if you'll follow me out through this door, we'll forthwith get into the back-court; and once out of the back-court, we shall be, at all events, nearer than we were before.”

page 261

Taking the lead, he conducted Chia Cheng and the whole party round two gauze mosquito houses, when they verily espied a door through which they made their exit, into a court, replete with stands of cinnamon roses. Passing round the flower-laden hedge, the only thing that spread before their view was a pure stream impeding their advance. The whole company was lost in admiration. “Where does this water again issue from?” they cried.

Chia Chen pointed to a spot at a distance. “Starting originally,” he explained, “from that water-gate, it runs as far as the mouth of that cave, when from among the hills on the north-east side, it is introduced into that village, where again a diverging channel has been opened and it is made to flow in a south-westerly direction; the whole volume of water then runs to this spot, where collecting once more in one place, it issues, on its outward course, from beneath that wall.”

“It's most ingenious!” they one and all exclaimed, after they had listened to him; but, as they uttered these words, they unawares realised that a lofty hill obstructed any further progress. The whole party felt very hazy about the right road. But “Come along after me,” Chia Chen smilingly urged, as he at once went ahead and showed the way, whereupon the company followed in his steps, and

as soon as they turned round the foot of the hill, a level place and broad road lay before them; and wide before their faces appeared the main entrance.

“This is charming! this is delightful!” the party unanimously exclaimed, “what wits must have been ransacked, and ingenuity attained, so as to bring things to this extreme degree of excellence!”

Forthwith the party egressed from the garden, and Pao-yü's heart anxiously longed for the society of the young ladies in the inner quarters, but as he did not hear Chia Cheng bid him go, he had no help but to follow him into the library. But suddenly Chia Cheng bethought himself of him. “What,” he said, “you haven't gone yet! the old lady will I fear be anxious on your account; and is it pray that you haven't as yet had enough walking?”

Pao-yü at length withdrew out of the library. On his arrival in the court, a page, who had been in attendance on Chia Cheng, at once pressed forward, and took hold of him fast in his arms. “You've been lucky enough,” he said, “to-day to have been in master's good graces! just a while back when our old mistress despatched servants to come on several occasions and ask after you, we replied that master was pleased with you; for had we given any other answer, her ladyship would have sent to fetch you to go in, and you wouldn't have had an opportunity of displaying your talents. Every one admits that the several stanzas you recently composed were superior to

page 262

those of the whole company put together; but you must, after the good luck you've had to-day, give us a tip!”

“I'll give each one of you a tiao,” Pao-yü rejoined smirkingly.

“Who of us hasn't seen a tiao?” they all exclaimed, “let's have that purse of yours, and have done with it!”

Saying this, one by one advanced and proceeded to unloosen the purse, and to unclasp the fan-case; and allowing Pao-yü no time to make any remonstrance, they stripped him of every ornament in the way of appendage which he carried about on his person. “Whatever we do let's escort him home!” they shouted, and one after another hustled round him and accompanied him as far as dowager

lady Chia's door.

Her ladyship was at this moment awaiting his arrival, so that when she saw him walk in, and she found out that (Chia Cheng) had not bullied him, she felt, of course, extremely delighted. But not a long interval elapsed before Hsi Jen came to serve the tea; and when she perceived that on his person not one of the ornaments remained, she consequently smiled and inquired: "Have all the things that you had on you been again taken away by these barefaced rascals?"

As soon as Lin Tai-yü heard this remark, she crossed over to him and saw at a glance that not one single trinket was, in fact, left. "Have you also given them," she felt constrained to ask, "the purse that I gave you? Well, by and by, when you again covet anything of mine, I shan't let you have it."

After uttering these words, she returned into her apartment in high dudgeon, and taking the scented bag, which Pao-yü had asked her to make for him, and which she had not as yet finished, she picked up a pair of scissors, and instantly cut it to pieces.

Pao-yü noticing that she had lost her temper, came after her with hurried step, but the bag had already been cut with the scissors; and as Pao-yü observed how extremely fine and artistic this scented bag was, in spite of its unfinished state, he verily deplored that it should have been rent to pieces for no rhyme or reason. Promptly therefore unbuttoning his coat, he produced from inside the lapel the purse, which had been fastened there. "Look at this!" he remarked as he handed it to Tai-yü; "what kind of thing is this! have I given away to any one what was yours?" Lin Tai-yü, upon seeing how much he prized it as to wear it within his clothes, became alive to the fact that it was done with intent, as he feared lest any one should take it away; and as this conviction made her sorry that she had been so impetuous as to have cut the scented bag, she lowered her head and uttered not a word.

page 263

"There was really no need for you to have cut it," Pao-yü observed; "but as I know that you're loth to give me anything, what do you say to my returning even this purse?"

With these words, he threw the purse in her lap and walked off; which vexed

Tai-yü so much the more that, after giving way to tears, she took up the purse in her hands to also destroy it with the scissors, when Pao-yü precipitately turned round and snatched it from her grasp.

“My dear cousin,” he smilingly pleaded, “do spare it!” and as Tai-yü dashed down the scissors and wiped her tears: “You needn't,” she urged, “be kind to me at one moment, and unkind at another; if you wish to have a tiff, why then let's part company!” But as she spoke, she lost control over her temper, and, jumping on her bed, she lay with her face turned towards the inside, and set to work drying her eyes.

Pao-yü could not refrain from approaching her. “My dear cousin, my own cousin,” he added, “I confess my fault!”

“Go and find Pao-yü!” dowager lady Chia thereupon gave a shout from where she was in the front apartment, and all the attendants explained that he was in Miss Lin's room.

“All right, that will do! that will do!” her ladyship rejoined, when she heard this reply; “let the two cousins play together; his father kept him a short while back under check, for ever so long, so let him have some distraction. But the only thing is that you mustn't allow them to have any quarrels.” To which the servants in a body expressed their obedience.

Tai-yü, unable to put up with Pao-yü's importunity, felt compelled to rise. “Your object seems to be,” she remarked, “not to let me have any rest. If it is, I'll run away from you.” Saying which, she there and then was making her way out, when Pao-yü protested with a face full of smiles: “Wherever you go, I'll follow!” and as he, at the same time, took the purse and began to fasten it on him, Tai-yü stretched out her hand, and snatching it away, “You say you don't want it,” she observed, “and now you put it on again! I'm really much ashamed on your account!” And these words were still on her lips when with a sound of Ch'ih, she burst out laughing.

“My dear cousin,” Pao-yü added, “to-morrow do work another scented bag for me!”

“That too will rest upon my good pleasure,” Tai-yü rejoined.

As they conversed, they both left the room together and walked into madame Wang's suite of apartments, where, as luck would have it, Pao-ch'ai was also seated.

Unusual commotion prevailed, at this time, over at madame Wang's, for the fact is that Chia Se had already come back from Ku Su, where he had

page 264

selected twelve young girls, and settled about an instructor, as well as about the theatrical properties and the other necessities. And as Mrs. Hsüeh had by this date moved her quarters into a separate place on the northeast side, and taken up her abode in a secluded and quiet house, (madame Wang) had had repairs of a distinct character executed in the Pear Fragrance Court, and then issued directions that the instructor should train the young actresses in this place; and casting her choice upon all the women, who had, in days of old, received a training in singing, and who were now old matrons with white hair, she bade them have an eye over them and keep them in order. Which done, she enjoined Chia Se to assume the chief control of all matters connected with the daily and monthly income and outlay, as well as of the accounts of all articles in use of every kind and size.

Lin Chih-hsiao also came to report: "that the twelve young nuns and Taoist girls, who had been purchased after proper selection, had all arrived, and that the twenty newly-made Taoist coats had also been received. That there was besides a maiden, who though devoted to asceticism, kept her chevelure unshaved; that she was originally a denizen of Suchow, of a family whose ancestors were also people of letters and official status; that as from her youth up she had been stricken with much sickness, (her parents) had purchased a good number of substitutes (to enter the convent), but all with no relief to her, until at last this girl herself entered the gate of abstraction when she at once recovered. That hence it was that she grew her hair, while she devoted herself to an ascetic life; that she was this year eighteen years of age, and that the name given to her was Miao Yü; that her father and mother were, at this time, already dead; that she had only by her side, two old nurses and a young servant girl to wait upon her; that she was most proficient in literature, and exceedingly well versed in the classics and canons; and that she was likewise very attractive as far as looks went; that having heard that in the city of Ch'ang-an, there were vestiges of Kuan Yin and relics of the canons inscribed on leaves, she followed, last year, her

teacher (to the capital). She now lives,” he said, “in the Lao Ni nunnery, outside the western gate; her teacher was a great expert in prophetic divination, but she died in the winter of last year, and her dying words were that as it was not suitable for (Miao Yü) to return to her native place, she should await here, as something in the way of a denouement was certain to turn up; and this is the reason why she hasn't as yet borne the coffin back to her home!”

“If such be the case,” madame Wang readily suggested, “why shouldn't we bring her here?”

page 265

“If we are to ask her,” Lin Chih-hsiao's wife replied, “she'll say that a marquis' family and a duke's household are sure, in their honourable position, to be overbearing to people; and I had rather not go.”

“As she's the daughter of an official family,” madame Wang continued, “she's bound to be inclined to be somewhat proud; but what harm is there to our sending her a written invitation to ask her to come!”

Lin Chih-hsiao's wife assented; and leaving the room, she made the secretary write an invitation and then went to ask Miao Yü. The next day servants were despatched, and carriages and sedan chairs were got ready to go and bring her over.

What subsequently transpired is not as yet known, but, reader, listen to the account given in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

*His Majesty shows magnanimous bounty.
The Imperial consort Yuan pays a visit to her parents.
The happiness of a family gathering.
Pao-yü displays his polished talents.*

But let us resume our story. A servant came, at this moment, to report that for the works in course of execution, they were waiting for gauze and damask silk to paste on various articles, and that they requested lady Feng to go and open the depot for them to take the gauze and silk, while another servant also came to ask lady Feng to open the treasury for them to receive the gold and silver ware. And as Madame Wang, the waiting-maids and the other domestics of the upper rooms had all no leisure, Pao-ch'ai suggested: "Don't let us remain in here and be in the way of their doing what there is to be done, and of going where they have to go," and saying this, she betook herself, escorted by Pao-yü and the rest, into Ying Ch'un's rooms.

Madame Wang continued day after day in a great state of flurry and confusion, straight up to within the tenth moon, by which time every arrangement had been completed, and the overseers had all handed in a clear statement of their accounts. The curios and writing materials, wherever needed, had all already been laid out and everything got ready, and the birds (and animals), from the stork, the deer and rabbits to the chickens, geese and the like, had all been purchased and handed over to be reared in the various localities in the garden; and over at Chia Se's, had also been learnt

page 266

twenty miscellaneous plays, while a company of young nuns and Taoist priestesses had likewise the whole number of them, mastered the intonation of Buddhist classics and incantations.

Chia Cheng after this, at length, was slightly composed in mind, and cheerful at heart; and having further invited dowager lady Chia and other inmates to go into the garden, he deliberated with them on, and made arrangements for, every detail in such a befitting manner that not the

least trifle remained for which suitable provision had not been made; and Chia Cheng eventually mustered courage to indite a memorial, and on the very day on which the memorial was presented, a decree was received fixing upon the fifteenth day of the first moon of the ensuing year, the very day of the Shang Yuan festival, for the honourable consorts to visit their homes.

Upon the receipt of this decree, with which the Chia family was honoured, they had still less leisure, both by day as well as by night; so much so that they could not even properly observe the new year festivities. But in a twinkling of the eye, the festival of the full moon of the first moon drew near; and beginning from the eighth day of the first moon, eunuchs issued from the palace and inspected beforehand the various localities, the apartments in which the imperial consort was to change her costume; the place where she would spend her leisure moments; the spot where she would receive the conventionalities; the premises where the banquets would be spread; the quarters where she would retire for rest.

There were also eunuchs who came to assume the patrol of the grounds and the direction of the defences; and they brought along with them a good many minor eunuchs, whose duty it was to look after the safety of the various localities, to screen the place with enclosing curtains, to instruct the inmates and officials of the Chia mansion whither to go out and whence to come in from, what side the viands should be brought in from, where to report matters, and in the observance of every kind of etiquette; and for outside the mansion, there were, on the other hand, officers from the Board of Works, and a superintendent of the Police, of the "Five Cities," in charge of the sweeping of the streets and roads, and the clearing away of loungers. While Chia She and the others superintended the workmen in such things as the manufacture of flowered lanterns and fireworks.

The fourteenth day arrived and everything was in order; but on this night, one and all whether high or low, did not get a wink of sleep; and when the fifteenth came, every one, at the fifth watch, beginning from dowager lady Chia and those who enjoyed any official status, appeared in full gala dress, according to their respective ranks. In the garden, the curtains were, by this time, flapping like dragons, the portieres flying about like phoenixes with variegated plumage. Gold and silver glistened with

splendour.

page 267

Pearls and precious gems shed out their brilliant lustre. The tripod censers burnt the Pai-ho incense. In the vases were placed evergreens. Silence and stillness prevailed, and not a man ventured so much as to cough.

Chia She and the other men were standing outside the door giving on to the street on the west; and old lady Chia and the other ladies were outside the main entrance of the Jung mansion at the head of the street, while at the mouth of the lane were placed screens to rigorously obstruct the public gaze. They were unable to bear the fatigue of any further waiting when, at an unexpected moment, a eunuch arrived on horseback, and Chia Cheng went up to meet him, and ascertained what tidings he was the bearer of.

"It's as yet far too early," rejoined the eunuch, "for at one o'clock (her highness) will have her evening repast, and at two she has to betake herself to the Palace of Precious Perception to worship Buddha. At five, she will enter the Palace of Great Splendour to partake of a banquet, and to see the lanterns, after which, she will request His Majesty's permission; so that, I'm afraid, it won't be earlier than seven before they set out."

Lady Feng's ear caught what was said. "If such be the case," she interposed, "may it please your venerable ladyship, and you, my lady, to return for a while to your apartments, and wait; and if you come when it's time you'll be here none too late."

Dowager lady Chia and the other ladies immediately left for a time and suited their own convenience, and as everything in the garden devolved upon lady Feng to supervise, she ordered the butlers to take the eunuchs and give them something to eat and drink; and at the same time, she sent word that candles should be brought in and that the lanterns in the various places should be lit.

But unexpectedly was heard from outside the continuous patter of horses

running, whereupon about ten eunuchs hurried in gasping and out of breath. They clapped their hands, and the several eunuchs (who had come before), understanding the signal, and knowing that the party had arrived, stood in their respective positions; while Chia She, at the head of all the men of the clan, remained at the western street door, and dowager lady Chia, at the head of the female relatives of the family, waited outside the principal entrance to do the honours.

For a long interval, everything was plunged in silence and quiet; when suddenly two eunuchs on horseback were espied advancing with leisurely step. Reaching the western street gate, they dismounted, and, driving their horses beyond the screens, they forthwith took their stand facing the west. After another long interval, a second couple arrived, and went likewise through the same proceedings. In a short time, drew near about ten

page 268

couples, when, at length, were heard the gentle strains of music, and couple by couple advanced with banners, dragons, with fans made with phoenix feathers, and palace flabella of pheasant plumes; and those besides who carried gold-washed censers burning imperial incense. Next in order was brought past a state umbrella of golden yellow, with crooked handle and embroidered with seven phoenixes; after which quickly followed the crown, robe, girdle and shoes.

There were likewise eunuchs, who took a part in the procession, holding scented handkerchiefs and embroidered towels, cups for rinsing the mouth, dusters and other such objects; and company after company went past, when, at the rear, approached with stately step eight eunuchs carrying an imperial sedan chair, of golden yellow, with a gold knob and embroidered with phoenixes.

Old lady Chia and the other members of the family hastily fell on their knees, but a eunuch came over at once to raise her ladyship and the rest; and the imperial chair was thereupon carried through the main entrance, the ceremonial gate and into a court on the eastern side, at the door of which stood a eunuch, who prostrated himself and invited (her highness) to dismount and change her costume.

Having forthwith carried her inside the gate, the eunuchs dispersed; and only the maids-of-honour and ladies-in-waiting ushered Yuan Ch'un out of the chair, when what mainly attracted her eye in the park was the brilliant lustre of the flowered lamps of every colour, all of which were made of gauze or damask, and were beautiful in texture, and out of the common run; while on the upper side was a flat lantern with the inscription in four characters, "Regarded (by His Majesty's) benevolence and permeated by his benefits."

Yuan Ch'un entered the apartment and effected the necessary changes in her toilette; after which, she again egressed, and, mounting her chair, she made her entry into the garden, when she perceived the smoke of incense whirling and twirling, and the reflection of the flowers confusing the eyes. Far and wide, the rays of light, shed by the lanterns, intermingled their brilliancy, while, from time to time, fine strains of music sounded with clamorous din. But it would be impossible to express adequately the perfect harmony in the aspect of this scene, and the grandeur of affluence and splendour.

The imperial consort of the Chia family, we must now observe, upon catching sight, from the interior of her chair, of the picture presented within as well as without the confines of this garden, shook her head and heaved a sigh. "What lavish extravagance! What excessive waste!" she soliloquised.

But of a sudden was again seen a eunuch who, on his knees, invited her to get into a boat; and the Chia consort descended from the chair and stepped

page 269

into the craft, when the expanse of a limpid stream met her gaze, whose grandeur resembled that of the dragon in its listless course. The stone bannisters, on each side, were one mass of air-tight lanterns, of every colour, made of crystal or glass, which threw out a light like the lustre of silver or the brightness of snow.

The willow, almond and the whole lot of trees, on the upper side, were, it

is true, without blossom and leaves; but pongee and damask silks, paper and lustring had been employed, together with rice-paper, to make flowers of, which had been affixed on the branches. Upon each tree were suspended thousands of lanterns; and what is more, the lotus and aquatic plants, the ducks and water fowl in the pond had all, in like manner, been devised out of conches and clams, plumes and feathers. The various lanterns, above and below, vied in refulgence. In real truth, it was a crystal region, a world of pearls and precious stones. On board the boat were also every kind of lanterns representing such designs as are used on flower-pots, pearl-laden portieres, embroidered curtains, oars of cinnamon wood, and paddles of magnolia, which need not of course be minutely described.

They entered a landing with a stone curb; and on this landing was erected a flat lantern upon which were plainly visible the four characters the "Persicary beach and flower-laden bank." But, reader, you have heard how that these four characters "the persicary beach and the flower-laden bank," the motto "a phoenix comes with dignified air," and the rest owe one and all their origin to the unexpected test to which Chia Cheng submitted, on a previous occasion, Pao-yü's literary abilities; but how did it come about that they were actually adopted?

You must remember that the Chia family had been, generation after generation, given to the study of letters, so that it was only natural that there should be among them one or two renowned writers of verses; for how could they ever resemble the families of such upstarts, who only employ puerile expressions as a makeshift to get through what they have to do? But the why and the wherefore must be sought in the past. The consort, belonging to the Chia mansion, had, before she entered the palace, been, from her infancy, also brought up by dowager lady Chia; and when Pao-yü was subsequently added to the family, she was the eldest sister and Pao-yü the youngest child. The Chia consort, bearing in mind how that she had, when her mother was verging on old age, at length obtained this younger brother, she for this reason doated upon him with single love; and as they were besides companions in their attendance upon old lady Chia, they were inseparable for even a moment. Before Pao-yü had entered school, and when three or four years of age, he had already received oral instruction from the imperial spouse Chia from the contents of several books

and had committed to memory several thousands of characters, for though they were only sister and brother, they were like mother and child. And after she had entered the Palace, she was wont time and again to have letters taken out to her father and her cousins, urgently recommending them to be careful with his bringing up, that if they were not strict, he could not possibly become good for anything, and that if they were immoderately severe, there was the danger of something unpropitious befalling him, with the result, moreover, that his grandmother would be stricken with sorrow; and this solicitude on his account was never for an instant lost sight of by her.

Hence it was that Chia Cheng having, a few days back, heard his teacher extol him for his extreme abilities, he forthwith put him to the test on the occasion of their ramble through the garden. And though (his compositions) were not in the bold style of a writer of note, yet they were productions of their own family, and would, moreover, be instrumental, when the Chia consort had her notice attracted by them, and come to know that they were devised by her beloved brother, in also not rendering nugatory the anxious interest which she had ever entertained on his behalf, and he, therefore, purposely adopted what had been suggested by Pao-yü; while for those places, for which on that day no devices had been completed, a good number were again subsequently composed to make up what was wanted.

After the Chia consort had, for we shall now return to her, perused the four characters, she gave a smile. "The two words 'flower-laden bank,'" she said, "are really felicitous, so what use was there for 'persicary beach?'"

When the eunuch in waiting heard this observation, he promptly jumped off the craft on to the bank, and at a flying pace hurried to communicate it to Chia Cheng, and Chia Cheng instantly effected the necessary alteration.

By this time the craft had reached the inner bank, and leaving the boat, and mounting into her sedan chair, she in due course contemplated the

magnificent Jade-like Palace; the Hall of cinnamon wood, lofty and sublime; and the marble portals with the four characters in bold style: the "Precious confines of heavenly spirits," which the Chia consort gave directions should be changed for the four words denoting: "additional Hall (for the imperial consort) on a visit to her parents." And forthwith making her entrance into the travelling lodge her gaze was attracted by torches burning in the court encompassing the heavens, fragments of incense strewn on the ground, fire-like trees and gem-like flowers, gold-like windows and jade-like bannisters. But it would be difficult to give a full account of the curtains, which rolled up (as fine as a) shrimp's moustache; of the carpets of other skins spread on the floor; of the tripods exhaling the fragrant aroma of the brain of the musk deer; of the screens in a row resembling

page 271

fans made of pheasant tails. Indeed, the gold-like doors and the windows like jade were suggestive of the abode of spirits; while the halls made of cinnamon wood and the palace of magnolia timber, of the very homes of the imperial secondary consorts.

"Why is it," the Chia consort inquired, "that there is no tablet in this Hall?"

The eunuch in waiting fell on his knees. "This is the main Hall," he reverently replied, "and the officials, outside the palace, did not presume to take upon themselves to suggest any motto."

The Chia consort shook her head and said not a word; whereupon the eunuch, who acted as master of ceremonies, requested Her Majesty to ascend the throne and receive homage. The band stationed on the two flights of steps struck up a tune, while two eunuchs ushered Chia She, Chia Cheng and the other members on to the moonlike stage, where they arranged themselves in order and ascended into the hall, but when the ladies-in-waiting transmitted her commands that the homage could be dispensed with, they at once retraced their footsteps.

(The master of the ceremonies), in like manner led forward the dowager lady of the Jung Kuo mansion, as well as the female relatives, from the steps on the east side, on to the moon-like stage; where they were

placed according to their ranks. But the maids-of-honour again commanded that they should dispense with the ceremony, so they likewise promptly withdrew.

After tea had been thrice presented, the Chia consort descended the Throne, and the music ceased. She retired into a side room to change her costume, and the private chairs were then got ready for her visit to her parents. Issuing from the garden, she came into the main quarters belonging to dowager lady Chia, where she was bent upon observing the domestic conventionalities, when her venerable ladyship, and the other members of the family, prostrated themselves in a body before her, and made her desist. Tears dropped down from the eyes of the Chia consort as (she and her relatives) mutually came forward, and greeted each other, and as with one hand she grasped old lady Chia, and with the other she held madame Wang, the three had plenty in their hearts which they were fain to speak about; but, unable as each one of them was to give utterance to their feelings, all they did was to sob and to weep, as they kept face to face to each other; while madame Hsing, widow Li Wan, Wang Hsi-feng, and the three sisters: Ying Ch'un, T'an Ch'un, and Hsi Ch'un, stood aside in a body shedding tears and saying not a word.

After a long time, the Chia consort restrained her anguish, and forcing a smile, she set to work to reassure old lady Chia and madame Wang. "Having

page 272

in days gone by," she urged, "been sent to that place where no human being can be seen, I have to-day after extreme difficulty returned home; and now that you ladies and I have been reunited, instead of chatting or laughing we contrariwise give way to incessant tears! But shortly, I shall be gone, and who knows when we shall be able again to even see each other!"

When she came to this sentence, they could not help bursting into another fit of crying; and Madame Hsing hastened to come forward, and to console dowager lady Chia and the rest. But when the Chia consort resumed her seat, and one by one came again, in turn, to exchange salutations, they could not once more help weeping and sobbing for a

time.

Next in order, were the managers and servants of the eastern and western mansions to perform their obeisance in the outer pavilion; and after the married women and waiting-maids had concluded their homage, the Chia consort heaved a sigh. "How many relatives," she observed, "there are all of whom, alas! I may not see."

"There are here now," madame Wang rejoined with due respect, "kindred with outside family names, such as Mrs. Hsüeh, nee Wang, Pao-ch'ai, and Tai-yü waiting for your commands; but as they are distant relatives, and without official status, they do not venture to arrogate to themselves the right of entering into your presence." But the Chia consort issued directions that they should be invited to come that they should see each other; and in a short while, Mrs. Hsüeh and the other relatives walked in, but as they were on the point of performing the rites, prescribed by the state, she bade them relinquish the observance so that they came forward, and each, in turn, alluded to what had transpired during the long separation.

Pao Ch'in also and a few other waiting-maids, whom the Chia consort had originally taken along with her into the palace, knocked their heads before dowager lady Chia, but her ladyship lost no time in raising them up, and in bidding them go into a separate suite of rooms to be entertained; and as for the retainers, eunuchs as well as maids-of-honour, ladies-in-waiting and every attendant, there were needless to say, those in the two places, the Ning mansion and Chia She's residence, to wait upon them; there only remained three or four young eunuchs to answer the summons.

The mother and daughter and her cousins conversed for some time on what had happened during the protracted separation, as well as on domestic affairs and their private feelings, when Chia Cheng likewise advanced as far as the other side of the portiere, and inquired after her health, and the Chia consort from inside performed the homage and other conventionalities (due to her parent).

"The families of farmers," she further went on to say to her father, "feed on salted cabbage, and clothe in cotton material; but they readily

enjoy the happiness of the relationships established by heaven! We, however, relatives though we now be of one bone and flesh, are, with all our affluence and honours, living apart from each other, and deriving no happiness whatsoever!”

Chia Cheng, on his part endeavoured, to restrain his tears. “I belonged,” he rejoined, “to a rustic and poor family; and among that whole number of pigeons and pheasants, how could I have imagined that I would have obtained the blessing of a hidden phoenix! Of late all for the sake of your honourable self, His Majesty, above, confers upon us his heavenly benefits; while we, below, show forth the virtue of our ancestors! And it is mainly because the vital principle of the hills, streams, sun, and moon, and the remote virtue of our ancestors have been implanted in you alone that this good fortune has attained me Cheng and my wife! Moreover, the present emperor, bearing in mind the great bounty shewn by heaven and earth in promoting a ceaseless succession, has vouchsafed a more generous act of grace than has ever been displayed from old days to the present. And although we may besmear our liver and brain in the mire, how could we show our gratitude, even to so slight a degree as one ten-thousandth part. But all I can do is, in the daytime, to practise diligence, vigilance at night, and loyalty in my official duties. My humble wish is that His Majesty, my master, may live ten thousand years and see thousands of autumns, so as to promote the welfare of all mankind in the world! And you, worthy imperial consort, must, on no account, be mindful of me Cheng and my wife, decrepid as we are in years. What I would solicit more than anything is that you should be more careful of yourself, and that you should be diligent and reverential in your service to His Majesty, with the intent that you may not prove ungrateful of his affectionate regard and bountiful grace.”

The Chia consort, on the other hand, enjoined “that much as it was expedient to display zeal, in the management of state matters, it behoved him, when he had any leisure, to take good care of himself, and that he should not, whatever he did, give way to solicitude on her behalf.” And Chia Cheng then went on to say “that the various inscriptions in the park over the pavilions, terraces, halls and residences had been all composed by Pao-yü, and, that in the event of there being one or two that could

claim her attention, he would be happy if it would please her to at once favour him with its name.” Whereupon the imperial consort Y ü an, when she heard that Pao-yü could compose verses, forthwith exclaimed with a smile: “He has in very truth made progress!”

After Chia Cheng had retired out of the hall, the Chia consort made it a point to ask: “How is it that I do not see Pao-yü?” and dowager lady

page 274

Chia explained: “An outside male relative as he is, and without official rank, he does not venture to appear before you of his own accord.”

“Bring him in!” the imperial consort directed; whereupon a young eunuch ushered Pao-yü in. After he had first complied with the state ceremonies, she bade him draw near to her, and taking his hand, she held it in her lap, and, as she went on to caress his head and neck, she smiled and said: “He's grown considerably taller than he was before;” but she had barely concluded this remark, when her tears ran down as profuse as rain. Mrs. Yu, lady Feng, and the rest pressed forward. “The banquet is quite ready,” they announced, “and your highness is requested to favour the place with your presence.”

The imperial consort Y ü an stood up and asking Pao-yü to lead the way, she followed in his steps, along with the whole party, and betook herself on foot as far as the entrance of the garden gate, whence she at once espied, in the lustre shed by the lanterns, every kind of decorations. Entering the garden, they first passed the spots with the device “a phoenix comes with dignified air,” “the red (flowers are) fragrant and the green (banana leaves like) jade!” “the sign on the apricot tree is visible,” “the fragrance pure of the ligularia and iris,” and other places; and ascending the towers they walked up the halls, forded the streams and wound round the hills; contemplating as they turned their gaze from side to side, each place arranged in a different style, and each kind of article laid out in unique designs. The Chia consort expressed her admiration in most profuse eulogiums, and then went on to advise them: “that it was not expedient to indulge in future in such excessive extravagance and that all these arrangements were over and above what should have been done.”

Presently they reached the main pavilion, where she commanded that they could dispense with the rites and take their seats. A sumptuous banquet was laid out, at which dowager lady Chia and the other ladies occupied the lower seats and entertained each other, while Mrs. Yu, widow Li Wan, lady Feng and the rest presented the soup and handed the cups. The Imperial consort Yuan subsequently directed that the pencils and inkslabs should be brought, and with her own hands she opened the silken paper. She chose the places she liked, and conferred upon them a name; and devising a general designation for the garden, she called it the Ta Kuan garden (Broad vista), while for the tablet of the main pavilion the device she composed ran as follows: "Be mindful of the grace and remember the equity (of His Majesty);" with this inscription on the antithetical scrolls:

*Mercy excessive Heaven and earth display,
And it men young and old hail gratefully;
From old till now they pour their bounties great
Those rich gifts which Cathay and all states permeate.*

page 275

Changing also the text: "A phoenix comes with dignified air for the Hsiao Hsiang Lodge."

"The red (flowers are) fragrant and the green (banana leaves like) jade," she altered into "Happy red and joyful green"; bestowing upon the place the appellation of the I Hung court (joyful red). The spot where "the fragrance pure of the ligularia and iris," was inscribed, she called "the ligularia and the 'Wu' weed court;" and where was "the sign in the apricot tree is visible," she designated "the cottage in the hills where dolichos is bleached." The main tower she called the Broad Vista Tower. The lofty tower facing the east, she designated "the variegated and flowery Hall;" bestowing on the line of buildings, facing the west, the appellation of "the Hall of Occult Fragrance;" and besides these figured such further names as: "the Hall of peppery wind," "the Arbour of lotus fragrance," "the Islet of purple caltrop," "the Bank of golden lotus," and the like. There were also tablets with four characters such as: "the peach blossom and the vernal rain;" "the autumnal wind prunes the Eloecocca," "the artemisia leaves

and the night snow,” and other similar names which could not all be placed on record. She furthermore directed that such tablets as were already put up, should not be dismantled, and she forthwith took the lead and composed an heptameter stanza, the burden of which was:

*Hills it enclasps, embraces streams, with skill it is laid out:
What task the grounds to raise! the works to start and bring about!
Of scenery in heaven and amongst men store has been made;
The name Broad Vista o'er the fragrant park should be engraved.*

When she had finished writing, she observed smilingly, as she addressed herself to all the young ladies: “I have all along lacked the quality of sharpness and never besides been good at verses; as you, sisters, and all of you have ever been aware; but, on a night like this I've been fain to do my best, with the object of escaping censure, and of not reflecting injustice on this scenery and nothing more. But some other day when I've got time, be it ever so little, I shall deem it my duty to make up what remains by inditing a record of the Broad Vista Garden, as well as a song on my visit to my parents and other such literary productions in memory of the events of this day. You sisters and others must, each of you, in like manner compose a stanza on the motto on each tablet, expressing your sentiments, as you please, without being restrained by any regard for my meagre ability. Knowing as I do besides that Pao-yü is, indeed, able to write verses, I feel the more delighted! But among his compositions, those I like the best are those in the two places, 'the Hsiao Hsiang Lodge,' and 'the court of Heng and Wu;' and next those of 'the Joyful red court,' and 'the cottage in the hills, where the dolichos is bleached.' As for grand sites like these four, there should be found some out-of-the-way expressions to insert in the

page 276

verses so that they should be felicitous. The antithetical lines composed by you, (Pao-yü), on a former occasion are excellent, it is true; but you should now further indite for each place, a pentameter stanza, so that by allowing me to test you in my presence, you may not show yourself ungrateful for the trouble I have taken in teaching you from your youth up.”

Pao-yü had no help but to assent, and descending from the hall, he went off all alone to give himself up to reflection.

Of the three Ying Ch'un, T'an Ch'un, and Hsi Ch'un, T'an Ch'un must be considered to have also been above the standard of her sisters, but she, in her own estimation, imagined it, in fact, difficult to compete with Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai and Lin Tai-yü. With no alternative however than that of doing her best, she followed the example of all the rest with the sole purpose of warding off criticism. And Li Wan too succeeded, after much exertion, in putting together a stanza.

The consort of the Chia family perused in due order the verses written by the young ladies, the text of which is given below.

The lines written by Ying Ch'un on the tablet of "Boundless spirits and blissful heart" were:

*A park laid out with scenery surpassing fine and rare!
Submissive to thy will, on boundless bliss bashful I write!
Who could believe that yonder scenes in this world found a share!
Will not thy heart be charmed on thy visit by the sight?*

These are the verses by T'an Ch'un on the tablet of "All nature vies in splendour":

*Of aspect lofty and sublime is raised a park of fame!
Honoured with thy bequest, my shallow lore fills me with shame.
No words could e'er amply exhaust the beauteous skill,
For lo! in very truth glory and splendour all things fill!*

Thus runs Hsi Ch'un's stanza on the tablet of the "Conception of literary compositions":

*The hillocks and the streams crosswise beyond a thousand li extend!
The towers and terraces 'midst the five-coloured clouds lofty ascend!
In the resplendent radiance of both sun and moon the park it lies!
The skill these scenes to raise the skill e'en essays to conceive
outvies!*

The lines composed by Li Wan on the tablet “grace and elegance,” consisted of:

*The comely streams and hillocks clear, in double folds, embrace;
E'en Fairyland, forsooth, transcend they do in elegance and grace!
The “Fragrant Plant” the theme is of the ballad fan, green-made.
Like drooping plum-bloom flap the lapel red and the Hsiang gown.
From prosperous times must have been handed down those pearls and
jade.
What bliss! the fairy on the jasper terrace will come down!
When to our prayers she yields, this glorious park to contemplate,
No mortal must e'er be allowed these grounds to penetrate.*

page 277

The ode by Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai on the tablet of “Concentrated Splendour and Accumulated auspiciousness” was:

*Raised on the west of the Imperial city, lo! the park stored with
fragrant smell,
Shrouded by Phoebe's radiant rays and clouds of good omen, in
wondrous
glory lies!
The willows tall with joy exult that the parrots their nests have
shifted from the dell.
The bamboo groves, when laid, for the phoenix with dignity to come,
were meant to rise.
The very eve before the Empress' stroll, elegant texts were ready and
affixed.
If even she her parents comes to see, how filial piety supreme must
be!
When I behold her beauteous charms and talents supernatural, with
awe
transfixed,
One word, to utter more how can I troth ever presume, when shame
overpowers me.*

The distich by Lin Tai-yü on the tablet of “Spiritual stream outside the world,” ran thus:

*Th' imperial visit doth enhance joy and delight.
This fairy land from mortal scenes what diff'rent sight!
The comely grace it borrows of both hill and stream;
And to the landscape it doth add a charm supreme.
The fumes of Chin Ku wine everything permeate;
The flowers the inmate of the Jade Hall fascinate.
The imperial favour to receive how blessed our lot!
For oft the palace carriage will pass through this spot.*

The Chia consort having concluded the perusal of the verses, and extolled them for a time: "After all," she went on to say with a smile, "those composed by my two cousins, Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai and Lin Tai-yü, differ in excellence from those of all the rest; and neither I, stupid as I am, nor my sisters can attain their standard."

Lin Tao-yü had, in point of fact, made up her mind to display, on this evening, her extraordinary abilities to their best advantage, and to put down every one else, but contrary to her expectations the Chia consort had expressed her desire that no more than a single stanza should be written on each tablet, so that unable, after all, to disregard her directions by writing anything in excess, she had no help but to compose a pentameter stanza, in an offhand way, merely with the intent of complying with her wishes.

Pao-yü had by this time not completed his task. He had just finished two stanzas on the Hsiao Hsiang Lodge and the Heng Wu garden, and was just then engaged in composing a verse on the "Happy red Court." In his draft figured a line: "The (leaves) of jade-like green in spring are yet rolled up," which Pao-ch'ai stealthily observed as she turned her eyes from side to side; and availing herself of the very first moment, when none of the company could notice her, she gave him a nudge. "As her highness," she

page 278

remarked, "doesn't relish the four characters, representing the red (flowers are) fragrant, and the green (banana leaves) like jade, she changed them, just a while back, for 'the joyful red and gladsome green;' and if you deliberately now again employ these two words 'jade-like green,' won't it look as if you were bent upon being at variance with her?"

Besides, very many are the old books, in which the banana leaves form the theme, so you had better think of another line and substitute it and have done with it!"

When Pao-yü heard the suggestion made by Pao-ch'ai, he speedily replied, as he wiped off the perspiration: "I can't at all just at present call to mind any passage from the contents of some old book."

"Just simply take," proposed Pao-ch'ai smilingly, "the character jade in jade-like green and change it into the character wax, that's all."

"Does 'green wax,'" Pao-yü inquired, "come out from anywhere?"

Pao-ch'ai gently smacked her lips and nodded her head as she laughed. "I fear," she said, "that if, on an occasion like to-night, you show no more brains than this, by and by when you have to give any answers in the golden hall, to the questions (of the examiner), you will, really, forget (the very first four names) of Chao, Ch'ien, Sun and Li (out of the hundred)! What, have you so much as forgotten the first line of the poem by Han Yü, of the T'ang dynasty, on the Banana leaf:

"Cold is the candle and without a flame, the green wax dry?"

On hearing these words, Pao-yü's mind suddenly became enlightened. "What a fool I am!" he added with a simper; "I couldn't for the moment even remember the lines, ready-made though they were and staring at me in my very eyes! Sister, you really can be styled my teacher, little though you may have taught me, and I'll henceforward address you by no other name than 'teacher,' and not call you 'sister' any more!"

"Don't you yet hurry to go on," Pao-ch'ai again observed in a gentle tone of voice sneeringly, "but keep on calling me elder sister and younger sister? Who's your sister? that one over there in a yellow coat is your sister!"

But apprehending, as she bandied these jokes, lest she might be wasting his time, she felt constrained to promptly move away; whereupon Pao-yü continued the ode he had been working at, and brought it to a close, writing in all three stanzas.

Tai-yü had not had so far an opportunity of making a display of her ability, and was feeling at heart in a very dejected mood; but when she perceived that Pao-yü was having intense trouble in conceiving what he had to write, and she found, upon walking up to the side of the table, that he

page 279

had only one stanza short, that on “the sign on the apricot tree is visible,” she consequently bade him copy out clean the first three odes, while she herself composed a stanza, which she noted down on a slip of paper, rumped up into a ball, and threw just in front of Pao-yü.

As soon as Pao-yü opened it and glanced at it, he realised that it was a hundred times better than his own three stanzas, and transcribing it without loss of time, in a bold writing, he handed up his compositions.

On perusal, the Chia Consort read what follows. By Pao-yü, on: “A phoenix comes with dignified air:”

*The bamboos just now don that jadelike grace,
Which worthy makes them the pheasant to face;
Each culm so tender as if to droop fain,
Each one so verdant, in aspect so cool,
The curb protects, from the steps wards the pool.
The pervious screens the tripod smell restrain.
The shadow will be strewn, mind do not shake
And (Hsieh) from her now long fine dream (awake)!*

On “the pure fragrance of the Ligularia and Iris Florentina:”

*Hengs and Wus the still park permeate;
The los and pis their sweet perfume enhance;
And supple charms the third spring flowers ornate;
Softly is wafted one streak of fragrance!
A light mist doth becloud the tortuous way!
With moist the clothes bedews, that verdure cold!
The pond who ever sinuous could hold?*

Dreams long and subtle, dream the household Hsieh.

On “the happy red and joyful green:”

*Stillness pervades the deep pavilion on a lengthy day.
The green and red, together matched, transcendent grace display.
Unfurled do still remain in spring the green and waxlike leaves.
No sleep yet seeks the red-clad maid, though night's hours be
far-spent,
But o'er the rails lo, she reclines, dangling her ruddy sleeves;
Against the stone she leans shrouded by taintless scent,
And stands the quarter facing whence doth blow the eastern wind!
Her lord and master must look up to her with feelings kind.*

On “the sign on the apricot tree is visible:”

*The apricot tree sign to drink wayfarers doth invite;
A farm located on a hill, lo! yonder strikes the sight!
And water caltrops, golden lotus, geese, as well as flows,
And mulberry and elm trees which afford rest to swallows.
That wide extent of spring leeks with verdure covers the ground;
And o'er ten li the paddy blossom fragrance doth abound.
In days of plenty there's a lack of dearth and of distress,
And what need then is there to plough and weave with such briskness?*

When the Chia consort had done with the perusal, excessive joy filled her heart. “He has indeed made progress!” she exclaimed, and went on

page 280

to point at the verses on “the sign on the apricot tree,” as being the crowning piece of the four stanzas. In due course, she with her own hands changed the motto “a cottage in the hills where dolichos is bleached” into “the paddy-scented village,” and bidding also T'an Ch'un to take the several tens of stanzas written then, and to transcribe them separately on ornamented silk paper, she commanded a eunuch to send them to the outer quarters. And when Chia Cheng and the other men perused them, one and all sung their incessant praise, while Chia Cheng, on his part, sent in some complimentary message, with regard to her

return home on a visit.

Y ü an Ch'un went further and gave orders that luscious wines, a ham and other such presents should be conferred upon Pao-yü, as well as upon Chia Lan. This Chia Lan was as yet at this time a perfect youth without any knowledge of things in general, so that all that he could do was to follow the example of his mother, and imitate his uncle in performing the conventional rites.

At the very moment that Chia Se felt unable, along with a company of actresses, to bear the ordeal of waiting on the ground floor of the two-storied building, he caught sight of a eunuch come running at a flying pace. "The composition of verses is over," he said, "so quick give me the programme;" whereupon Chia Se hastened to present the programme as well as a roll of the names of the twelve girls. And not a long interval elapsed before four plays were chosen; No. 1 being the Imperial Banquet; No. 2 Begging (the weaver goddess) for skill in needlework; No. 3 The spiritual match; and No. 4 the Parting spirit. Chia Se speedily lent a hand in the getting up, and the preparations for the performance, and each of the girls sang with a voice sufficient to split the stones and danced in the manner of heavenly spirits; and though their exterior was that of the characters in which they were dressed up for the play, their acting nevertheless represented, in a perfect manner, both sorrow as well as joy. As soon as the performance was brought to a close, a eunuch walked in holding a golden salver containing cakes, sweets, and the like, and inquired who was Ling Kuan; and Chia Se readily concluding that these articles were presents bestowed upon Ling Kuan, made haste to take them over, as he bade Ling Kuan prostrate herself.

"The honourable consort," the eunuch further added, "directs that Ling Kuan, who is the best actress of the lot, should sing two more songs; any two will do, she does not mind what they are."

Chia Se at once expressed his obedience, and felt constrained to urge Ling Kuan to sing the two ballads entitled: "The walk through the garden" and "Frightened out of a dream." But Ling Kuan asserted that these two ballads had not originally been intended for her own role; and being firm in her refusal to accede and insisting upon rendering the two songs

“The Mutual Promise” and “The Mutual Abuse,” Chia Se found it hard to bring her round, and had no help but to let her have her own way. The Chia consort was so extremely enchanted with her that she gave directions that she should not be treated harshly, and that this girl should receive a careful training, while besides the fixed number of presents, she gave her two rolls of palace silk, two purses, gold and silver ingots, and presents in the way of eatables.

Subsequently, when the banquet had been cleared, and she once more prosecuted her visit through those places to which she had not been, she quite accidentally espied the Buddhist Temple encircled by hills, and promptly rinsing her hands, she walked in and burnt incense and worshipped Buddha. She also composed the device for a tablet, “a humane boat on the (world's) bitter sea,” and went likewise so far as to show special acts of additional grace to a company of ascetic nuns and Taoist priestesses.

A eunuch came in a short while and reverently fell on his knees. “The presents are all in readiness,” he reported, “and may it please you to inspect them and to distribute them, in compliance with custom;” and presented to her a list, which the Chia consort perused from the very top throughout without raising any objection, and readily commanding that action should be taken according to the list, a eunuch descended and issued the gifts one after another. The presents for dowager lady Chia consisted, it may be added, of two sceptres, one of gold, the other of jade, with “may your wishes be fulfilled” inscribed on them; a staff made of lign-aloes; a string of chaplet beads of Chia-nan fragrant wood; four rolls of imperial satins with words “Affluence and honours” and Perennial Spring (woven in them); four rolls of imperial silk with Perennial Happiness and Longevity; two shoes of purple gold bullion, representing a pen, an ingot and “as you like;” and ten silver ingots with the device “Felicitous Blessings.” While the two shares for madame Hsing and madame Wang were only short of hers by the sceptres and staffs, four things in all. Chia She, Chia Cheng and the others had each apportioned to him a work newly written by the Emperor, two boxes of superior ink, and gold and silver cups, two pairs of each; their other gifts being identical with those above. Pao-ch'ai, Tai-yü, all the sisters and the rest

were assigned each a copy of a new book, a fine slab and two pair of gold and silver ornaments of a novel kind and original shape; Pao-yü likewise receiving the same presents. Chia Lan's gifts consisted of two necklets, one of gold, the other of silver, and of two pair of gold ingots. Mrs. Yu, widow Li Wan, lady Feng and the others had each of them, four ingots of gold and silver; and, in the way of keepsakes, four pieces of silk. There were, in addition, presents consisting of twenty-four pieces of silk and a thousand strings of good cash to be allotted to the nurses, and waiting-maids,

page 282

in the apartments of dowager lady Chia, madame Wang and of the respective sisters; while Chia Chen, Chia Lien, Chia Huan, Chia Jung and the rest had, every one, for presents, a piece of silk, and a pair of gold and silver ingots.

As regards the other gifts, there were a hundred rolls of various coloured silks, a thousand ounces of pure silver, and several bottles of imperial wine, intended to be bestowed upon all the men-servants of the mansions, on the East and the West, as well as upon those who had been in the garden overseeing works, arranging the decorations, and in waiting to answer calls, and upon those who looked after the theatres and managed the lanterns. There being, besides, five hundred strings of pure cash for the cooks, waiters, jugglers and hundreds of actors and every kind of domestic.

The whole party had finished giving expression to their thanks for her bounty, when the managers and eunuchs respectfully announced: "It is already a quarter to three, and may it please your Majesty to turn back your imperial chariot;" whereupon, much against her will, the Chia consort's eyes brimmed over, and she once more gave vent to tears. Forcing herself however again to put on a smile, she clasped old lady Chia's and madame Wang's hands, and could not bring herself to let them go; while she repeatedly impressed upon their minds: that there was no need to give way to any solicitude, and that they should take good care of their healths; that the grace of the present emperor was so vast, that once a month he would grant permission for them to enter the palace and pay her a visit. "It is easy enough for us to see each other,"

(she said,) “and why should we indulge in any excess of grief? But when his majesty in his heavenly generosity allows me another time to return home, you shouldn't go in for such pomp and extravagance.”

Dowager lady Chia and the other inmates had already cried to such an extent that sobs choked their throats and they could with difficulty give utterance to speech. But though the Chia consort could not reconcile herself to the separation, the usages in vogue in the imperial household could not be disregarded or infringed, so that she had no alternative but to stifle the anguish of her heart, to mount her chariot, and take her departure.

The whole family experienced meanwhile a hard task before they succeeded in consoling the old lady and madame Wang and in supporting them away out of the garden. But as what follows is not ascertained, the next chapter will disclose it.

CHAPTER XIX.

In the vehemence of her feelings, Hua (Hsi Jen) on a quiet evening admonishes Pao-yü.

While (the spell) of affection continues unbroken, Pao-yü, on a still day, perceives the fragrance emitted from Tai-yü's person.

The Chia consort, we must now go on to explain, returned to the Palace, and the next day, on her appearance in the presence of His Majesty, she thanked him for his bounty and gave him furthermore an account of her experiences on her visit home. His Majesty's dragon countenance was much elated, and he also issued from the privy store coloured satins, gold and silver and such like articles to be presented to Chia Cheng and the other officials in the various households of her relatives. But dispensing with minute details about them, we will now revert to the two mansions of Jung and Ning.

With the extreme strain on mind and body for successive days, the strength of one and all was, in point of fact, worn out and their respective energies exhausted. And it was besides after they had been putting by the various decorations and articles of use for two or three days, that they, at length, got through the work.

Lady Feng was the one who had most to do, and whose responsibilities were greatest. The others could possibly steal a few leisure moments and retire to rest, while she was the sole person who could not slip away. In the second place, naturally anxious as she was to excel and both to fall in people's estimation, she put up with the strain just as if she were like one of those who had nothing to attend to. But the one who had the least to do and had the most leisure was Pao-yü.

As luck would have it on this day, at an early hour, Hsi Jen's mother came again in person and told dowager lady Chia that she would take Hsi Jen home to drink a cup of tea brewed in the new year and that she would return in the evening. For this reason Pao-yü was only in the company of all the waiting-maids, throwing dice, playing at chess and amusing himself. But while he was in the room playing with them with a total absence of zest, he unawares perceived a few waiting-maids arrive,

who informed him that their senior master Mr. Chen, of the Eastern Mansion, had come to invite him to go and see a theatrical performance, and the fireworks, which were to be let off.

Upon hearing these words, Pao-yü speedily asked them to change his clothes; but just as he was ready to start, presents of cream, steamed with sugar, arrived again when least expected from the Chia Consort, and Pao-yü recollecting with what relish Hsi Jen had partaken of this dish on the last occasion forthwith bid them keep it for her; while he went himself and told dowager lady Chia that he was going over to see the play.

page 284

The plays sung over at Chia Chen's consisted, who would have thought it, of "Ting L'ang recognises his father," and "Huang Po-ying deploys the spirits for battle," and in addition to these, "Sung Hsing-che causes great commotion in the heavenly palace;" "Ghiang T'ai-kung kills the general and deifies him," and other such like. Soon appeared the spirits and devils in a confused crowd on the stage, and suddenly also became visible the whole band of sprites and goblins, among which were some waving streamers, as they went past in a procession, invoking Buddha and burning incense. The sound of the gongs and drums and of shouts and cries were audible at a distance beyond the lane; and in the whole street, one and all extolled the performance as exceptionally grand, and that the like could never have been had in the house of any other family.

Pao-yü, noticing that the commotion and bustle had reached a stage so unbearable to his taste, speedily betook himself, after merely sitting for a little while, to other places in search of relaxation and fun. First of all, he entered the inner rooms, and after spending some time in chatting and laughing with Mrs. Yu, the waiting-maids, and secondary wives, he eventually took his departure out of the second gate; and as Mrs. Yu and her companions were still under the impression that he was going out again to see the play, they let him speed on his way, without so much as keeping an eye over him.

Chia Chen, Chia Lien, Hsueh P'an and the others were bent upon guessing enigmas, enforcing the penalties and enjoying themselves in a

hundred and one ways, so that even allowing that they had for a moment noticed that he was not occupying his seat, they must merely have imagined that he had gone inside and not, in fact, worried their minds about him. And as for the pages, who had come along with Pao-yü, those who were a little advanced in years, knowing very well that Pao-yü would, on an occasion like the present, be sure not to be going before dusk, stealthily therefore took advantage of his absence, those, who could, to gamble for money, and others to go to the houses of relatives and friends to drink of the new year tea, so that what with gambling and drinking the whole bevy surreptitiously dispersed, waiting for dusk before they came back; while those, who were younger, had all crept into the green rooms to watch the excitement; with the result that Pao-yü perceiving not one of them about bethought himself of a small reading room, which existed in previous days on this side, in which was suspended a picture of a beauty so artistically executed as to look life-like. "On such a bustling day as this," he reasoned, "it's pretty certain, I fancy, that there will be no one in there; and that beautiful person must surely too feel lonely, so that it's only right that I should go and console her a bit." With these thoughts, he hastily betook himself towards the side-house

page 285

yonder, and as soon as he came up to the window, he heard the sound of groans in the room. Pao-yü was really quite startled. "What!" (he thought), "can that beautiful girl, possibly, have come to life!" and screwing up his courage, he licked a hole in the paper of the window and peeped in. It was not she, however, who had come to life, but Ming Yen holding down a girl and likewise indulging in what the Monitory Dream Fairy had taught him.

"Dreadful!" exclaimed Pao-yü, aloud, unable to repress himself, and, stamping one of his feet, he walked into the door to the terror of both of them, who parting company, shivered with fear, like clothes that are being shaken. Ming Yen perceiving that it was Pao-yü promptly fell on his knees and piteously implored for pardon.

"What! in broad daylight! what do you mean by it? Were your master Mr. Chen to hear of it, would you die or live?" asked Pao-yü, as he simultaneously cast a glance at the servant-girl, who although not a

beauty was anyhow so spick and span, and possessed besides a few charms sufficient to touch the heart. From shame, her face was red and her ears purple, while she lowered her head and uttered not a syllable. Pao-yü stamped his foot. "What!" he shouted, "don't you yet bundle yourself away!"

This simple remark suggested the idea to the girl's mind who ran off, as if she had wings to fly with; but as Pao-yü went also so far as to go in pursuit of her, calling out: "Don't be afraid, I'm not one to tell anyone," Ming Yen was so exasperated that he cried, as he went after them, "My worthy ancestor, this is distinctly telling people about it."

"How old is that servant girl?" Pao-yü having asked; "She's, I expect, no more than sixteen or seventeen," Ming Yen rejoined.

"Well, if you haven't gone so far as to even ascertain her age," Pao-yü observed, "you're sure to know still less about other things; and it makes it plain enough that her acquaintance with you is all vain and futile! What a pity! what a pity!"

He then went on to enquire what her name was; and "Were I," continued Ming Yen smiling, "to tell you about her name it would involve a long yarn; it's indeed a novel and strange story! She relates that while her mother was nursing her, she dreamt a dream and obtained in this dream possession of a piece of brocaded silk, on which were designs, in variegated colours, representing opulence and honour, and a continuous line of the character Wan; and that this reason accounts for the name of Wan Erh, which was given her."

page 286

"This is really strange!" Pao-yü exclaimed with a grin, after lending an ear to what he had to say; "and she is bound, I think, by and by to have a good deal of good fortune!"

These words uttered, he plunged in deep thought for a while, and Ming Yen having felt constrained to inquire: "Why aren't you, Mr. Secundus, watching a theatrical performance of this excellent kind?" "I had been looking on for ever so long," Pao-yü replied, "until I got quite weary; and

had just come out for a stroll, when I happened to meet you two. But what's to be done now?"

Ming Yen gave a faint smile. "As there's no one here to know anything about it," he added, "I'll stealthily take you, Mr. Secundus, for a walk outside the city walls; and we'll come back shortly, before they've got wind of it."

"That won't do," Pao-yü demurred, "we must be careful, or else some beggar might kidnap us away; besides, were they to come to hear of it, there'll be again a dreadful row; and isn't it better that we should go to some nearer place, from which we could, after all, return at once?"

"As for some nearer place," Ming Yen observed; "to whose house can we go? It's really no easy matter!"

"My idea is," Pao-yü suggested with a smirk, "that we should simply go, and find sister Hua, and see what she's up to at home."

"Yes! Yes!" Ming Yen replied laughingly; "the fact is I had forgotten all about her home; but should it reach their ears," he continued, "they'll say that it was I who led you, Mr. Secundus, astray, and they'll beat me!"

"I'm here for you!" Pao-yü having assured him; Ming Yen at these words led the horses round, and the two of them speedily made their exit by the back gate. Luckily Hsi Jen's house was not far off. It was no further than half a li's distance, so that in a twinkling they had already reached the front of the door, and Ming Yen was the first to walk in and to call for Hsi Jen's eldest brother Hua Tzu-fang.

Hsi Jen's mother had, on this occasion, united in her home Hsi Jen, several of her sister's daughters, as well as a few of her nieces, and they were engaged in partaking of fruits and tea, when they heard some one outside call out, "Brother Hua." Hua Tzu-fang lost no time in rushing out; and upon looking and finding that it was the two of them, the master and his servant, he was so taken by surprise that his fears could not be set at rest. Promptly, he clasped Pao-yü in his arms and dismounted him, and coming into the court, he shouted out at the top of his voice: "Mr. Pao has come." The other persons heard the announcement of his arrival, with

equanimity, but when it reached Hsi Jen's ears, she truly felt at such a loss to fathom

page 287

the object of his visit that issuing hastily out of the room, she came to meet Pao-yü, and as she laid hold of him: "Why did you come?" she asked.

"I felt awfully dull," Pao-yü rejoined with a smile, "and came to see what you were up to."

Hsi Jen at these words banished, at last, all anxiety from her mind. "You're again up to your larks," she observed, "but what's the aim of your visit? Who else has come along with him?" she at the same time went on to question Ming Yen.

"All the others know nothing about it!" explained Ming Yen exultingly; "only we two do, that's all."

When Hsi Jen heard this remark, she gave way afresh to solicitous fears: "This is dreadful!" she added; "for were you to come across any one from the house, or to meet master; or were, in the streets, people to press against you, or horses to collide with you, as to make (his horse) shy, and he were to fall, would that too be a joke? The gall of both of you is larger than a peck measure; but it's all you, Ming Yen, who has incited him, and when I go back, I'll surely tell the nurses to beat you."

Ming Yen pouted his mouth. "Mr. Secundus," he pleaded, "abused me and beat me, as he bade me bring him here, and now he shoves the blame on my shoulders! 'Don't let us go,' I suggested; 'but if you do insist, well then let us go and have done.'"

Hua Tzu-fang promptly interceded. "Let things alone," he said; "now that they're already here, there's no need whatever of much ado. The only thing is that our mean house with its thatched roof is both so crammed and so filthy that how could you, sir, sit in it!"

Hsi Jen's mother also came out at an early period to receive him, and Hsi

Jen pulled Pao-yü in. Once inside the room, Pao-yü perceived three or five girls, who, as soon as they caught sight of him approaching, all lowered their heads, and felt so bashful that their faces were suffused with blushes. But as both Hua Tzu-fang and his mother were afraid that Pao-yü would catch cold, they pressed him to take a seat on the stove-bed, and hastened to serve a fresh supply of refreshments, and to at once bring him a cup of good tea.

“You needn't be flurrying all for nothing,” Hsi Jen smilingly interposed; “I, naturally, should know; and there's no use of even laying out any fruits, as I daren't recklessly give him anything to eat.”

Saying this, she simultaneously took her own cushion and laid it on a stool, and after Pao-yü took a seat on it, she placed the footstove she had been using, under his feet; and producing, from a satchel, two peach-blossom-scented small cakes, she opened her own hand-stove and threw them

page 288

into the fire; which done, she covered it well again and placed it in Pao-yü's lap. And eventually, she filled her own tea-cup with tea and presented it to Pao-yü, while, during this time, her mother and sister had been fussing about, laying out in fine array a tableful of every kind of eatables.

Hsi Jen noticed that there were absolutely no things that he could eat, but she felt urged to say with a smile: “Since you've come, it isn't right that you should go empty away; and you must, whether the things be good or bad, taste a little, so that it may look like a visit to my house!”

As she said this, she forthwith took several seeds of the fir-cone, and cracking off the thin skin, she placed them in a handkerchief and presented them to Pao-yü. But Pao-yü, espying that Hsi Jen's two eyes were slightly red, and that the powder was shiny and moist, quietly therefore inquired of Hsi Jen, “Why do you cry for no rhyme or reason?”

“Why should I cry?” Hsi Jen laughed; “something just got into my eyes and I rubbed them.” By these means she readily managed to evade

detection; but seeing that Pao-yü wore a deep red archery-sleeved pelisse, ornamented with gold dragons, and lined with fur from foxes' ribs and a grey sable fur surtout with a fringe round the border. "What! have you," she asked, "put on again your new clothes for? specially to come here? and didn't they inquire of you where you were going?"

"I had changed," Pao-yü explained with a grin, "as Mr. Chen had invited me to go over and look at the play."

"Well, sit a while and then go back;" Hsi Jen continued as she nodded her head; "for this isn't the place for you to come to!"

"You'd better be going home now," Pao-yü suggested smirkingly; "where I've again kept something good for you."

"Gently," smiled Hsi Jen, "for were you to let them hear, what figure would we cut?" And with these, words, she put out her hand and unclasping from Pao-yü's neck the jade of Spiritual Perception, she faced her cousins and remarked exultingly. "Here! see for yourselves; look at this and learn! When I repeatedly talked about it, you all thought it extraordinary, and were anxious to have a glance at it; to-day, you may gaze on it with all your might, for whatever precious thing you may by and by come to see will really never excel such an object as this!"

When she had finished speaking, she handed it over to them, and after they had passed it round for inspection, she again fastened it properly on Pao-yü's neck, and also bade her brother go and hire a small carriage, or engage a small chair, and escort Pao-yü back home.

"If I see him back," Hua Tzu-fang remarked, "there would be no harm, were he even to ride his horse!"

page 289

"It isn't because of harm," Hsi Jen replied; "but because he may come across some one from the house."

Hua Tzu-fang promptly went and bespoke a small chair; and when it came to the door, the whole party could not very well detain him, and

they of course had to see Pao-yü out of the house; while Hsi Jen, on the other hand, snatched a few fruits and gave them to Ming Yen; and as she at the same time pressed in his hand several cash to buy crackers with to let off, she enjoined him not to tell any one as he himself would likewise incur blame.

As she uttered these words, she straightway escorted Pao-yü as far as outside the door, from whence having seen him mount into the sedan chair, she dropped the curtain; whereupon Ming Yen and her brother, the two of them, led the horses and followed behind in his wake. Upon reaching the street where the Ning mansion was situated, Ming Yen told the chair to halt, and said to Hua Tzu-fang, "It's advisable that I should again go, with Mr. Secundus, into the Eastern mansion, to show ourselves before we can safely betake ourselves home; for if we don't, people will suspect!"

Hua Tzu-fang, upon hearing that there was good reason in what he said, promptly clasped Pao-yü out of the chair and put him on the horse, whereupon after Pao-yü smilingly remarked: "Excuse me for the trouble I've surely put you to," they forthwith entered again by the back gate; but putting aside all details, we will now confine ourselves to Pao-yü.

After he had walked out of the door, the several waiting-maids in his apartments played and laughed with greater zest and with less restraint. Some there were who played at chess, others who threw the dice or had a game of cards; and they covered the whole floor with the shells of melon-seeds they were cracking, when dame Li, his nurse, happened to come in, propping herself on a staff, to pay her respects and to see Pao-yü, and perceiving that Pao-yü was not at home and that the servant-girls were only bent upon romping, she felt intensely disgusted. "Since I've left this place," she therefore exclaimed with a sigh, "and don't often come here, you've become more and more unmannerly; while the other nurse does still less than ever venture to expostulate with you; Pao-yü is like a candlestick eighty feet high, shedding light on others, and throwing none upon himself! All he knows is to look down upon people as being filthy; and yet this is his room and he allows you to put it topsy-turvey, and to become more and more unmindful of decorum!"

These servant-girls were well aware that Pao-yü was not particular in

these respects, and that in the next place nurse Li, having pleaded old age, resigned her place and gone home, had nowadays no control over them, so that they simply gave their minds to romping and joking, and paid no heed

page 290

whatever to her. Nurse Li however still kept on asking about Pao-yü, "How much rice he now ate at one meal? and at what time he went to sleep?" to which questions, the servant-girls replied quite at random; some there being too who observed: "What a dreadful despicable old thing she is!"

"In this covered bowl," she continued to inquire, "is cream, and why not give it to me to eat?" and having concluded these words, she took it up and there and then began eating it.

"Be quick, and leave it alone!" a servant-girl expostulated, "that, he said, was kept in order to be given to Hsi Jen; and on his return, when he again gets into a huff, you, old lady, must, on your own motion, confess to having eaten it, and not involve us in any way as to have to bear his resentment."

Nurse Li, at these words, felt both angry and ashamed. "I can't believe," she forthwith remarked, "that he has become so bad at heart! Not to speak of the milk I've had, I have, in fact every right to even something more expensive than this; for is it likely that he holds Hsi Jen dearer than myself? It can't forsooth be that he doesn't bear in mind how that I've brought him up to be a big man, and how that he has eaten my blood transformed into milk and grown up to this age! and will be because I'm now having a bowl of milk of his be angry on that score! I shall, yes, eat it, and we'll see what he'll do! I don't know what you people think of Hsi Jen, but she was a lowbred girl, whom I've with my own hands raised up! and what fine object indeed was she!"

As she spoke, she flew into a temper, and taking the cream she drank the whole of it.

"They don't know how to speak properly!" another servant-girl interposed sarcastically, "and it's no wonder that you, old lady, should get angry!"

Pao-yü still sends you, venerable dame, presents as a proof of his gratitude, and is it possible that he will feel displeased for such a thing like this?"

"You girls shouldn't also pretend to be artful flatterers to cajole me!" nurse Li added; "do you imagine that I'm not aware of the dismissal, the other day, of Hsi Hsüeh, on account of a cup of tea? and as it's clear enough that I've incurred blame, I'll come by and by and receive it!"

Having said this, she went off in a dudgeon, but not a long interval elapsed before Pao-yü returned, and gave orders to go and fetch Hsi Jen; and perceiving Ching Ling reclining on the bed perfectly still: "I presume she's ill," Pao-yü felt constrained to inquire, "or if she isn't ill, she must have lost at cards."

"Not so!" observed Chiu Wen; "she had been a winner, but dame Li

page 291

came in quite casually and muddled her so that she lost; and angry at this she rushed off to sleep."

"Don't place yourselves," Pao-yü smiled, "on the same footing as nurse Li, and if you were to let her alone, everything will be all right."

These words were still on his lips when Hsi Jen arrived. After the mutual salutations, Hsi Jen went on to ask of Pao-yü: "Where did you have your repast? and what time did you come back?" and to present likewise, on behalf of her mother and sister, her compliments to all the girls, who were her companions. In a short while, she changed her costume and divested herself of her fineries, and Pao-yü bade them fetch the cream.

"Nurse Li has eaten it," the servant-girls rejoined, and as Pao-yü was on the point of making some remark Hsi Jen hastened to interfere, laughing the while; "Is it really this that you had kept for me? many thanks for the trouble; the other day, when I had some, I found it very toothsome, but after I had partaken of it, I got a pain in the stomach, and was so much upset, that it was only after I had brought it all up that I felt all right. So it's as well that she has had it, for, had it been kept here, it would have been

wasted all for no use! What I fancy are dry chestnuts; and while you clean a few for me, I'll go and lay the bed!"

Pao-yü upon hearing these words credited them as true, so that he discarded all thought of the cream and fetched the chestnuts, which he, with his own hands, selected and peeled. Perceiving at the same time that none of the party were present in the room, he put on a smile and inquired of Hsi Jen: "Who were those persons dressed in red to day?"

"They're my two cousins on my mother's side," Hsi Jen explained, and hearing this, Pao-yü sang their praise as he heaved a couple of sighs.

"What are you sighing for?" Hsi Jen remarked. "I know the secret reasons of your heart; it's I fancy because she isn't fit to wear red!"

"It isn't that," Pao-yü protested smilingly, "it isn't that; if such a person as that isn't good enough to be dressed in red, who would forsooth presume to wear it? It's because I find her so really lovely! and if we could, after all, manage to get her into our family, how nice it would be then!"

Hsi Jen gave a sardonic smile. "That it's my own fate to be a slave doesn't matter, but is it likely that the destiny of even my very relatives could be to become one and all of them bond servants? But you should certainly set your choice upon some really beautiful girl, for she would in that case be good enough to enter your house."

"Here you are again with your touchiness!" Pao-yü eagerly exclaimed smiling, "if I said that she should come to our house, does it necessarily

page 292

imply that she should be a servant? and wouldn't it do were I to mention that she should come as a relative!"

"That too couldn't exalt her to be a fit match for you!" rejoined Hsi Jen; but Pao-yü being loth to continue the conversation, simply busied himself with cleaning the chestnuts.

"How is it you utter not a word?" Hsi Jen laughed; "I expect it's because I

just offended you by my inconsiderate talk! But if by and by you have your purpose fixed on it, just spend a few ounces of silver to purchase them with, and bring them in and have done!”

“How would you have one make any reply?” Pao-yü smilingly rejoined; “all I did was to extol her charms; for she's really fit to have been born in a deep hall and spacious court as this; and it isn't for such foul things as myself and others to contrariwise spend our days in this place!”

“Though deprived of this good fortune,” Hsi Jen explained, “she's nevertheless also petted and indulged and the jewel of my maternal uncle and my aunt! She's now seventeen years of age, and everything in the way of trousseau has been got ready, and she's to get married next year.”

Upon hearing the two words “get married,” he could not repress himself from again ejaculating: “Hai hai!” but while he was in an unhappy frame of mind, he once more heard Hsi Jen remark as she heaved a sigh: “Ever since I've come here, we cousins haven't all these years been able to get to live together, and now that I'm about to return home, they, on the other hand, will all be gone!”

Pao-yü, realising that there lurked in this remark some meaning or other, was suddenly so taken aback that dropping the chestnuts, he inquired: “How is it that you now want to go back?”

“I was present to-day,” Hsi Jen explained, “when mother and brother held consultation together, and they bade me be patient for another year, and that next year they'll come up and redeem me out of service!”

Pao-yü, at these words, felt the more distressed. “Why do they want to redeem you?” he consequently asked.

“This is a strange question!” Hsi Jen retorted, “for I can't really be treated as if I were the issue born in this homestead of yours! All the members of my family are elsewhere, and there's only myself in this place, so that how could I end my days here?”

“If I don't let you go, it will verily be difficult for you to get away!” Pao-yü

replied.

“There has never been such a principle of action!” urged Hsi Jen; “even in the imperial palace itself, there's a fixed rule, by which possibly

page 293

every certain number of years a selection (of those who have to go takes place), and every certain number of years a new batch enters; and there's no such practice as that of keeping people for ever; not to speak of your own home.”

Pao-yü realised, after reflection, that she, in point of fact, was right, and he went on to observe: “Should the old lady not give you your release, it will be impossible for you to get off.”

“Why shouldn't she release me?” Hsi Jen questioned. “Am I really so very extraordinary a person as to have perchance made such an impression upon her venerable ladyship and my lady that they will be positive in not letting me go? They may, in all likelihood, give my family some more ounces of silver to keep me here; that possibly may come about. But, in truth, I'm also a person of the most ordinary run, and there are many more superior to me, yea very many! Ever since my youth up, I've been in her old ladyship's service; first by waiting upon Miss Shih for several years, and recently by being in attendance upon you for another term of years; and now that our people will come to redeem me, I should, as a matter of right, be told to go. My idea is that even the very redemption money won't be accepted, and that they will display such grace as to let me go at once. And, as for being told that I can't be allowed to go as I'm so diligent in my service to you, that's a thing that can on no account come about! My faithful attendance is an obligation of my duties, and is no exceptional service! and when I'm gone you'll again have some other faithful attendant, and it isn't likely that when I'm no more here, you'll find it impracticable to obtain one!”

After Pao-yü had listened to these various arguments, which proved the reasonableness of her going and the unreasonableness of any detention, he felt his heart more than ever a prey to distress. “In spite of all you say,” he therefore continued, “the sole desire of my heart is to detain you; and I have no doubt but that the old lady will speak to your mother about

it; and if she were to give your mother ample money, she'll, of course, not feel as if she could very well with any decency take you home!"

"My mother won't naturally have the audacity to be headstrong!" Hsi Jen ventured, "not to speak besides of the nice things, which may be told her and the lots of money she may, in addition, be given; but were she even not to be paid any compliments, and not so much as a single cash given her, she won't, if you set your mind upon keeping me here, presume not to comply with your wishes, were it also against my inclination. One thing however; our family would never rely upon prestige, and trust upon honorability to do anything so domineering as this! for this isn't like anything else, which, because you take a fancy to it, a hundred per cent profit can be

page 294

added, and it obtained for you! This action can be well taken if the seller doesn't suffer loss! But in the present instance, were they to keep me back for no rhyme or reason, it would also be of no benefit to yourself; on the contrary, they would be instrumental in keeping us blood relatives far apart; a thing the like of which, I feel positive that dowager lady Chia and my lady will never do!"

After lending an ear to this argument, Pao-yü cogitated within himself for a while. "From what you say," he then observed, "when you say you'll go, it means that you'll go for certain!"

"Yes, that I'll go for certain," Hsi Jen rejoined.

"Who would have anticipated," Pao-yü, after these words, mused in his own heart, "that a person like her would have shown such little sense of gratitude, and such a lack of respect! Had I," he then remarked aloud with a sigh, "been aware, at an early date, that your whole wish would have been to go, I wouldn't, in that case, have brought you over! But when you're away, I shall remain alone, a solitary spirit!"

As he spoke, he lost control over his temper, and, getting into bed, he went to sleep.

The fact is that when Hsi Jen had been at home, and she heard her mother and brother express their intention of redeeming her back, she there and then observed that were she even at the point of death, she would not return home. "When in past days," she had argued, "you had no rice to eat, there remained myself, who was still worth several taels; and hadn't I urged you to sell me, wouldn't I have seen both father and mother die of starvation under my very eyes? and you've now had the good fortune of selling me into this place, where I'm fed and clothed just like a mistress, and where I'm not beaten by day, nor abused by night! Besides, though now father be no more, you two have anyhow by putting things straight again, so adjusted the family estate that it has resumed its primitive condition. And were you, in fact, still in straitened circumstances, and you could by redeeming me back, make again some more money, that would be well and good; but the truth is that there's no such need, and what would be the use for you to redeem me at such a time as this? You should temporarily treat me as dead and gone, and shouldn't again recall any idea of redeeming me!"

Having in consequence indulged in a loud fit of crying, her mother and brother resolved, when they perceived her in this determined frame of mind, that for a fact there was no need for her to come out of service. What is more they had sold her under contract until death, in the distinct reliance that the Chia family, charitable and generous a family as it was, would, possibly, after no more than a few entreaties, make them a present of her

page 295

person as well as the purchase money. In the second place, never had they in the Chia mansion ill-used any of those below; there being always plenty of grace and little of imperiousness. Besides, the servant-girls, who acted as personal attendants in the apartments of the old as well as of the young, were treated so far unlike the whole body of domestics in the household that the daughters even of an ordinary and penniless parentage could not have been so looked up to. And these considerations induced both the mother as well as her son to at once dispel the intention and not to redeem her, and when Pao-yü had subsequently paid them an unexpected visit, and the two of them (Pao-yü and Hsi Jen) were seen to be also on such terms, the mother and her

son obtained a clearer insight into their relations, and still one more burden (which had pressed on their mind) fell to the ground, and as besides this was a contingency, which they had never reckoned upon, they both composed their hearts, and did not again entertain any idea of ransoming her.

It must be noticed moreover that Hsi Jen had ever since her youth not been blind to the fact that Pao-yü had an extraordinary temperament, that he was self-willed and perverse, far even in excess of all young lads, and that he had, in addition, a good many peculiarities and many unspeakable defects. And as of late he had placed such reliance in the fond love of his grandmother that his father and mother even could not exercise any extreme control over him, he had become so much the more remiss, dissolute, selfish and unconcerned, not taking the least pleasure in what was proper, that she felt convinced, whenever she entertained the idea of tendering him advice, that he would not listen to her. On this day, by a strange coincidence, came about the discussion respecting her ransom, and she designedly made use, in the first instance, of deception with a view to ascertain his feelings, to suppress his temper, and to be able subsequently to extend to him some words of admonition; and when she perceived that Pao-yü had now silently gone to sleep, she knew that his feelings could not brook the idea of her return and that his temper had already subsided. She had never had, as far as she was concerned, any desire of eating chestnuts, but as she feared lest, on account of the cream, some trouble might arise, which might again lead to the same results as when Hsi Hsüeh drank the tea, she consequently made use of the pretence that she fancied chestnuts, in order to put off Pao-yü from alluding (to the cream) and to bring the matter speedily to an end. But telling forthwith the young waiting-maids to take the chestnuts away and eat them, she herself came and pushed Pao-yü; but at the sight of Pao-yü with the traces of tears on his face, she at once put on a smiling expression and said: "What's there in this to wound your heart? If you positively do wish to keep me, I shall, of course, not go away!"

Pao-yü noticed that these words contained some hidden purpose, and

readily observed: "Do go on and tell me what else I can do to succeed in keeping you here, for of my own self I find it indeed difficult to say how!"

"Of our friendliness all along," Hsi Jen smilingly rejoined, "there's naturally no need to speak; but, if you have this day made up your mind to retain me here, it isn't through this friendship that you'll succeed in doing so. But I'll go on and mention three distinct conditions, and, if you really do accede to my wishes, you'll then have shown an earnest desire to keep me here, and I won't go, were even a sword to be laid on my neck!"

"Do tell me what these conditions are," Pao-yü pressed her with alacrity, as he smiled, "and I'll assent to one and all. My dear sister, my own dear sister, not to speak of two or three, but even two or three hundred of them I'm quite ready to accept. All I entreat you is that you and all of you should combine to watch over me and take care of me, until some day when I shall be transformed into flying ashes; but flying ashes are, after all, not opportune, as they have form and substance and they likewise possess sense, but until I've been metamorphosed into a streak of subtle smoke. And when the wind shall have with one puff dispelled me, all of you then will be unable to attend to me, just as much as I myself won't be able to heed you. You will, when that time comes, let me go where I please, as I'll let you speed where you choose to go!"

These words so harassed Hsi Jen that she hastened to put her hand over his mouth. "Speak decently," she said; "I was on account of this just about to admonish you, and now here you are uttering all this still more loathsome trash."

"I won't utter these words again," Pao-yü eagerly added.

"This is the first fault that you must change," Hsi Jen replied.

"I'll amend," Pao-yü observed, "and if I say anything of the kind again you can wring my mouth; but what else is there?"

"The second thing is this," Hsi Jen explained; "whether you really like to study or whether you only pretend to like study is immaterial; but you should, when you are in the presence of master, or in the presence of any one else, not do nothing else than find fault with people and make

fun of them, but behave just as if you were genuinely fond of study, so that you shouldn't besides provoke your father so much to anger, and that he should before others have also a chance of saying something! 'In my family,' he reflects within himself, 'generation after generation has been fond of books, but ever since I've had you, you haven't accomplished my expectations, and not only is it that you don't care about reading books,'—and this has already filled his heart with anger and vexation,—'but both before my face and behind my back, you utter all that

page 297

stuff and nonsense, and give those persons, who have, through their knowledge of letters, attained high offices, the nickname of the “the salaried worms.” You also uphold that there's no work exclusive (of the book where appears) “fathom spotless virtue;” and that all other books consist of foolish compilations, which owe their origin to former authors, who, unable themselves to expound the writings of Confucius, readily struck a new line and invented original notions.' Now with words like these, how can one wonder if master loses all patience, and if he does from time to time give you a thrashing! and what do you make other people think of you?”

“I won't say these things again,” Pao-yü laughingly protested, “these are the reckless and silly absurdities of a time when I was young and had no idea of the height of the heavens and the thickness of the earth; but I'll now no more repeat them. What else is there besides?”

“It isn't right that you should sneer at the bonzes and vilify the Taoist priests, nor mix cosmetics or prepare rouge,” Hsi Jen continued; “but there's still another thing more important, you shouldn't again indulge the bad habits of licking the cosmetic, applied by people on their lips, nor be fond of (girls dressed) in red!”

“I'll change in all this,” Pao-yü added by way of rejoinder; “I'll change in all this; and if there's anything more be quick and tell me.”

“There's nothing more,” Hsi Jen observed; “but you must in everything exercise a little more diligence, and not indulge your caprices and allow

your wishes to run riot, and you'll be all right. And should you comply to all these things in real earnest, you couldn't carry me out, even in a chair with eight bearers."

"Well, if you do stay in here long enough," Pao-yü remarked with a smile, "there's no fear as to your not having an eight-bearer-chair to sit in!" Hsi Jen gave a sardonic grin. "I don't care much about it," she replied; "and were I even to have such good fortune, I couldn't enjoy such a right. But allowing I could sit in one, there would be no pleasure in it!"

While these two were chatting, they saw Ch'iu Wen walk in. "It's the third watch of the night," she observed, "and you should go to sleep. Just a few moments back your grandmother lady Chia and our lady sent a nurse to ask about you, and I replied that you were asleep."

Pao-yü bade her fetch a watch, and upon looking at the time, he found indeed that the hand was pointing at ten; whereupon rinsing his mouth again and loosening his clothes, he retired to rest, where we will leave him without any further comment.

page 298

The next day, Hsi Jen got up as soon as it was dawn, feeling her body heavy, her head sore, her eyes swollen, and her limbs burning like fire. She managed however at first to keep up, an effort though it was, but as subsequently she was unable to endure the strain, and all she felt disposed to do was to recline, she therefore lay down in her clothes on the stove-couch. Pao-yü hastened to tell dowager lady Chia, and the doctor was sent for, who, upon feeling her pulse and diagnosing her complaint, declared that there was nothing else the matter with her than a chill, which she had suddenly contracted, that after she had taken a dose or two of medicine, it would be dispelled, and that she would be quite well. After he had written the prescription and taken his departure, some one was despatched to fetch the medicines, which when brought were properly decocted. As soon as she had swallowed a dose, Pao-yü bade her cover herself with her bed-clothes so as to bring on perspiration; while he himself came into Tai-yü's room to look her up. Tai-yü was at this time quite alone, reclining on her bed having a midday siesta, and the waiting-maids having all gone out to attend to whatever they pleased,

the whole room was plunged in stillness and silence. Pao-yü raised the embroidered soft thread portiere and walked in; and upon espying Tai-yü in the room fast asleep, he hurriedly approached her and pushing her: "Dear cousin," he said, "you've just had your meal, and are you asleep already?" and he kept on calling "Tai-yü" till he woke her out of her sleep.

Perceiving that it was Pao-yü, "You had better go for a stroll," Tai-yü urged, "for the day before yesterday I was disturbed the whole night, and up to this day I haven't had rest enough to get over the fatigue. My whole body feels languid and sore."

"This languor and soreness," Pao-yü rejoined, "are of no consequence; but if you go on sleeping you'll be feeling very ill; so I'll try and distract you, and when we've dispelled this lassitude, you'll be all right."

Tai-yü closed her eyes. "I don't feel any lassitude," she explained, "all I want is a little rest; and you had better go elsewhere and come back after romping about for a while."

"Where can I go?" Pao-yü asked as he pushed her. "I'm quite sick and tired of seeing the others."

At these words, Tai-yü burst out laughing with a sound of Ch'ih. "Well! since you wish to remain here," she added, "go over there and sit down quietly, and let's have a chat."

"I'll also recline," Pao-yü suggested.

"Well, then, recline!" Tai-yü assented.

"There's no pillow," observed Pao-yü, "so let us lie on the same pillow."

page 299

"What nonsense!" Tai-yü urged, "aren't those pillows outside? get one and lie on it."

Pao-yü walked into the outer apartment, and having looked about him, he returned and remarked with a smile: "I don't want those, they may be, for

ought I know, some dirty old hag's."

Tai-yü at this remark opened her eyes wide, and as she raised herself up: "You're really," she exclaimed laughingly, "the evil star of my existence! here, please recline on this pillow!" and as she uttered these words, she pushed her own pillow towards Pao-yü, and, getting up she went and fetched another of her own, upon which she lay her head in such a way that both of them then reclined opposite to each other. But Tai-yü, upon turning up her eyes and looking, espied on Pao-yü's cheek on the left side of his face, a spot of blood about the size of a button, and speedily bending her body, she drew near to him, and rubbing it with her hand, she scrutinised it closely. "Whose nail," she went on to inquire, "has scratched this open?"

Pao-yü with his body still reclining withdrew from her reach, and as he did so, he answered with a smile: "It isn't a scratch; it must, I presume, be simply a drop, which bespattered my cheek when I was just now mixing and clarifying the cosmetic paste for them."

Saying this, he tried to get at his handkerchief to wipe it off; but Tai-yü used her own and rubbed it clean for him, while she observed: "Do you still give your mind to such things? attend to them you may; but must you carry about you a placard (to make it public)? Though uncle mayn't see it, were others to notice it, they would treat it as a strange occurrence and a novel bit of news, and go and tell him to curry favour, and when it has reached uncle's ear, we shall all again not come out clean, and provoke him to anger."

Pao-yü did not in the least heed what she said, being intent upon smelling a subtle scent which, in point of fact, emanated from Tai-yü's sleeve, and when inhaled inebriated the soul and paralysed the bones. With a snatch, Pao-yü laid hold of Tai-yü's sleeve meaning to see what object was concealed in it; but Tai-yü smilingly expostulated: "At such a time as this," she said, "who keeps scents about one?"

"Well, in that case," Pao-yü rejoined with a smirking face, "where does this scent come from?"

"I myself don't know," Tai-yü replied; "I presume it must be, there's no

saying, some scent in the press which has impregnated the clothes.”

“It doesn't follow,” Pao-yü added, as he shook his head; “the fumes of this smell are very peculiar, and don't resemble the perfume of scent-bottles, scent-balls, or scented satchets!”

page 300

“Is it likely that I have, like others, Buddhistic disciples,” Tai-yü asked laughing ironically, “or worthies to give me novel kinds of scents? But supposing there is about me some peculiar scent, I haven't, at all events, any older or younger brothers to get the flowers, buds, dew, and snow, and concoct any for me; all I have are those common scents, that's all.”

“Whenever I utter any single remark,” Pao-yü urged with a grin, “you at once bring up all these insinuations; but unless I deal with you severely, you'll never know what stuff I'm made of; but from henceforth I'll no more show you any grace!”

As he spoke, he turned himself over, and raising himself, he puffed a couple of breaths into both his hands, and hastily stretching them out, he tickled Tai-yü promiscuously under her armpits, and along both sides. Tai-yü had never been able to stand tickling, so that when Pao-yü put out his two hands and tickled her violently, she forthwith giggled to such an extent that she could scarcely gasp for breath. “If you still go on teasing me,” she shouted, “I'll get angry with you!”

Pao-yü then kept his hands off, and as he laughed, “Tell me,” he asked, “will you again come out with all those words or not?”

“I daren't do it again,” Tai-yü smiled and adjusted her hair; adding with another laugh: “I may have peculiar scents, but have you any 'warm' scents?”

Pao-yü at this question, could not for a time unfold its meaning: “What 'warm' scent?” he therefore asked.

Tai-yü nodded her head and smiled deridingly. “How stupid! what a fool!” she sighed; “you have jade, and another person has gold to match with you, and if some one has 'cold' scent, haven't you any 'warm' scent as a

set-off?”

Pao-yü at this stage alone understood the import of her remark.

“A short while back you craved for mercy,” Pao-yü observed smilingly, “and here you are now going on talking worse than ever;” and as he spoke he again put out his hands.

“Dear cousin,” Tai-yü speedily implored with a smirk, “I won't venture to do it again.”

“As for letting you off,” Pao-yü remarked laughing, “I'll readily let you off, but do allow me to take your sleeve and smell it!” and while uttering these words, he hastily pulled the sleeve, and pressing it against his face, kept on smelling it incessantly, whereupon Tai-yü drew her hand away and urged: “You must be going now!”

page 301

“Though you may wish me to go, I can't,” Pao-yü smiled, “so let us now lie down with all propriety and have a chat,” laying himself down again, as he spoke, while Tai-yü likewise reclined, and covered her face with her handkerchief. Pao-yü in a rambling way gave vent to a lot of nonsense, which Tai-yü did not heed, and Pao-yü went on to inquire: “How old she was when she came to the capital? what sights and antiquities she saw on the journey? what relics and curiosities there were at Yang Chou? what were the local customs and the habits of the people?”

Tai-yü made no reply; and Pao-yü fearing lest she should go to sleep, and get ill, readily set to work to beguile her to keep awake. “Ai yah!” he exclaimed, “at Yang Chou, where your official residence is, has occurred a remarkable affair; have you heard about it?”

Tai-yü perceiving that he spoke in earnest, that his words were correct and his face serious, imagined that what he referred to was a true story, and she therefore inquired what it was?

Pao-yü upon hearing her ask this question, forthwith suppressed a laugh, and, with a glib tongue, he began to spin a yarn. “At Yang Chou,” he said,

“there's a hill called the Tai hill; and on this hill stands a cave called the Lin Tzu.”

“This must all be lies,” Tai-yü answered sneeringly, “as I've never before heard of such a hill.”

“Under the heavens many are the hills and rivers,” Pao-yü rejoined, “and how could you know them all? Wait until I've done speaking, when you will be free to express your opinion!”

“Go on then,” Tai-yü suggested, whereupon Pao-yü prosecuted his raillery. “In this Lin Tzu cave,” he said, “there was once upon a time a whole swarm of rat-elves. In some year or other and on the seventh day of the twelfth moon, an old rat ascended the throne to discuss matters. 'Tomorrow,' he argued, 'is the eighth of the twelfth moon, and men in the world will all be cooking the congee of the eighth of the twelfth moon. We have now in our cave a short supply of fruits of all kinds, and it would be well that we should seize this opportunity to steal a few and bring them over.' Drawing a mandatory arrow, he handed it to a small rat, full of aptitude, to go forward on a tour of inspection. The young rat on his return reported that he had already concluded his search and inquiries in every place and corner, and that in the temple at the bottom of the hill alone was the largest stock of fruits and rice. 'How many kinds of rice are there?' the old rat ascertained, 'and how many species of fruits?' 'Rice and beans,' the young rat rejoined, 'how many barns-full there are, I can't remember; but in the way of fruits there are five kinds: 1st, red dates; 2nd,

page 302

chestnuts; 3rd, ground nuts; 4th, water caltrops, and 5th, scented taros.' At this report the old rat was so much elated that he promptly detailed rats to go forth; and as he drew the mandatory arrow, and inquired who would go and steal the rice, a rat readily received the order and went off to rob the rice. Drawing another mandatory arrow, he asked who would go and abstract the beans, when once more a rat took over the arrow and started to steal the beans; and one by one subsequently received each an arrow and started on his errand. There only remained the scented taros, so that picking again a mandatory arrow, he ascertained

who would go and carry away the taros: whereupon a very puny and very delicate rat was heard to assent. 'I would like,' he said, 'to go and steal the scented taros.' The old rat and all the swarm of rats, upon noticing his state, feared that he would not be sufficiently expert, and apprehending at the same time that he was too weakly and too devoid of energy, they one and all would not allow him to proceed. 'Though I be young in years and though my frame be delicate,' the wee rat expostulated, 'my devices are unlimited, my talk is glib and my designs deep and farseeing; and I feel convinced that, on this errand, I shall be more ingenious in pilfering than any of them.' 'How could you be more ingenious than they?' the whole company of rats asked. 'I won't,' explained the young rat, 'follow their example, and go straight to work and steal, but by simply shaking my body, and transforming myself, I shall metamorphose myself into a taro, and roll myself among the heap of taros, so that people will not be able to detect me, and to hear me; whereupon I shall stealthily, by means of the magic art of dividing my body into many, begin the removal, and little by little transfer the whole lot away, and will not this be far more ingenious than any direct pilfering or forcible abstraction?' After the whole swarm of rats had listened to what he had to say, they, with one voice, exclaimed: 'Excellent it is indeed, but what is this art of metamorphosis we wonder? Go forth you may, but first transform yourself and let us see you.' At these words the young rat laughed. 'This isn't a hard task!' he observed, 'wait till I transform myself.'

"Having done speaking, he shook his body and shouted out 'transform,' when he was converted into a young girl, most beauteous and with a most lovely face.

"'You've transformed yourself into the wrong thing,' all the rats promptly added deridingly; 'you said that you were to become a fruit, and how is it that you've turned into a young lady?'

"The young rat in its original form rejoined with a sneering smile: 'You all lack, I maintain, experience of the world; what you simply are aware of is that this fruit is the scented taro, but have no idea that the young

daughter of Mr. Lin, of the salt tax, is, in real truth, a genuine scented

taro.”

Tai-yü having listened to this story, turned herself round and raising herself, she observed laughing, while she pushed Pao-yü: “I'll take that mouth of yours and pull it to pieces! Now I see that you've been imposing upon me.”

With these words on her lips, she readily gave him a pinch, and Pao-yü hastened to plead for mercy. “My dear cousin,” he said, “spare me; I won't presume to do it again; and it's when I came to perceive this perfume of yours, that I suddenly bethought myself of this old story.”

“You freely indulge in abusing people,” Tai-yü added with a smile, “and then go on to say that it's an old story.”

But hardly had she concluded this remark before they caught sight of Pao-ch'ai walk in. “Who has been telling old stories?” she asked with a beaming face; “do let me also hear them.”

Tai-yü pressed her at once into a seat. “Just see for yourself who else besides is here!” she smiled; “he goes in for profuse abuses and then maintains that it's an old story!”

“Is it indeed cousin Pao-yü?” Pao-ch'ai remarked. “Well, one can't feel surprised at his doing it; for many have ever been the stories stored up in his brain. The only pity is that when he should make use of old stories, he invariably forgets them! To-day, he can easily enough recall them to mind, but in the stanza of the other night on the banana leaves, when he should have remembered them, he couldn't after all recollect what really stared him in the face! and while every one else seemed so cool, he was in such a flurry that he actually perspired! And yet, at this moment, he happens once again to have a memory!”

At these words, Tai-yü laughed. “O-mi-to-fu!” she exclaimed. “You are indeed my very good cousin! But you've also (to Pao-yü) come across your match. And this makes it clear that requital and retribution never fail or err.”

She had just reached this part of her sentence, when in Pao-yü's rooms

was heard a continuous sound of wrangling; but as what transpired is not yet known, the ensuing chapter will explain.

CHAPTER XX.

Wang Hsi-feng with earnest words upbraids Mrs. Chao's jealous notions.

Lin Tai-yü uses specious language to make sport of Shih Hsiang-yün's querulous tone of voice.

But to continue. Pao-yü was in Tai yü's apartments relating about the rat-elves, when Pao-ch'ai entered unannounced, and began to gibe Pao-yü, with trenchant irony: how that on the fifteenth of the first moon, he had shown ignorance of the allusion to the green wax; and the three of them then indulged in that room in mutual poignant satire, for the sake of fun. Pao-yü had been giving way to solicitude lest Tai-yü should, by being bent upon napping soon after her meal, be shortly getting an indigestion, or lest sleep should, at night, be completely dispelled, as neither of these things were conducive to the preservation of good health, when luckily Pao-ch'ai walked in, and they chatted and laughed together; and when Lin Tai-yü at length lost all inclination to dose, he himself then felt composed in his mind. But suddenly they heard clamouring begin in his room, and after they had all lent an ear and listened, Lin Tai-yü was the first to smile and make a remark. "It's your nurse having a row with Hsi Jen!" she said. "Hsi Jen treats her well enough, but that nurse of yours would also like to keep her well under her thumb; she's indeed an old dotard;" and Pao-yü was anxious to go over at once, but Pao-ch'ai laid hold of him and kept him back, suggesting: "It's as well that you shouldn't wrangle with your nurse, for she's quite stupid from old age; and it's but fair, on the contrary, that you should bear with her a little."

"I know all about that!" Pao-yü rejoined. But having concluded this remark, he walked into his room, where he discovered nurse Li, leaning on her staff, standing in the centre of the floor, abusing Hsi Jen, saying: "You young wench! how utterly unmindful you are of your origin! It's I who've raised you up, and yet, when I came just now, you put on high airs and mighty side, and remained reclining on the stove-couch! You saw me well enough, but you paid not the least heed to me! Your whole heart is set upon acting like a wily enchantress to befool Pao-yü; and you so impose upon Pao-yü that he doesn't notice me, but merely lends an

ear to what you people have to say! You're no more than a low girl bought for a few taels and brought in here; and will it ever do that you should be up to your mischievous tricks in this room? But whether you like it or not, I'll drag you out from this, and give you to some mean fellow, and we'll see whether you will still behave like a very imp, and cajole people or not?"

Hsi Jen was, at first, under the simple impression that the nurse was wrath for no other reason than because she remained lying down, and she felt

page 305

constrained to explain that "she was unwell, that she had just succeeded in perspiring, and that having had her head covered, she hadn't really perceived the old lady;" but when she came subsequently to hear her mention that she imposed upon Pao-yü, and also go so far as to add that she would be given to some mean fellow, she unavoidably experienced both a sense of shame and injury, and found it impossible to restrain herself from beginning to cry.

Pao-yü had, it is true, caught all that had been said, but unable with any propriety to take notice of it, he thought it his duty to explain matters for her. "She's ill," he observed, "and is taking medicines; and if you don't believe it," he went on, "well then ask the rest of the servant-girls."

Nurse Li at these words flew into a more violent dudgeon. "Your sole delight is to screen that lot of sly foxes!" she remarked, "and do you pay any notice to me? No, none at all! and whom would you like me to go and ask; who's it that doesn't back you? and who hasn't been dismounted from her horse by Hsi Jen? I know all about it; but I'll go with you and explain all these matters to our old mistress and my lady; for I've nursed you till I've brought you to this age, and now that you don't feed on milk, you thrust me on one side, and avail yourself of the servant-girls, in your wish to browbeat me."

As she uttered this remark, she too gave way to tears, but by this time, Tai-yü and Pao-ch'ai had also come over, and they set to work to reassure her. "You, old lady," they urged, "should bear with them a little,

and everything will be right!" And when nurse Li saw these two arrive, she hastened to lay bare her grievances to them; and taking up the question of the dismissal in days gone by, of Hsi Hsüeh, for having drunk some tea, of the cream eaten on the previous day, and other similar matters, she spun a long, interminable yarn.

By a strange coincidence lady Feng was at this moment in the upper rooms, where she had been making up the account of losses and winnings, and upon hearing at the back a continuous sound of shouting and bustling, she readily concluded that nurse Li's old complaint was breaking forth, and that she was finding fault with Pao-yü's servants. But she had, as luck would have it, lost money in gambling on this occasion, so that she was ready to visit her resentment upon others. With hurried step, she forthwith came over, and laying hold of nurse Li, "Nurse," she said smiling, "don't lose your temper, on a great festival like this, and after our venerable lady has just gone through a day in excellent spirits! You're an old dame, and should, when others get up a row, still do what is right and keep them in proper order; and aren't you, instead of that, aware what good manners imply, that you will start vociferating in this place, and make our dowager lady full of

page 306

displeasure? Tell me who's not good, and I'll beat her for you; but be quick and come along with me over to my quarters, where a pheasant which they have roasted is scalding hot, and let us go and have a glass of wine!" And as she spoke, she dragged her along and went on her way. "Feng Erh," she also called, "hold the staff for your old lady Li, and the handkerchief to wipe her tears with!" While nurse Li walked along with lady Feng, her feet scarcely touched the ground, as she kept on saying: "I don't really attach any value to this decrepid existence of mine! and I had rather disregard good manners, have a row and lose face, as it's better, it seems to me, than to put up with the temper of that wench!"

Behind followed Pao-ch'ai and Tai-yü, and at the sight of the way in which lady Feng dealt with her, they both clapped their hands, and exclaimed, laughing, "What piece of luck that this gust of wind has come, and dragged away this old matron!" while Pao-yü nodded his head to and fro and soliloquised with a sigh: "One can neither know whence

originates this score; for she will choose the weak one to maltreat; nor can one see what girl has given her offence that she has come to be put in her black books!”

Scarcely had he ended this remark, before Ch'ing Wen, who stood by, put in her word. “Who's gone mad again?” she interposed, “and what good would come by hurting her feelings? But did even any one happen to hurt her, she would have pluck enough to bear the brunt, and wouldn't act so improperly as to involve others!”

Hsi Jen wept, and as she, did so, she drew Pao-yü towards her: “All through my having aggrieved an old nurse,” she urged, “you've now again given umbrage, entirely on my account, to this crowd of people; and isn't this still enough for me to bear but must you also go and drag in third parties?”

When Pao-yü realised that to this sickness of hers, had also been superadded all these annoyances, he promptly stifled his resentment, suppressed his voice and consoled her so far as to induce her to lie down again to perspire. And when he further noticed how scalding like soup and burning like fire she was, he himself watched by her, and reclining by her side, he tried to cheer her, saying: “All you must do is to take good care of your ailment; and don't give your mind to those trifling matters, and get angry.”

“Were I,” Hsi Jen smiled sardonically, “to lose my temper over such concerns, would I be able to stand one moment longer in this room? The only thing is that if she goes on, day after day, doing nothing else than clamour in this manner, how can she let people get along? But you rashly go and hurt people's feelings for our sakes; but they'll bear it in mind, and when they

page 307

find an opportunity, they'll come out with what's easy enough to say, but what's not pleasant to hear, and how will we all feel then?”

While her mouth gave utterance to these words, she could not stop her tears from running; but fearful, on the other hand, lest Pao-yü should be

annoyed, she felt compelled to again strain every nerve to repress them. But in a short while, the old matrons employed for all sorts of duties, brought in some mixture of two drugs; and, as Pao-yü noticed that she was just on the point of perspiring, he did not allow her to get up, but readily taking it up to her, she immediately swallowed it, with her head still on her pillow; whereupon he gave speedy directions to the young servant-maids to lay her stove-couch in order.

“Whether you mean to have anything to eat or not,” Hsi Jen advised, “you should after all sit for a time with our old mistress and our lady, and have a romp with the young ladies; after which you can come back again; while I, by quietly keeping lying down, will also feel the better.”

When Pao-yü heard this suggestion, he had no help but to accede, and, after she had divested herself of her hair-pins and earrings, and he saw her lie down, he betook himself into the drawing-rooms, where he had his repast with old lady Chia. But the meal over, her ladyship felt still disposed to play at cards with the nurses, who had looked after the household for many years; and Pao-yü, bethinking himself of Hsi Jen, hastened to return to his apartments; where seeing that Hsi Jen was drowsily falling asleep, he himself would have wished to go to bed, but the hour was yet early. And as about this time Ch'ing Wen, I Hsia, Ch'in Wen, Pi Hen had all, in their desire of getting some excitement, started in search of Yüan Yang, Hu Po and their companions, to have a romp with them, and he espied She Yüeh alone in the outer room, having a game of dominoes by lamp-light, Pao-yü inquired full of smiles: “How is it you don't go with them?”

“I've no money,” She Yüeh replied.

“Under the bed,” continued Pao-yü, “is heaped up all that money, and isn't it enough yet for you to lose from?”

“Had we all gone to play,” She Yüeh added, “to whom would the charge of this apartment have been handed over? That other one is sick again, and the whole room is above, one mass of lamps, and below, full of fire; and all those old matrons, ancient as the heavens, should, after all their exertions in waiting upon you from morning to night, be also allowed some rest; while the young servant girls, on the other hand, have likewise

been on duty the whole day long, and shouldn't they even at this hour be left to go and have some distraction? and that's why I am in here on watch."

page 308

When Pao-yü heard these words, which demonstrated distinctly that she was another Hsi Jen, he consequently put on a smile and remarked: "I'll sit in here, so you had better set your mind at ease and go!"

"Since you remain in here, there's less need for me to go," resumed She Yüeh, "for we two can chat and play and laugh; and won't that be nice?"

"What can we two do? it will be awfully dull! but never mind," Pao-yü rejoined; "this morning you said that your head itched, and now that you have nothing to do, I may as well comb it for you."

"Yes! do so!" readily assented She Yüeh, upon catching what he suggested; and while still speaking, she brought over the dressing-case containing a set of small drawers and looking-glass, and taking off her ornaments, she dishevelled her hair; whereupon Pao-yü picked up the fine comb and passed it repeatedly through her hair; but he had only combed it three or five times, when he perceived Ch'ing Wen hurriedly walk in to fetch some money. As soon as she caught sight of them both: "You haven't as yet drunk from the marriage cup," she said with a smile full of irony, "and have you already put up your hair?"

"Now that you've come, let me also comb yours for you," Pao-yü continued.

"I'm not blessed with such excessive good fortune!" Ch'ing Wen retorted, and as she uttered these words, she took the money, and forthwith dashing the portiere after her, she quitted the room.

Pao-yü stood at the back of She Yüeh, and She Yüeh sat opposite the glass, so that the two of them faced each other in it, and Pao-yü readily observed as he gazed in the glass, "In the whole number of rooms she's the only one who has a glib tongue!"

She Yüeh at these words hastily waved her hand towards the inside of the glass, and Pao-yü understood the hint; and suddenly a sound of "hu" was heard from the portiere, and Ch'ing Wen ran in once again.

"How have I got a glib tongue?" she inquired; "it would be well for us to explain ourselves."

"Go after your business, and have done," She Yüeh interposed laughingly; "what's the use of your coming and asking questions of people?"

"Will you also screen him?" Ch'ing Wen smiled significantly; "I know all about your secret doings, but wait until I've got back my capital, and we'll then talk matters over!"

With this remark still on her lips, she straightway quitted the room, and during this while, Pao-yü having finished combing her hair, asked She

page 309

Yüeh to quietly wait upon him, while he went to sleep, as he would not like to disturb Hsi Jen.

Of the whole night there is nothing to record. But the next day, when he got up at early dawn, Hsi Jen had already perspired, during the night, so that she felt considerably lighter and better; but limiting her diet to a little rice soup, she remained quiet and nursed herself, and Pao-yü was so relieved in mind that he came, after his meal, over on this side to his aunt Hsüeh's on a saunter. The season was the course of the first moon, and the school was shut up for the new year holidays; while in the inner chambers the girls had put by their needlework, and were all having a time of leisure, and hence it was that when Chia Huan too came over in search of distraction, he discovered Pao-ch'ai, Hsiang Ling, Ying Erh, the three of them, in the act of recreating themselves by playing at chess. Chia Huan, at the sight of them, also wished to join in their games; and Pao-ch'ai, who had always looked upon him with, in fact, the same eye as she did Pao-yü, and with no different sentiment of any kind, pressed him to come up, upon hearing that he was on this occasion desirous to play; and, when he had seated himself together with them, they began to gamble, staking each time a pile of ten cash. The first time, he was the

winner, and he felt supremely elated at heart, but as it happened that he subsequently lost in several consecutive games he soon became a prey to considerable distress. But in due course came the game in which it was his turn to cast the dice, and, if in throwing, he got seven spots, he stood to win, but he was likewise bound to be a winner were he to turn up six; and when Ying Erh had turned up three spots and lost, he consequently took up the dice, and dashing them with spite, one of them settled at five; and, as the other reeled wildly about, Ying Erh clapped her hands, and kept on shouting, "one spot;" while Chia Huan at once gazed with fixed eye and cried at random: "It's six, it's seven, it's eight!" But the dice, as it happened, turned up at one spot, and Chia Huan was so exasperated that putting out his hand, he speedily made a snatch at the dice, and eventually was about to lay hold of the money, arguing that it was six spot. But Ying Erh expostulated, "It was distinctly an ace," she said. And as Pao-ch'ai noticed how distressed Chia Huan was, she forthwith cast a glance at Ying Erh and observed: "The older you get, the less manners you have! Is it likely that gentlemen will cheat you? and don't you yet put down the money?"

Ying Erh felt her whole heart much aggrieved, but as she heard Pao-ch'ai make these remarks, she did not presume to utter a sound, and as she was under the necessity of laying down the cash, she muttered to herself: "This one calls himself a gentleman, and yet cheats us of these few cash, for which I myself even have no eye! The other day when I played with

page 310

Mr. Pao-yü, he lost ever so many, and yet he did not distress himself! and what remained of the cash were besides snatched away by a few servant-girls, but all he did was to smile, that's all!"

Pao-ch'ai did not allow her time to complete what she had to say, but there and then called her to account and made her desist; whereupon Chia Huan exclaimed: "How can I compare with Pao-yü; you all fear him, and keep on good terms with him, while you all look down upon me for not being the child of my lady." And as he uttered these words, he at once gave way to tears.

"My dear cousin," Pao-ch'ai hastened to advise him, "leave off at once

language of this kind, for people will laugh at you;" and then went on to scold Ying Erh, when Pao-yü just happened to come in. Perceiving him in this plight, "What is the matter?" he asked; but Chia Huan had not the courage to say anything.

Pao-ch'ai was well aware of the custom, which prevailed in their family, that younger brothers lived in respect of the elder brothers, but she was not however cognisant of the fact that Pao-yü would not that any one should entertain any fear of him. His idea being that elder as well as younger brothers had, all alike, father and mother to admonish them, and that there was no need for any of that officiousness, which, instead of doing good gave, on the contrary, rise to estrangement. "Besides," (he reasoned,) "I'm the offspring of the primary wife, while he's the son of the secondary wife, and, if by treating him as leniently as I have done, there are still those to talk about me, behind my back, how could I exercise any control over him?" But besides these, there were other still more foolish notions, which he fostered in his mind; but what foolish notions they were can you, reader, guess? As a result of his growing up, from his early youth, among a crowd of girls, of whom, in the way of sister, there was Yüan Ch'un, of cousins, from his paternal uncle's side, there were Ying Ch'un, and Hsi Ch'un, and of relatives also there were Shih Hsiang-yün, Lin Tai-yü, Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai and the rest, he, in due course, resolved in his mind that the divine and unsullied virtue of Heaven and earth was only implanted in womankind, and that men were no more than feculent dregs and foul dirt. And for this reason it was that men were without discrimination, considered by him as so many filthy objects, which might or might not exist; while the relationships of father, paternal uncles, and brothers, he did not however presume to disregard, as these were among the injunctions bequeathed by the holy man, and he felt bound to listen to a few of their precepts. But to the above causes must be assigned the fact that, among his brothers, he did no more than accomplish the general purport of the principle of human affections; bearing

page 311

in mind no thought whatever that he himself was a human being of the male sex, and that it was his duty to be an example to his younger brothers. And this is why Chia Huan and the others entertained no respect for him, though in their veneration for dowager lady Chia, they

yielded to him to a certain degree.

Pao-ch'ai harboured fears lest, on this occasion, Pao-yü should call him to book, and put him out of face, and she there and then lost no time in taking Chia Huan's part with a view to screening him.

“In this felicitous first moon what are you blubbering for?” Pao-yü inquired, “if this place isn't nice, why then go somewhere else to play. But from reading books, day after day, you've studied so much that you've become quite a dunce. If this thing, for instance, isn't good, that must, of course, be good, so then discard this and take up that, but is it likely that by sticking to this thing and crying for a while that it will become good? You came originally with the idea of reaping some fun, and you've instead provoked yourself to displeasure, and isn't it better then that you should be off at once.”

Chia Huan upon hearing these words could not but come back to his quarters; and Mrs. Chao noticing the frame of mind in which he was felt constrained to inquire: “Where is it that you've been looked down upon by being made to fill up a hole, and being trodden under foot?”

“I was playing with cousin Pao-ch'ai,” Chia Huan readily replied, “when Ying Erh insulted me, and deprived me of my money, and brother Pao-yü drove me away.”

“Ts'ui!” exclaimed Mrs. Chao, “who bade you (presume so high) as to get up into that lofty tray? You low and barefaced thing! What place is there that you can't go to and play; and who told you to run over there and bring upon yourself all this shame?”

As she spoke, lady Feng was, by a strange coincidence, passing outside under the window; so that every word reached her ear, and she speedily asked from outside the window: “What are you up to in this happy first moon? These brothers are, really, but mere children, and will you just for a slight mistake, go on preaching to him! what's the use of coming out with all you've said? Let him go wherever he pleases; for there are still our lady and Mr. Chia Cheng to keep him in order. But you go and sputter him with your gigantic mouth; he's at present a master, and if there be anything wrong about him, there are, after all, those to rate him; and what business is that of yours? Brother Huan, come out with you, and follow

me and let us go and enjoy ourselves.”

Chia Huan had ever been in greater fear and trembling of lady Feng, than of madame Wang, so that when her summons reached his ear, he

page 312

hurriedly went out, while Mrs. Chao, on the other hand, did not venture to breathe a single word.

“You too,” resumed lady Feng, addressing Chia Huan; “are a thing devoid of all natural spirit! I've often told you that if you want to eat, drink, play, or laugh, you were quite free to go and play with whatever female cousin, male cousin, or sister-in-law you choose to disport yourself with; but you won't listen to my words. On the contrary, you let all these persons teach you to be depraved in your heart, perverse in your mind, to be sly, artful, and domineering; and you've, besides, no respect for your own self, but will go with that low-bred lot! and your perverse purpose is to begrudge people's preferences! But what you've lost are simply a few cash, and do you behave in this manner? How much did you lose?” she proceeded to ask Chia Huan; and Chia Huan, upon hearing this question, felt constrained to obey, by saying something in the way of a reply. “I've lost,” he explained, “some hundred or two hundred cash.”

“You have,” rejoined lady Feng, “the good fortune of being a gentleman, and do you make such a fuss for the loss of a hundred or two hundred cash!” and turning her head round, “Feng Erh,” she added, “go and fetch a thousand cash; and as the girls are all playing at the back, take him along to go and play. And if again by and by, you're so mean and deceitful, I shall, first of all, beat you, and then tell some one to report it at school, and won't your skin be flayed for you? All because of this want of respect of yours, your elder cousin is so angry with you that his teeth itch; and were it not that I prevent him, he would hit you with his foot in the stomach and kick all your intestines out! Get away,” she then cried; whereupon Chia Huan obediently followed Feng Erh, and taking the money he went all by himself to play with Ying Ch'un and the rest; where we shall leave him without another word.

But to return to Pao-yü. He was just amusing himself and laughing with

Pao-ch'ai, when at an unexpected moment, he heard some one announce that Miss Shih had come. At these words, Pao-yü rose, and was at once going off when "Wait," shouted Pao-ch'ai with a smile, "and we'll go over together and see her."

Saying this, she descended from the stove-couch, and came, in company with Pao-yü, to dowager lady Chia's on this side, where they saw Shih Hsiang-yün laughing aloud, and talking immoderately; and upon catching sight of them both, she promptly inquired after their healths, and exchanged salutations.

Lin Tai-yü just happened to be standing by, and having set the question to Pao-yü "Where do you come from?" "I come from cousin Pao-ch'ai's rooms," Pao-yü readily replied.

page 313

Tai-yü gave a sardonic smile. "What I maintain is this," she rejoined, "that lucky enough for you, you were detained over there; otherwise, you would long ago have, at once, come flying in here!"

"Am I only free to play with you?" Pao-yü inquired, "and to dispel your ennui! I simply went over to her place for a run, and that quite casually, and will you insinuate all these things?"

"Your words are quite devoid of sense," Tai-yü added; "whether you go or not what's that to me? neither did I tell you to give me any distraction; you're quite at liberty from this time forth not to pay any notice to me!"

Saying this, she flew into a high dudgeon and rushed back into her room; but Pao-yü promptly followed in her footsteps: "Here you are again in a huff," he urged, "and all for no reason! Had I even passed any remark that I shouldn't, you should anyhow have still sat in there, and chatted and laughed with the others for a while; instead of that, you come again to sit and mope all alone!"

"Are you my keeper?" Tai-yü expostulated.

"I couldn't, of course," Pao-yü smiled, "presume to exercise any influence

over you; but the only thing is that you are doing your own health harm!”

“If I do ruin my health,” Tai-yü rejoined, “and I die, it's my own lookout! what's that to do with you?”

“What's the good,” protested Pao-yü, “of talking in this happy first moon of dying and of living?”

“I *will* say die,” insisted Tai-yü, “die now, at this very moment! but you're afraid of death; and you may live a long life of a hundred years, but what good will that be!”

“If all we do is to go on nagging in this way,” Pao-yü remarked smiling, “will I any more be afraid to die? on the contrary, it would be better to die, and be free!”

“Quite so!” continued Tai-yü with alacrity, “if we go on nagging in this way, it would be better for me to die, and that you should be free of me!”

“I speak of my own self dying,” Pao-yü added, “so don't misunderstand my words and accuse people wrongly.”

While he was as yet speaking, Pao-ch'ai entered the room: “Cousin Shih is waiting for you;” she said; and with these words, she hastily pushed Pao-yü on, and they walked away.

Tai-yü, meanwhile, became more and more a prey to resentment; and disconsolate as she felt, she shed tears in front of the window. But not time enough had transpired to allow two cups of tea to be drunk, before

page 314

Pao-yü came back again. At the sight of him, Tai-yü sobbed still more fervently and incessantly, and Pao-yü realising the state she was in, and knowing well enough how arduous a task it would be to bring her round, began to join together a hundred, yea a thousand kinds of soft phrases and tender words to console her. But at an unforeseen moment, and before he could himself open his mouth, he heard Tai-yü anticipate him.

“What have you come back again for?” she asked. “Let me die or live, as

I please, and have done! You've really got at present some one to play with you, one who, compared with me, is able to read and able to compose, able to write, to speak, as well as to joke, one too who for fear lest you should have ruffled your temper dragged you away: and what do you return here for now?"

Pao-yü, after listening to all she had to say, hastened to come up to her. "Is it likely," he observed in a low tone of voice, "that an intelligent person like you isn't so much as aware that near relatives can't be separated by a distant relative, and a remote friend set aside an old friend! I'm stupid, there's no gainsaying, but I do anyhow understand what these two sentiments imply. You and I are, in the first place, cousins on my father's sister's side; while sister Pao-ch'ai and I are two cousins on mother's sides, so that, according to the degrees of relationship, she's more distant than yourself. In the second place, you came here first, and we two have our meals at one table and sleep in one bed, having ever since our youth grown up together; while she has only recently come, and how could I ever distance you on her account?"

"Ts'ui!" Tai-yü exclaimed. "Will I forsooth ever make you distance her! who and what kind of person have I become to do such a thing? What (I said) was prompted by my own motives."

"I too," Pao-yü urged, "made those remarks prompted by my own heart's motives, and do you mean to say that your heart can only read the feelings of your own heart, and has no idea whatsoever of my own?"

Tai-yü at these words, lowered her head and said not a word. But after a long interval, "You only know," she continued, "how to feel bitter against people for their action in censuring you: but you don't, after all, know that you yourself provoke people to such a degree, that it's hard for them to put up with it! Take for instance the weather of to-day as an example. It's distinctly very cold, to-day, and yet, how is it that you are so contrary as to go and divest yourself of the pelisse with the bluish breast-fur overlapping the cloth?"

"Why say I didn't wear it?" Pao-yü smilingly observed. "I did, but seeing you get angry I felt suddenly in such a terrible blaze, that I at once took it off!"

Tai-yü heaved a sigh. "You'll by and by catch a cold," she remarked, "and then you'll again have to starve, and vociferate for something to eat!"

While these two were having this colloquy, Hsiang-yün was seen to walk in! "You two, Ai cousin and cousin Lin," she ventured jokingly, "are together playing every day, and though I've managed to come after ever so much trouble, you pay no heed to me at all!"

"It's invariably the rule," Tai-yü retorted smilingly, "that those who have a defect in their speech will insist upon talking; she can't even come out correctly with 'Erh' (secundus) cousin, and keeps on calling him 'Ai' cousin, 'Ai' cousin! And by and by when you play 'Wei Ch'i' you're sure also to shout out yao, ai, (instead of erh), san; (one, two, three)."

Pao-yü laughed. "If you imitate her," he interposed, "and get into that habit, you'll also begin to bite your tongue when you talk."

"She won't make even the slightest allowance for any one," Hsiang-yün rejoined; "her sole idea being to pick out others' faults. You may readily be superior to any mortal being, but you shouldn't, after all, offend against what's right and make fun of every person you come across! But I'll point out some one, and if you venture to jeer her, I'll at once submit to you."

"Who is it?" Tai-yü vehemently inquired.

"If you do have the courage," Hsiang-yün answered, "to pick out cousin Pao-ch'ai's faults, you then may well be held to be first-rate!"

Tai-yü after hearing these words, gave a sarcastic smile. "I was wondering," she observed, "who it was. Is it indeed she? How could I ever presume to pick out hers?"

Pao-yü allowed her no time to finish, but hastened to say something to interrupt the conversation.

“I couldn't, of course, during the whole of this my lifetime,” Hsiang-yün laughed, “attain your standard! but my earnest wish is that by and by should be found for you, cousin Lin, a husband, who bites his tongue when he speaks, so that you should every minute and second listen to 'ai-ya-os!' O-mi-to-fu, won't then your reward be manifest to my eyes!”

As she made this remark, they all burst out laughing heartily, and Hsiang-yün speedily turned herself round and ran away.

But reader, do you want to know the sequel? Well, then listen to the explanation given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXI.

The eminent Hsi Jen, with winsome ways, rails at Pao-yü, with a view to exhortation.

The beautiful P'ing Erh, with soft words, screens Chia Lien.

But to resume our story. When Shih Hsiang-yüan ran out of the room, she was all in a flutter lest Lin Tai-yü should catch her up; but Pao-yü, who came after her, readily shouted out, "You'll trip and fall. How ever could she come up to you?"

Lin Tai-yü went in pursuit of her as far as the entrance, when she was impeded from making further progress by Pao-yü, who stretched his arms out against the posts of the door.

"Were I to spare Yüan Erh, I couldn't live!" Lin Tai-yü exclaimed, as she tugged at his arms. But Hsiang-yüan, perceiving that Pao-yü obstructed the door, and surmising that Tai-yü could not come out, speedily stood still. "My dear cousin," she smilingly pleaded, "do let me off this time!"

But it just happened that Pao-ch'ai, who was coming along, was at the back of Hsiang-yüan, and with a face also beaming with smiles: "I advise you both," she said, "to leave off out of respect for cousin Pao-yü, and have done."

"I don't agree to that," Tai-yü rejoined; "are you people, pray, all of one mind to do nothing but make fun of me?"

"Who ventures to make fun of you?" Pao-yü observed advisingly; "and hadn't you made sport of her, would she have presumed to have said anything about you?"

While this quartet were finding it an arduous task to understand one another, a servant came to invite them to have their repast, and they eventually crossed over to the front side, and as it was already time for the lamps to be lit, madame Wang, widow Li Wan, lady Feng, Ying Ch'un, T'an Ch'un, Hsi Ch'un and the other cousins, adjourned in a body

to dowager lady Chia's apartments on this side, where the whole company spent a while in a chat on irrelevant topics, after which they each returned to their rooms and retired to bed. Hsiang-yüan, as of old, betook herself to Tai-yü's quarters to rest, and Pao-yü escorted them both into their apartment, and it was after the hour had already past the second watch, and Hsi Jen had come and pressed him several times, that he at length returned to his own bedroom and went to sleep. The next morning, as soon as it was daylight, he threw his clothes over him, put on his low shoes and came over into Tai-yü's room, where he however saw nothing of the two girls Tzu Ch ü an and Ts'ui Lu, as there was no one else here in there besides his two cousins, still reclining

page 317

under the coverlets. Tai-yü was closely wrapped in a quilt of almond-red silk, and lying quietly, with closed eyes fast asleep; while Shih Hsiang-yüan, with her handful of shiny hair draggling along the edge of the pillow, was covered only up to the chest, and outside the coverlet rested her curved snow-white arm, with the gold bracelets, which she had on.

At the sight of her, Pao-yü heaved a sigh. "Even when asleep," he soliloquised, "she can't be quiet! but by and by, when the wind will have blown on her, she'll again shout that her shoulder is sore!" With these words, he gently covered her, but Lin Tai-yü had already awoke out of her sleep, and becoming aware that there was some one about, she promptly concluded that it must, for a certainty, be Pao-yü, and turning herself accordingly round, and discovering at a glance that the truth was not beyond her conjectures, she observed: "What have you run over to do at this early hour?" to which question Pao-yü replied: "Do you call this early? but get up and see for yourself!"

"First quit the room," Tai-yü suggested, "and let us get up!"

Pao-yü thereupon made his exit into the ante-chamber, and Tai-yü jumped out of bed, and awoke Hsiang-yüan. When both of them had put on their clothes, Pao-yü re-entered and took a seat by the side of the toilet table; whence he beheld Tzu-chüan and Hsüeh Yen walk in and wait upon them, as they dressed their hair and performed their ablutions. Hsiang-yüan had done washing her face, and Ts'üi L ü at once took the

remaining water and was about to throw it away, when Pao-yü interposed, saying: "Wait, I'll avail myself of this opportunity to wash too and finish with it, and thus save myself the trouble of having again to go over!" Speaking the while, he hastily came forward, and bending his waist, he washed his face twice with two handfuls of water, and when Tzu Ch ü an went over to give him the scented soap, Pao-yü added: "In this basin, there's a good deal of it, and there's no need of rubbing any more!" He then washed his face with two more handfuls, and forthwith asked for a towel, and Ts'üi Lü exclaimed: "What! have you still got this failing? when will you turn a new leaf?" But Pao-yü paid not so much as any heed to her, and there and then called for some salt, with which he rubbed his teeth, and rinsed his mouth. When he had done, he perceived that Hsiang-yüan had already finished combing her hair, and speedily coming up to her, he put on a smile, and said: "My dear cousin, comb my hair for me!"

"This can't be done!" Hsiang-yüan objected.

"My dear cousin," Pao-yü continued smirkingly, "how is it that you combed it for me in former times?"

"I've forgotten now how to comb it!" Hsiang-yüan replied.

page 318

"I'm not, after all, going out of doors," Pao-yü observed, "nor will I wear a hat or frontlet, so that all that need be done is to plait a few queues, that's all!" Saying this, he went on to appeal to her in a thousand and one endearing terms, so that Hsiang-yüan had no alternative, but to draw his head nearer to her and to comb one queue after another, and as when he stayed at home he wore no hat, nor had, in fact, any tufted horns, she merely took the short surrounding hair from all four sides, and twisting it into small tufts, she collected it together over the hair on the crown of the head, and plaited a large queue, binding it fast with red ribbon; while from the root of the hair to the end of the queue, were four pearls in a row, below which, in the way of a tip, was suspended a golden pendant.

"Of these pearls there are only three," Hsiang-yüan remarked as she went on plaiting; "this isn't one like them; I remember these were all of

one kind, and how is it that there's one short?"

"I've lost one," Pao-yü rejoined.

"It must have dropped," Hsiang-yüan added, "when you went out of doors, and been picked up by some one when you were off your guard; and he's now, instead of you, the richer for it."

"One can neither tell whether it has been really lost," Tai-yü, who stood by, interposed, smiling the while sarcastically; "nor could one say whether it hasn't been given away to some one to be mounted in some trinket or other and worn!"

Pao-yü made no reply; but set to work, seeing that the two sides of the dressing table were all full of toilet boxes and other such articles, taking up those that came under his hand and examining them. Grasping unawares a box of cosmetic, which was within his reach, he would have liked to have brought it to his lips, but he feared again lest Hsiang-yüan should chide him. While he was hesitating whether to do so or not, Hsiang-yüan, from behind, stretched forth her arm and gave him a smack, which sent the cosmetic flying from his hand, as she cried out: "You good-for-nothing! when will you mend those weaknesses of yours!" But hardly had she had time to complete this remark, when she caught sight of Hsi Jen walk in, who upon perceiving this state of things, became aware that he was already combed and washed, and she felt constrained to go back and attend to her own coiffure and ablutions. But suddenly, she saw Pao-ch'ai come in and inquire: "Where's cousin Pao-yü gone?"

"Do you mean to say," Hsi Jen insinuated with a sardonic smile, "that your cousin Pao-yü has leisure to stay at home?"

When Pao-ch'ai heard these words, she inwardly comprehended her meaning, and when she further heard Hsi Jen remark with a sigh:

page 319

"Cousins may well be on intimate terms, but they should also observe some sort of propriety; and they shouldn't night and day romp together; and no matter how people may tender advice it's all like so much wind

blowing past the ears." Pao-ch'ai began, at these remarks, to cogitate within her mind: "May I not, possibly, have been mistaken in my estimation of this girl; for to listen to her words, she would really seem to have a certain amount of savoir faire!"

Pao-ch'ai thereupon took a seat on the stove-couch, and quietly, in the course of their conversation on one thing and another, she managed to ascertain her age, her native village and other such particulars, and then setting her mind diligently to put, on the sly, her conversation and mental capacity to the test, she discovered how deeply worthy she was to be respected and loved. But in a while Pao-yü arrived, and Pao-ch'ai at once quitted the apartment.

"How is it," Pao-yü at once inquired, "that cousin Pao-ch'ai was chatting along with you so lustily, and that as soon as she saw me enter, she promptly ran away?"

Hsi Jen did not make any reply to his first question, and it was only when he had repeated it that Hsi Jen remarked: "Do you ask me? How can I know what goes on between you two?"

When Pao-yü heard these words, and he noticed that the look on her face was so unlike that of former days, he lost no time in putting on a smile and asking: "Why is it that you too are angry in real earnest?"

"How could I presume to get angry!" Hsi Jen rejoined smiling indifferently; "but you mustn't, from this day forth, put your foot into this room! and as you have anyhow people to wait on you, you shouldn't come again to make use of my services, for I mean to go and attend to our old mistress, as in days of old."

With this remark still on her lips, she lay herself down on the stove-couch and closed her eyes. When Pao-yü perceived the state of mind she was in, he felt deeply surprised and could not refrain from coming forward and trying to cheer her up. But Hsi Jen kept her eyes closed and paid no heed to him, so that Pao-yü was quite at a loss how to act. But espying She Yüeh enter the room, he said with alacrity: "What's up with your sister?"

"Do I know?" answered She Yüeh, "examine your own self and you'll

readily know!”

After these words had been heard by Pao-yü, he gazed vacantly for some time, feeling the while very unhappy; but raising himself impetuously: “Well!” he exclaimed, “if you don't notice me, all right, I too

page 320

will go to sleep,” and as he spoke he got up, and, descending from the couch, he betook himself to his own bed and went to sleep. Hsi Jen noticing that he had not budged for ever so long, and that he faintly snored, presumed that he must have fallen fast asleep, so she speedily rose to her feet, and, taking a wrapper, came over and covered him. But a sound of “hu” reached her ear, as Pao-yü promptly threw it off and once again closed his eyes and feigned sleep. Hsi Jen distinctly grasped his idea and, forthwith nodding her head, she smiled coldly. “You really needn't lose your temper! but from this time forth, I'll become mute, and not say one word to you; and what if I do?”

Pao-yü could not restrain himself from rising. “What have I been up to again,” he asked, “that you're once more at me with your advice? As far as your advice goes, it's all well and good; but just now without one word of counsel, you paid no heed to me when I came in, but, flying into a huff, you went to sleep. Nor could I make out what it was all about, and now here you are again maintaining that I'm angry. But when did I hear you, pray, give me a word of advice of any kind?”

“Doesn't your mind yet see for itself?” Hsi Jen replied; “and do you still expect me to tell you?”

While they were disputing, dowager lady Chia sent a servant to call him to his repast, and he thereupon crossed over to the front; but after he had hurriedly swallowed a few bowls of rice, he returned to his own apartment, where he discovered Hsi Jen reclining on the outer stove-couch, while She Yüeh was playing with the dominoes by her side. Pao-yü had been ever aware of the intimacy which existed between She Yüeh and Hsi Jen, so that paying not the slightest notice to even She Yüeh, he raised the soft portiere and straightway walked all alone into the inner apartment. She Yüeh felt constrained to follow him in, but Pao-yü at once

pushed her out, saying: "I don't venture to disturb you two;" so that She Yüeh had no alternative but to leave the room with a smiling countenance, and to bid two young waiting-maids go in. Pao-yü took hold of a book and read for a considerable time in a reclining position; but upon raising his head to ask for some tea, he caught sight of a couple of waiting-maids, standing below; the one of whom, slightly older than the other, was exceedingly winsome.

"What's your name?" Pao-yü eagerly inquired.

"I'm called Hui Hsiang, (orchid fragrance)," that waiting-maid rejoined simperingly.

"Who gave you this name?" Pao-yü went on to ask.

"I went originally under the name of Yüan Hsiang (Gum Sandarac)," added Hui Hsiang, "but Miss Hua it was who changed it."

page 321

"You should really be called Hui Ch'i, (latent fragrance), that would be proper; and why such stuff as Hui Hsiang, (orchid fragrance)?"

"How many sisters have you got?" he further went on to ask of her.

"Four," replied Hui Hsiang.

"Which of them are you?" Pao-yü asked.

"The fourth," answered Hui Hsiang.

"By and by you must be called Ssu Erh, (fourth child)," Pao-yü suggested, "for there's no need for any such nonsense as Hui Hsiang (orchid fragrance) or Lan Ch'i (epidendrum perfume.) Which single girl deserves to be compared to all these flowers, without profaning pretty names and fine surnames!"

As he uttered these words, he bade her give him some tea, which he drank; while Hsi Jen and She Yüeh, who were in the outer apartment,

had been listening for a long time and laughing with compressed lips.

Pao-yü did not, on this day, so much as put his foot outside the door of his room, but sat all alone sad and dejected, simply taking up his books, in order to dispel his melancholy fit, or diverting himself with his writing materials; while he did not even avail himself of the services of any of the family servants, but simply bade Ssu Erh answer his calls.

This Ssu Erh was, who would have thought it, a girl gifted with matchless artfulness, and perceiving that Pao-yü had requisitioned her services, she speedily began to devise extreme ways and means to inveigle him. When evening came, and dinner was over, Pao-yü's eyes were scorching hot and his ears burning from the effects of two cups of wine that he had taken. Had it been in past days, he would have now had Hsi Jen and her companions with him, and with all their good cheer and laughter, he would have been enjoying himself. But here was he, on this occasion, dull and forlorn, a solitary being, gazing at the lamp with an absolute lack of pleasure. By and by he felt a certain wish to go after them, but dreading that if they carried their point, they would, in the future, come and tender advice still more immoderate, and that, were he to put on the airs of a superior to intimidate them, he would appear to be too deeply devoid of all feeling, he therefore, needless to say, thwarted the wish of his heart, and treated them just as if they were dead. And as anyway he was constrained also to live, alone though he was, he readily looked upon them, for the time being as departed, and did not worry his mind in the least on their account. On the contrary, he was able to feel happy and contented with his own society. Hence it was that bidding Ssu Erh trim the candles and brew the tea, he himself perused for a time the "Nan Hua Ching," and upon reaching the precept: "On thieves," given on

page 322

some additional pages, the burden of which was: "Therefore by exterminating intuitive wisdom, and by discarding knowledge, highway robbers will cease to exist, and by taking off the jade and by putting away the pearls, pilferers will not spring to existence; by burning the slips and by breaking up the seals, by smashing the measures, and snapping the scales, the result will be that the people will not wrangle; by abrogating, to the utmost degree, wise rules under the heavens, the people will, at

length, be able to take part in deliberation. By putting to confusion the musical scale, and destroying fifes and lutes, by deafening the ears of the blind Kuang, then, at last, will the human race in the world constrain his sense of hearing. By extinguishing literary compositions, by dispersing the five colours and by sticking the eyes of Li Chu, then, at length, mankind under the whole sky, will restrain the perception of his eyes. By destroying and eliminating the hooks and lines, by discarding the compasses and squares, and by amputating Kung Chui's fingers, the human race will ultimately succeed in constraining his ingenuity,"—his high spirits, on perusal of this passage, were so exultant that taking advantage of the exuberance caused by the wine, he picked up his pen, for he could not repress himself, and continued the text in this wise: "By burning the flower, (Hua-Hsi Jen) and dispersing the musk, (She Yüeh), the consequence will be that the inmates of the inner chambers will, eventually, keep advice to themselves. By obliterating Pao-ch'ai's supernatural beauty, by reducing to ashes Tai-yü's spiritual perception, and by destroying and extinguishing my affectionate preferences, the beautiful in the inner chambers as well as the plain will then, at length, be put on the same footing. And as they will keep advice to themselves, there will be no fear of any disagreement. By obliterating her supernatural beauty, I shall then have no incentive for any violent affection; by dissolving her spiritual perception, I will have no feelings with which to foster the memory of her talents. The hair-pin, jade, flower and musk (Pao-ch'ai, Tai-yü, Hsi Jen and She Yüeh) do each and all spread out their snares and dig mines, and thus succeed in inveigling and entrapping every one in the world."

At the conclusion of this annex, he flung the pen away, and lay himself down to sleep. His head had barely reached the pillow before he at once fell fast asleep, remaining the whole night long perfectly unconscious of everything straight up to the break of day, when upon waking and turning himself round, he, at a glance, caught sight of no one else than Hsi Jen, sleeping in her clothes over the coverlet.

Pao-yü had already banished from his mind every thought of what had transpired the previous day, so that forthwith giving Hsi Jen a push: "Get up!" he said, "and be careful where you sleep, as you may catch cold."

The fact is that Hsi Jen was aware that he was, without regard to day or night, ever up to mischief with his female cousins; but presuming that if she earnestly called him to account, he would not mend his ways, she had, for this reason, had recourse to tender language to exhort him, in the hope that, in a short while, he would come round again to his better self. But against all her expectations Pao-yü had, after the lapse of a whole day and night, not changed the least in his manner, and as she really was in her heart quite at a loss what to do, she failed to find throughout the whole night any proper sleep. But when on this day, she unexpectedly perceived Pao-yü in this mood, she flattered herself that he had made up his mind to effect a change, and readily thought it best not to notice him. Pao-yü, seeing that she made no reply, forthwith stretched out his hand and undid her jacket; but he had just unclasped the button, when his arm was pushed away by Hsi Jen, who again made it fast herself.

Pao-yü was so much at his wit's ends that he had no alternative but to take her hand and smilingly ask: "What's the matter with you, after all, that I've had to ask you something time after time?"

Hsi Jen opened her eyes wide. "There's nothing really the matter with me!" she observed; "but as you're awake, you surely had better be going over into the opposite room to comb your hair and wash; for if you dilly-dally any longer, you won't be in time."

"Where shall I go over to?" Pao-yü inquired.

Hsi Jen gave a sarcastic grin. "Do you ask me?" she rejoined; "do I know? you're at perfect liberty to go over wherever you like; from this day forth you and I must part company so as to avoid fighting like cocks or brawling like geese, to the amusement of third parties. Indeed, when you get surfeited on that side, you come over to this, where there are, after all, such girls as Fours and Fives (Ssu Erh and Wu Erh) to dance attendance upon you. But such kind of things as ourselves uselessly defile fine names and fine surnames."

"Do you still remember this to-day!" Pao-yü asked with a smirk.

“Hundred years hence I shall still bear it in mind,” Hsi Jen protested; “I'm not like you, who treat my words as so much wind blowing by the side of your ears, that what I've said at night, you've forgotten early in the morning.”

Pao-yü perceiving what a seductive though angry air pervaded her face found it difficult to repress his feelings, and speedily taking up, from the side of the pillow, a hair-pin made of jade, he dashed it down breaking it into two exclaiming: “If I again don't listen to your words, may I fare like this hair-pin.”

page 324

Hsi Jen immediately picked up the hair-pin, as she remarked: “What's up with you at this early hour of the morning? Whether you listen or not is of no consequence; and is it worth while that you should behave as you do?”

“How can you know,” Pao-yü answered, “the anguish in my heart!”

“Do you also know what anguish means?” Hsi Jen observed laughing; “if you do, then you can judge what the state of my heart is! But be quick and get up, and wash your face and be off!”

As she spoke, they both got out of bed and performed their toilette; but after Pao-yü had gone to the drawing rooms, and at a moment least expected by any one, Tai-yü walked into his apartment. Noticing that Pao-yü was not in, she was fumbling with the books on the table and examining them, when, as luck would have it, she turned up the Chuang Tzu of the previous day. Upon perusing the passage tagged on by Pao-yü, she could not help feeling both incensed and amused. Nor could she restrain herself from taking up the pen and appending a stanza to this effect:

*Who is that man, who of his pen, without good rhyme, made use,
A toilsome task to do into the Chuang-tzu text to steal,
Who for the knowledge he doth lack no sense of shame doth feel,
But language vile and foul employs third parties to abuse?*

At the conclusion of what she had to write, she too came into the drawing room; but after paying her respects to dowager lady Chia, she walked over to madame Wang's quarters.

Contrary to everybody's expectations, lady Feng's daughter, Ta Chieh Erh, had fallen ill, and a great fuss was just going on as the doctor had been sent for to diagnose her ailment.

“My congratulations to you, ladies,” the doctor explained; “this young lady has fever, as she has small-pox; indeed it's no other complaint!” As soon as madame Wang and lady Feng heard the tidings, they lost no time in sending round to ascertain whether she was getting on all right or not, and the doctor replied: “The symptoms are, it is true, serious, but favourable; but though after all importing no danger, it's necessary to get ready the silkworms and pigs' tails.”

When lady Feng received this report, she, there and then, hastened to make the necessary preparations, and while she had the rooms swept and oblations offered to the goddess of small-pox, she, at the same time, transmitted orders to her household to avoid viands fried or roasted in fat, or other such heating things; and also bade P'ing Erh get ready the bedding and clothes for Chia Lien in a separate room, and taking pieces of deep red cotton material, she distributed them to the nurses, waiting-maids and all

page 325

the servants, who were in close attendance, to cut out clothes for themselves. And having had likewise some apartments outside swept clean, she detained two doctors to alternately deliberate on the treatment, feel the pulse and administer the medicines; and for twelve days, they were not at liberty to return to their homes; while Chia Lien had no help but to move his quarters temporarily into the outer library, and lady Feng and P'ing Erh remained both in daily attendance upon madame Wang in her devotions to the goddess.

Chia Lien, now that he was separated from lady Feng, soon felt disposed to look round for a flame. He had only slept alone for a couple of nights, but these nights had been so intensely intolerable that he had no option

than to choose, for the time being, from among the young pages, those who were of handsome appearance, and bring them over to relieve his monotony. In the Jung Kuo mansion, there was, it happened, a cook, a most useless, good-for-nothing drunkard, whose name was To Kuan, in whom people recognised an infirm and a useless husband so that they all dubbed him with the name of To Hun Ch'ung, the stupid worm To. As the wife given to him in marriage by his father and mother was this year just twenty, and possessed further several traits of beauty, and was also naturally of a flighty and frivolous disposition, she had an extreme penchant for violent flirtations. But To Hun-ch'ung, on the other hand, did not concern himself (with her deportment), and as long as he had wine, meat and money he paid no heed whatever to anything. And for this reason it was that all the men in the two mansions of Ning and Jung had been successful in their attentions; and as this woman was exceptionally fascinating and incomparably giddy, she was generally known by all by the name To Ku Ning (Miss To).

Chia Lien, now that he had his quarters outside, chafed under the pangs of irksome ennui, yet he too, in days gone by, had set his eyes upon this woman, and had for long, watered in the mouth with admiration; but as, inside, he feared his winsome wife, and outside, he dreaded his beloved lads, he had not made any advances. But this To Ku Niang had likewise a liking for Chia Lien, and was full of resentment at the absence of a favourable opportunity; but she had recently come to hear that Chia Lien had shifted his quarters into the outer library, and her wont was, even in the absence of any legitimate purpose, to go over three and four times to entice him on; but though Chia Lien was, in every respect, like a rat smitten with hunger, he could not dispense with holding consultation with the young friends who enjoyed his confidence; and as he struck a bargain with them for a large amount of money and silks, how could they ever not have come to terms (with him to speak on his behalf)? Besides, they were all old friends of this woman, so that, as soon as they conveyed the proposal, she willingly accepted it.

page 326

When night came To Hun Ch'ung was lying on the couch in a state of drunkenness, and at the second watch, when every one was quiet, Chia Lien at once slipped in, and they had their assignation. As soon as he

gazed upon her face, he lost control over his senses, and without even one word of ordinary greeting or commonplace remark, they forthwith, fervently indulged in a most endearing tete-a-tete.

This woman possessed, who could have thought it, a strange natural charm; for, as soon as any one of her lovers came within any close distance of her, he speedily could not but notice that her very tendons and bones mollified, paralysed-like from feeling, so that his was the sensation of basking in a soft bower of love. What is more, her demonstrative ways and free-and-easy talk put even those of a born coquette to shame, with the result that while Chia Lien, at this time, longed to become heart and soul one with her, the woman designedly indulged in immodest innuendoes.

“Your daughter is at home,” she insinuated in her recumbent position, “ill with the small-pox, and prayers are being offered to the goddess; and your duty too should be to abstain from love affairs for a couple of days, but on the contrary, by flirting with me, you've contaminated yourself! but, you'd better be off at once from me here!”

“You're my goddess!” gaspingly protested Chia Lien, as he gave way to demonstrativeness; “what do I care about any other goddess!”

The woman began to be still more indelicate in her manner, so that Chia Lien could not refrain himself from making a full exhibition of his warm sentiments. When their tete-a-tete had come to a close, they both went on again to vow by the mountains and swear by the seas, and though they found it difficult to part company and hard to tear themselves away, they, in due course, became, after this occasion, mutual sworn friends. But by a certain day the virus in Ta Chieh's system had become exhausted, and the spots subsided, and at the expiry of twelve days the goddess was removed, and the whole household offered sacrifices to heaven, worshipped the ancestors, paid their vows, burnt incense, exchanged congratulations, and distributed presents. And these formalities observed, Chia Lien once more moved back into his own bedroom and was reunited with lady Feng. The proverb is indeed true which says: “That a new marriage is not equal to a long separation,” for there ensued between them demonstrations of loving affection still more numerous than heretofore, to which we need not, of course, refer with any minuteness.

The next day, at an early hour, after lady Feng had gone into the upper rooms, P'ing Erh set to work to put in order the clothes and bedding, which had been brought from outside, when, contrary to her expectation, a tress of

page 327

hair fell out from inside the pillow-case, as she was intent upon shaking it. P'ing Erh understood its import, and taking at once the hair, she concealed it in her sleeve, and there and then came over into the room on this side, where she produced the hair, and smirkingly asked Chia Lien, "What's this?"

Chia Lien, at the sight of it, lost no time in making a snatch with the idea of depriving her of it; and when P'ing Erh speedily endeavoured to run away, she was clutched by Chia Lien, who put her down on the stove-couch, and came up to take it from her hand.

"You heartless fellow!" P'ing Erh laughingly exclaimed, "I conceal this, with every good purpose, from her knowledge, and come to ask you about it, and you, on the contrary, fly into a rage! But wait till she comes back, and I'll tell her, and we'll see what will happen."

At these words, Chia Lien hastily forced a smile. "Dear girl!" he entreated, "give it to me, and I won't venture again to fly into a passion."

But hardly was this remark finished, when they heard the voice of lady Feng penetrate into the room. As soon as it reached the ear of Chia Lien, he was at a loss whether it was better to let her go or to snatch it away, and kept on shouting, "My dear girl! don't let her know."

P'ing Erh at once rose to her feet; but lady Feng had already entered the room; and she went on to bid P'ing Erh be quick and open a box and find a pattern for madame Wang. P'ing Erh expressed her obedience with alacrity; but while in search of it, lady Feng caught sight of Chia Lien; and suddenly remembering something, she hastened to ask P'ing Erh about it.

"The other day," she observed, "some things were taken out, and have you brought them all in or not?"

"I have!" P'ing Erh assented.

"Is there anything short or not?" lady Feng inquired.

"I've carefully looked at them," P'ing Erh added, "and haven't found even one single thing short."

"Is there anything in excess?" lady Feng went on to ascertain.

P'ing Erh laughed. "It's enough," she rejoined, "that there's nothing short; and how could there really turn out to be anything over and above?"

"That this half month," lady Feng continued still smiling, "things have gone on immaculately it would be hard to vouch; for some intimate friend there may have been, who possibly has left something behind, in the shape of a ring, handkerchief or other such object, there's no saying for certain!"

page 328

While these words were being spoken, Chia Lien's face turned perfectly sallow, and, as he stood behind lady Feng, he was intent upon gazing at P'ing Erh, making signs to her (that he was going) to cut her throat as a chicken is killed, (threatening her not to utter a sound) and entreating her to screen him; but P'ing Erh pretended not to notice him, and consequently observed smiling: "How is it that my ideas should coincide with those of yours, my lady; and as I suspected that there may have been something of the kind, I carefully searched all over, but I didn't find even so much as the slightest thing wrong; and if you don't believe me, my lady, you can search for your own self."

"You fool!" lady Feng laughed, "had he any things of the sort, would he be likely to let you and I discover them!"

With these words still on her lips, she took the patterns and went her way; whereupon P'ing Erh pointed at her nose, and shook her head to

and fro. "In this matter," she smiled, "how much you should be grateful to me!" A remark which so delighted Chia Lien that his eyebrows distended, and his eyes smiled, and running over, he clasped her in his embrace, and called her promiscuously: "My darling, my pet, my own treasure!"

"This," observed P'ing Erh, with the tress in her hand, "will be my source of power, during all my lifetime! if you treat me kindly, then well and good! but if you behave unkindly, then we'll at once produce this thing!"

"Do put it away, please," Chia Lien entreated smirkingly, "and don't, on any account, let her know about it!" and as he uttered these words, he noticed that she was off her guard, and, with a snatch, readily grabbed it adding laughingly: "In your hands, it would be a source of woe, so that it's better that I should burn it, and have done with it!" Saying this he simultaneously shoved it down the sides of his boot, while P'ing Erh shouted as she set her teeth close: "You wicked man! you cross the river and then demolish the bridge! but do you imagine that I'll by and by again tell lies on your behalf!"

Chia Lien perceiving how heart-stirring her seductive charms were, forthwith clasped her in his arms, and begged her to be his; but P'ing Erh snatched her hands out of his grasp and ran away out of the room; which so exasperated Chia Lien that as he bent his body, he exclaimed, full of indignation: "What a dreadful niggardly young wench! she actually sets her mind to stir up people's affections with her wanton blandishments, and then, after all, she runs away!"

"If I be wanton, it's my own look-out;" P'ing Erh answered, from outside the window, with a grin, "and who told you to arouse your affections? Do you forsooth mean to imply that my wish is to become

page 329

your tool? And did she come to know about it would she again ever forgive me?"

"You needn't dread her!" Chia Lien urged; "wait till my monkey is up, and I'll take this jealous woman, and beat her to atoms; and she'll then know what stuff I'm made of. She watches me just as she would watch a thief!

and she's only to hobnob with men, and I'm not to say a word to any girl! and if I do say aught to a girl, or get anywhere near one, she must at once give way to suspicion. But with no regard to younger brothers or nephews, to young and old, she prattles and giggles with them, and doesn't entertain any fear that I may be jealous; but henceforward I too won't allow her to set eyes upon any man."

"If she be jealous, there's every reason," P'ing Erh answered, "but for you to be jealous on her account isn't right. Her conduct is really straightforward, and her deportment upright, but your conduct is actuated by an evil heart, so much so that even I don't feel my heart at ease, not to say anything of her."

"You two," continued Chia Lien, "have a mouth full of malicious breath! Everything the couple of you do is invariably proper, while whatever I do is all from an evil heart! But some time or other I shall bring you both to your end with my own hands!"

This sentence was scarcely at an end, when lady Feng walked into the court. "If you're bent upon chatting," she urgently inquired, upon seeing P'ing Erh outside the window, "why don't you go into the room? and what do you mean, instead, by running out, and speaking with the window between?"

Chia Lien from inside took up the string of the conversation. "You should ask her," he said. "It would verily seem as if there were a tiger in the room to eat her up."

"There's not a single person in the room," P'ing Erh rejoined, "and what shall I stay and do with him?"

"It's just the proper thing that there should be no one else! Isn't it?" lady Feng remarked grinning sarcastically.

"Do these words allude to me?" P'ing Erh hastily asked, as soon as she had heard what she said.

Lady Feng forthwith laughed. "If they don't allude to you," she continued, "to whom do they?"

“Don't press me to come out with some nice things!” P'ing Erh insinuated, and, as she spoke, she did not even raise the portiere (for lady Feng to enter), but straightway betook herself to the opposite side.

page 330

Lady Feng lifted the portiere with her own hands, and walked into the room. “That girl P'ing Erh,” she exclaimed, “has gone mad, and if this hussey does in real earnest wish to try and get the upper hand of me, it would be well for you to mind your skin.”

Chia Lien listened to her, as he kept reclining on the couch. “I never in the least knew,” he ventured, clapping his hands and laughing, “that P'ing Erh was so dreadful; and I must, after all, from henceforth look up to her with respect!”

“It's all through your humouring her,” lady Feng rejoined; “so I'll simply settle scores with you and finish with it.”

“Ts'ui!” ejaculated Chia Lien at these words, “because you two can't agree, must you again make a scapegoat of me! Well then, I'll get out of the way of both of you!”

“I'll see where you'll go and hide,” lady Feng observed.

“I've got somewhere to go!” Chia Lien added; and with these words, he was about to go, when lady Feng urged: “Don't be off! I have something to tell you.”

What it is, is not yet known, but, reader, listen to the account given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXII.

*Upon hearing the text of the stanza, Pao-yü comprehends the
Buddhistic spells.*

*While the enigmas for the lanterns are being devised, Chia Cheng is
grieved by a prognostic.*

Chia Lien, for we must now prosecute our story, upon hearing lady Feng observe that she had something to consult about with him, felt constrained to halt and to inquire what it was about.

“On the 21st,” lady Feng explained, “is cousin Hsüeh's birthday, and what do you, after all, purpose doing?”

“Do I know what to do?” exclaimed Chia Lien; “you have made, time and again, arrangements for ever so many birthdays of grown-up people, and do you, really, find yourself on this occasion without any resources?”

“Birthdays of grown-up people are subject to prescribed rules,” lady Feng expostulated; “but her present birthday is neither one of an adult nor that of an infant, and that's why I would like to deliberate with you!”

Chia Lien upon hearing this remark, lowered his head and gave himself to protracted reflection. “You're indeed grown dull!” he cried; “why

page 231

you've a precedent ready at hand to suit your case! Cousin Lin's birthday affords a precedent, and what you did in former years for cousin Lin, you can in this instance likewise do for cousin Hsüeh, and it will be all right.”

At these words lady Feng gave a sarcastic smile. “Do you, pray, mean to insinuate,” she added, “that I'm not aware of even this! I too had previously come, after some thought, to this conclusion; but old lady Chia explained, in my hearing yesterday, that having made inquiries about all their ages and their birthdays, she learnt that cousin Hsüeh would this year be fifteen, and that though this was not the birthday, which made her of age, she could anyhow well

be regarded as being on the dawn of the year, in which she would gather up her hair, so that our dowager lady enjoined that her anniversary should, as a matter of course, be celebrated, unlike that of cousin Lin.”

“Well, in that case,” Chia Lien suggested, “you had better make a few additions to what was done for cousin Lin!”

“That's what I too am thinking of,” lady Feng replied, “and that's why I'm asking your views; for were I, on my own hook, to add anything you would again feel hurt for my not have explained things to you.”

“That will do, that will do!” Chia Lien rejoined laughing, “none of these sham attentions for me! So long as you don't pry into my doings it will be enough; and will I go so far as to bear you a grudge?”

With these words still in his mouth, he forthwith went off. But leaving him alone we shall now return to Shih Hsiang-yüan. After a stay of a couple of days, her intention was to go back, but dowager lady Chia said: “Wait until after you have seen the theatrical performance, when you can return home.”

At this proposal, Shih Hsiang-yüan felt constrained to remain, but she, at the same time, despatched a servant to her home to fetch two pieces of needlework, which she had in former days worked with her own hands, for a birthday present for Pao-ch'ai.

Contrary to all expectations old lady Chia had, since the arrival of Pao-ch'ai, taken quite a fancy to her, for her sedateness and good nature, and as this happened to be the first birthday which she was about to celebrate (in the family) she herself readily contributed twenty taels which, after sending for lady Feng, she handed over to her, to make arrangements for a banquet and performance.

“A venerable senior like yourself,” lady Feng thereupon smiled and ventured, with a view to enhancing her good cheer, “is at liberty to celebrate the birthday of a child in any way agreeable to you, without any one presuming to raise any objection; but what's the use again of giving a

banquet? But since it be your good pleasure and your purpose to have it

celebrated with eclat, you could, needless to say, your own self have spent several taels from the private funds in that old treasury of yours! But you now produce those twenty taels, spoiled by damp and mould, to play the hostess with, with the view indeed of compelling us to supply what's wanted! But hadn't you really been able to contribute any more, no one would have a word to say; but the gold and silver, round as well as flat, have with their heavy weight pressed down the bottom of the box! and your sole object is to harass us and to extort from us. But raise your eyes and look about you; who isn't your venerable ladyship's son and daughter? and is it likely, pray, that in the future there will only be cousin Pao-yü to carry you, our old lady, on his head, up the Wu T'ai Shan? You may keep all these things for him alone! but though we mayn't at present, deserve that anything should be spent upon us, you shouldn't go so far as to place us in any perplexities (by compelling us to subscribe). And is this now enough for wines, and enough for the theatricals?"

As she bandied these words, every one in the whole room burst out laughing, and even dowager lady Chia broke out in laughter while she observed: "Do you listen to that mouth? I myself am looked upon as having the gift of the gab, but why is it that I can't talk in such a wise as to put down this monkey? Your mother-in-law herself doesn't dare to be so overbearing in her speech; and here you are jabber, jabber with me!"

"My mother-in-law," explained lady Feng, "is also as fond of Pao-yü as you are, so much so that I haven't anywhere I could go and give vent to my grievances; and instead of (showing me some regard) you say that I'm overbearing in my speech!"

With these words, she again enticed dowager lady Chia to laugh for a while. The old lady continued in the highest of spirits, and, when evening came, and they all appeared in her presence to pay their obeisance, her ladyship made it a point, while the whole company of ladies and young ladies were engaged in chatting, to ascertain of Pao-ch'ai what play she liked to hear, and what things she fancied to eat.

Pao-ch'ai was well aware that dowager lady Chia, well up in years though she was, delighted in sensational performances, and was partial to sweet and tender viands, so that she readily deferred, in every respect, to those things, which were to the taste of her ladyship, and enumerated a whole number of them, which made the old lady become the more exuberant. And the next day, she was the

first to send over clothes, nicknacks and such presents, while madame Wang and lady Feng, and the other girls, as well as the whole number of inmates had all presents for her, regulated by their degree of relationship, to which we need not allude in detail.

page 333

When the 21st arrived, a stage of an ordinary kind, small but yet handy, was improvised in dowager lady Chia's inner court, and a troupe of young actors, who had newly made their debut, was retained for the nonce, among whom were both those who could sing tunes, slow as well as fast. In the drawing rooms of the old lady were then laid out several tables for a family banquet and entertainment, at which there was not a single outside guest; and with the exception of Mrs. Hsüeh, Shih Hsiang-yüan, and Pao-ch'ai, who were visitors, the rest were all inmates of her household.

On this day, Pao-yü failed, at any early hour, to see anything of Lin , and coming at once to her rooms in search of her, he discovered her reclining on the stove-couch. "Get up," Pao-yü pressed her with a smile, "and come and have breakfast, for the plays will commence shortly; but whichever plays you would like to listen to, do tell me so that I may be able to choose them."

smiled sarcastically. "In that case," she rejoined, "you had better specially engage a troupe and select those I like sung for my benefit; for on this occasion you can't be so impertinent as to make use of their expense to ask me what I like!"

"What's there impossible about this?" Pao-yü answered smiling; "well, tomorrow I'll readily do as you wish, and ask them too to make use of what is yours and mine."

As he passed this remark, he pulled her up, and taking her hand in his own, they walked out of the room and came and had breakfast. When the time arrived to make a selection of the plays, dowager lady Chia of her own motion first asked Pao-ch'ai to mark off those she liked; and though for a time Pao-ch'ai declined, yielding the choice to others, she had no alternative but to decide, fixing upon a play called, "the Record of the Western Tour," a play of which the old lady was herself very fond. Next in order, she bade lady Feng choose, and lady Feng, had, after all, in spite of madame Wang ranking before her in precedence, to consider

old lady Chia's request, and not to presume to show obstinacy by any disobedience. But as she knew well enough that her ladyship had a penchant for what was exciting, and that she was still more partial to jests, jokes, epigrams, and buffoonery, she therefore hastened to precede (madame Wang) and to choose a play, which was in fact no other than "Liu Erh pawns his clothes."

Dowager lady Chia was, of course, still more elated. And after this she speedily went on to ask to choose. likewise concedingly yielded her turn in favour of madame Wang and the other seniors, to make their selections before her, but the old lady expostulated. "To-day," she said, "is primarily an occasion, on which I've brought all of you here for your special recreation; and we had better look after our own

page 334

selves and not heed them! For have I, do you imagine, gone to the trouble of having a performance and laying a feast for their special benefit? they're already reaping benefit enough by being in here, listening to the plays and partaking of the banquet, when they have no right to either; and are they to be pressed further to make a choice of plays?"

At these words, the whole company had a hearty laugh; after which, , at length, marked off a play; next in order following Pao-yü, Shih Hsiang-yüan, Ying-ch'un, T'an Ch'un, Hsi Ch'un, widow Li Wan, and the rest, each and all of whom made a choice of plays, which were sung in the costumes necessary for each. When the time came to take their places at the banquet, dowager lady Chia bade Pao-ch'ai make another selection, and Pao-ch'ai cast her choice upon the play: "Lu Chih-shen, in a fit of drunkenness stirs up a disturbance up the Wu T'ai mountain;" whereupon Pao-yü interposed, with the remark: "All you fancy is to choose plays of this kind;" to which Pao-ch'ai rejoined, "You've listened to plays all these years to no avail! How could you know the beauties of this play? the stage effect is grand, but what is still better are the apt and elegant passages in it."

"I've always had a dread of such sensational plays as these!" Pao-yü retorted.

"If you call this play sensational," Pao-ch'ai smilingly expostulated, "well then you may fitly be looked upon as being no connoisseur of plays. But come over and I'll tell you. This play constitutes one of a set of books, entitled the 'Pei Tien

Peng Ch'un,' which, as far as harmony, musical rests and closes, and tune go, is, it goes without saying, perfect; but there's among the elegant compositions a ballad entitled: 'the Parasitic Plant,' written in a most excellent style; but how could you know anything about it?"

Pao-yü, upon hearing her speak of such points of beauty, hastily drew near to her. "My dear cousin," he entreated, "recite it and let me hear it!" Whereupon Pao-ch'ai went on as follows:

*My manly tears I will not wipe away,
But from this place, the scholar's home, I'll stray.
The bonze for mercy I shall thank; under the lotus altar shave my
pate;
With Yüan to be the luck I lack; soon in a twinkle we shall separate,
And needy and forlorn I'll come and go, with none to care about my
fate.
Thither shall I a suppliant be for a fog wrapper and rain hat; my
warrant I shall roll,
And listless with straw shoes and broken bowl, wherever to convert my
fate may be, I'll stroll.*

As soon as Pao-yü had listened to her recital, he was so full of enthusiasm, that, clapping his knees with his hands, and shaking his head,

page 335

he gave vent to incessant praise; after which he went on to extol Pao-ch'ai, saying: "There's no book that you don't know."

"Be quiet, and listen to the play," Lin urged; "they haven't yet sung about the mountain gate, and you already pretend to be mad!"

At these words, Hsiang-yüan also laughed. But, in due course, the whole party watched the performance until evening, when they broke up. Dowager lady Chia was so very much taken with the young actor, who played the role of a lady, as well as with the one who acted the buffoon, that she gave orders that they should be brought in; and, as she looked at them closely, she felt so much the more interest in them, that she went on to inquire what their ages were. And when the would-be lady (replied) that he was just eleven, while the would-be buffoon

(explained) that he was just nine, the whole company gave vent for a time to expressions of sympathy with their lot; while dowager lady Chia bade servants bring a fresh supply of meats and fruits for both of them, and also gave them, besides their wages, two tiaos as a present.

“This lad,” lady Feng observed smiling, “is when dressed up (as a girl), a living likeness of a certain person; did you notice it just now?”

Pao-ch'ai was also aware of the fact, but she simply nodded her head assentingly and did not say who it was. Pao-yü likewise expressed his assent by shaking his head, but he too did not presume to speak out. Shih Hsiang-yüan, however, readily took up the conversation. “He resembles,” she interposed, “cousin Lin's face!” When this remark reached Pao-yü's ear, he hastened to cast an angry scowl at Hsiang-yüan, and to make her a sign; while the whole party, upon hearing what had been said, indulged in careful and minute scrutiny of (the lad); and as they all began to laugh: “The resemblance is indeed striking!” they exclaimed.

After a while, they parted; and when evening came Hsiang-yüan directed Ts'ui Lü to pack up her clothes.

“What's the hurry?” Ts'ui Lü asked. “There will be ample time to pack up, on the day on which we go!”

“We'll go to-morrow,” Hsiang-yüan rejoined; “for what's the use of remaining here any longer—to look at people's mouths and faces?”

Pao-yü, at these words, lost no time in pressing forward.

“My dear cousin,” he urged; “you're wrong in bearing me a grudge! My cousin Lin is a girl so very touchy, that though every one else distinctly knew (of the resemblance), they wouldn't speak out; and all because they were afraid that she would get angry; but unexpectedly out you came with it, at a moment when off your guard; and how ever couldn't she but feel hurt? and it's because I was in dread that you would give offence to people that

I then winked at you; and now here you are angry with me; but isn't that being

ungrateful to me? Had it been any one else, would I have cared whether she had given offence to even ten; that would have been none of my business!”

Hsiang-yüan waved her hand: “Don't,” she added, “come and tell me these flowery words and this specious talk, for I really can't come up to your cousin Lin. If others poke fun at her, they all do so with impunity, while if I say anything, I at once incur blame. The fact is I shouldn't have spoken of her, undeserving as I am; and as she's the daughter of a master, while I'm a slave, a mere servant girl, I've heaped insult upon her!”

“And yet,” pleaded Pao-yü, full of perplexity, “I had done it for your sake; and through this, I've come in for reproach. But if it were with an evil heart I did so, may I at once become ashes, and be trampled upon by ten thousands of people!”

“In this felicitous firstmonth,” Hsiang-yüan remonstrated, “you shouldn't talk so much reckless nonsense! All these worthless despicable oaths, disjointed words, and corrupt language, go and tell for the benefit of those mean sort of people, who in everything take pleasure in irritating others, and who keep you under their thumb! But mind don't drive me to spit contemptuously at you.”

As she gave utterance to these words, she betook herself in the inner room of dowager lady Chia's suite of apartments, where she lay down in high dudgeon, and, as Pao-yü was so heavy at heart, he could not help coming again in search of ; but strange to say, as soon as he put his foot inside the doorway, he was speedily hustled out of it by , who shut the door in his face.

Pao-yü was once more unable to fathom her motives, and as he stood outside the window, he kept on calling out: “My dear cousin,” in a low tone of voice; but paid not the slightest notice to him so that Pao-yü became so melancholy that he drooped his head, and was plunged in silence. And though Hsi Jen had, at an early hour, come to know the circumstances, she could not very well at this juncture tender any advice.

Pao-yü remained standing in such a vacant mood that imagined that he had gone back; but when she came to open the door she caught sight of Pao-yü still waiting in there; and as did not feel justified to again close the door, Pao-yü consequently followed her in.

“Every thing has,” he observed, “a why and a wherefore; which, when spoken

out, don't even give people pain; but you will rush into a rage, and all without any rhyme! but to what really does it owe its rise?"

page 337

"It's well enough, after all, for you to ask me," rejoined with an indifferent smile, "but I myself don't know why! But am I here to afford you people amusement that you will compare me to an actress, and make the whole lot have a laugh at me?"

"I never did liken you to anything," Pao-yü protested, "neither did I ever laugh at you! and why then will you get angry with me?"

"Was it necessary that you should have done so much as made the comparison," urged, "and was there any need of even any laughter from you? why, though you mayn't have likened me to anything, or had a laugh at my expense, you were, yea more dreadful than those who did compare me (to a singing girl) and ridiculed me!"

Pao-yü could not find anything with which to refute the argument he had just heard, and went on to say. "This offence can, anyhow, be condoned; but, what is more, why did you also wink at Yüan Erh? What was this idea which you had resolved in your mind? wasn't it perhaps that if she played with me, she would be demeaning herself, and making herself cheap? She's the daughter of a duke or a marquis, and we forsooth the mean progeny of a poor plebeian family; so that, had she diverted herself with me, wouldn't she have exposed herself to being depreciated, had I, perchance, said anything in retaliation? This was your idea wasn't it? But though your purpose was, to be sure, honest enough, that girl wouldn't, however, receive any favours from you, but got angry with you just as much as I did; and though she made me also a tool to do you a good turn, she, on the contrary, asserts that I'm mean by nature and take pleasure in irritating people in everything! and you again were afraid lest she should have hurt my feelings, but, had I had a row with her, what would that have been to you? and had she given me any offence, what concern would that too have been of yours?"

When Pao-yü heard these words, he at once became alive to the fact that she too had lent an ear to the private conversation he had had a short while back with Hsiang-yüan: "All because of my, fears," he carefully mused within himself,

“lest these two should have a misunderstanding, I was induced to come between them, and act as a mediator; but I myself have, contrary to my hopes, incurred blame and abuse on both sides! This just accords with what I read the other day in the Nan Hua Ching. 'The ingenious toil, the wise are full of care; the good-for-nothing seek for nothing, they feed on vegetables, and roam where they list; they wander purposeless like a boat not made fast!' 'The mountain trees,' the text goes on to say, 'lead to their own devastation; the spring (conduces) to its own plunder; and so on.'” And the more he therefore indulged in reflection, the more depressed he felt. “Now there are only these few girls,” he

page 338

proceeded to ponder minutely, “and yet, I'm unable to treat them in such a way as to promote perfect harmony; and what will I forsooth do by and by (when there will be more to deal with)!”

When he had reached this point in his cogitations, (he decided) that it was really of no avail to agree with her, so that turning round, he was making his way all alone into his apartments; but Lin , upon noticing that he had left her side, readily concluded that reflection had marred his spirits and that he had so thoroughly lost his temper as to be going without even giving vent to a single word, and she could not restrain herself from feeling inwardly more and more irritated. “After you've gone this time,” she hastily exclaimed, “don't come again, even for a whole lifetime; and I won't have you either so much as speak to me!”

Pao-yü paid no heed to her, but came back to his rooms, and laying himself down on his bed, he kept on muttering in a state of chagrin; and though Hsi Jen knew full well the reasons of his dejection, she found it difficult to summon up courage to say anything to him at the moment, and she had no alternative but to try and distract him by means of irrelevant matters. “The theatricals which you've seen to-day,” she consequently observed smiling, “will again lead to performances for several days, and Miss Pao-ch'ai will, I'm sure, give a return feast.”

“Whether she gives a return feast or not,” Pao-yü rejoined with an apathetic smirk, “is no concern of mine!”

When Hsi Jen perceived the tone, so unlike that of other days, with which these

words were pronounced: "What's this that you're saying?" she therefore remarked as she gave another smile. "In this pleasant and propitious first moon, when all the ladies and young ladies are in high glee, how is it that you're again in a mood of this sort?"

"Whether the ladies and my cousins be in high spirits or not," Pao-yü replied forcing a grin, "is also perfectly immaterial to me."

"They are all," Hsi Jen added, smilingly, "pleasant and agreeable, and were you also a little pleasant and agreeable, wouldn't it conduce to the enjoyment of the whole company?"

"What about the whole company, and they and I?" Pao-yü urged. "They all have their mutual friendships; while I, poor fellow, all forlorn, have none to care a rap for me."

His remarks had reached this clause, when inadvertently the tears trickled down; and Hsi Jen realising the state of mind he was in, did not venture to say anything further. But as soon as Pao-yü had reflected minutely over the sense and import of this sentence, he could not refrain

page 339

from bursting forth into a loud fit of crying, and, turning himself round, he stood up, and, drawing near the table, he took up the pencil, and eagerly composed these enigmatical lines:

*If thou wert me to test, and I were thee to test,
Our hearts were we to test, and our minds to test,
When naught more there remains for us to test
That will yea very well be called a test,
And when there's naught to put, we could say, to the test,
We will a place set up on which our feet to rest.*

After he had finished writing, he again gave way to fears that though he himself could unfold their meaning, others, who came to peruse these lines, would not be able to fathom them, and he also went on consequently to indite another stanza, in imitation of the "Parasitic Plant," which he inscribed at the close of the enigma; and when he had read it over a second time, he felt his heart so free of

all concern that forthwith he got into his bed, and went to sleep.

But, who would have thought it, , upon seeing Pao-yü take his departure in such an abrupt manner, designedly made use of the excuse that she was bent upon finding Hsi Jen, to come round and see what he was up to.

“He's gone to sleep long ago!” Hsi Jen replied.

At these words, felt inclined to betake herself back at once; but Hsi Jen smiled and said: “Please stop, miss. Here's a slip of paper, and see what there is on it!” and speedily taking what Pao-yü had written a short while back, she handed it over to to examine. , on perusal, discovered that Pao-yü had composed it, at the spur of the moment, when under the influence of resentment; and she could not help thinking it both a matter of ridicule as well as of regret; but she hastily explained to Hsi Jen: “This is written for fun, and there's nothing of any consequence in it!” and having concluded this remark, she readily took it along with her to her room, where she conned it over in company with Hsiang-yüan; handing it also the next day to Pao-ch'ai to peruse. The burden of what Pao-ch'ai read was:

*In what was no concern of mine, I should to thee have paid no heed,
For while I humour this, that one to please I don't succeed!
Act as thy wish may be! go, come whene'er thou list; 'tis naught to
me.*

*Sorrow or joy, without limit or bound, to indulge thou art free!
What is this hazy notion about relatives distant or close?
For what purpose have I for all these days racked my heart with woes?
Even at this time when I look back and think, my mind no pleasure
knows.*

After having finished its perusal, she went on to glance at the Buddhistic stanza, and smiling: “This being,” she soliloquised; “has awakened to a sense of perception; and all through my fault, for it's that ballad of mine

yesterday which has incited this! But the subtle devices in all these rationalistic books have a most easy tendency to unsettle the natural disposition, and if tomorrow he does actually get up, and talk a lot of insane trash, won't his having

fostered this idea owe its origin to that ballad of mine; and shan't I have become the prime of all guilty people?"

Saying this, she promptly tore the paper, and, delivering the pieces to the servant girls, she bade them go at once and burn them.

"You shouldn't have torn it!" remonstrated laughingly. "But wait and I'll ask him about it! so come along all of you, and I vouch I'll make him abandon that idiotic frame of mind and that depraved language."

The three of them crossed over, in point of fact, into Pao-yü's room, and was the first to smile and observe. "Pao-yü, may I ask you something? What is most valuable is a precious thing; and what is most firm is jade, but what value do you possess and what firmness is innate in you?"

But as Pao-yü could not, say anything by way of reply, two of them remarked sneeringly: "With all this doltish bluntness of his will he after all absorb himself in abstraction?" While Hsiang-yüan also clapped her hands and laughed, "Cousin Pao has been discomfited."

"The latter part of that apothegm of yours," continued, "says:

"We would then find some place on which our feet to rest.

"Which is certainly good; but in my view, its excellence is not as yet complete! and I should still tag on two lines at its close;" as she proceeded to recite:

*"If we do not set up some place on which our feet to rest,
For peace and freedom then it will be best."*

"There should, in very truth, be this adjunct to make it thoroughly explicit!" Pao-ch'ai added. "In days of yore, the sixth founder of the Southern sect, Hui Neng, came, when he went first in search of his patron, in the Shao Chou district; and upon hearing that the fifth founder, Hung Jen, was at Huang Mei, he readily entered his service in the capacity of Buddhist cook; and when the fifth founder, prompted by a wish to select a Buddhistic successor, bade his neophytes and all the bonzes to each compose an enigmatical stanza, the one who occupied the upper seat, Shen Hsiu, recited:

*“A P'u T'i tree the body is, the heart so like a stand of mirror
bright,
On which must needs, by constant careful rubbing, not be left dust to
alight!”*

“And Hui Neng, who was at this time in the cook-house pounding rice, overheard this enigma. 'Excellent, it is excellent,' he ventured, 'but as far as completeness goes it isn't complete;' and having bethought himself of an apothegm: 'The P'u T'i, (an expression for Buddha or intelligence),' he proceeded, 'is really no tree; and the resplendent mirror, (Buddhistic term for heart), is likewise no stand; and as, in fact, they do not constitute any tangible objects, how could they be contaminated by particles of dust?' Whereupon the fifth founder at once took his robe and clap-dish and handed them to him. Well, the text now of this enigma presents too this identical idea, for the simple fact is that those lines full of subtleties of a short while back are not, as yet, perfected or brought to an issue, and do you forsooth readily give up the task in this manner?”

“He hasn't been able to make any reply,” rejoined sneeringly, “and must therefore be held to be discomfited; but were he even to make suitable answer now, there would be nothing out of the common about it! Anyhow, from this time forth you mustn't talk about Buddhistic spells, for what even we two know and are able to do, you don't as yet know and can't do; and do you go and concern yourself with abstraction?”

Pao-yü had, in his own mind, been under the impression that he had attained perception, but when he was unawares and all of a sudden subjected to this question by , he soon found it beyond his power to give any ready answer. And when Pao-ch'ai furthermore came out with a religious disquisition, by way of illustration, and this on subjects, in all of which he had hitherto not seen them display any ability, he communed within himself: “If with their knowledge, which is indeed in advance of that of mine, they haven't, as yet, attained perception, what need is there for me now to bring upon myself labour and vexation?”

“Who has, pray,” he hastily inquired smilingly, after arriving at the end of his reflections, “indulged in Buddhistic mysteries? what I did amounts to nothing more than nonsensical trash, written, at the spur of the moment, and nothing else.”

At the close of this remark all four came to be again on the same terms as of old; but suddenly a servant announced that the Empress (Yüan Ch'un) had despatched a messenger to bring over a lantern-conundrum with the directions that they should all go and guess it, and that after they had found it out, they should each also devise one and send it in. At these words, the four of them left the room with hasty step, and adjourned into dowager lady Chia's drawing room, where they discovered a young eunuch, holding a four-cornered, flat-topped lantern, of white gauze, which had been specially fabricated for lantern riddles. On the front side, there was already a

page 342

conundrum, and the whole company were vying with each other in looking at it and making wild guesses; when the young eunuch went on to transmit his orders, saying: "Young ladies, you should not speak out when you are guessing; but each one of you should secretly write down the solutions for me to wrap them up, and take them all in together to await her Majesty's personal inspection as to whether they be correct or not."

Upon listening to these words, Pao-ch'ai drew near, and perceived at a glance, that it consisted of a stanza of four lines, with seven characters in each; but though there was no novelty or remarkable feature about it, she felt constrained to outwardly give utterance to words of praise. "It's hard to guess!" she simply added, while she pretended to be plunged in thought, for the fact is that as soon as she had cast her eye upon it, she had at once solved it. Pao-yü, Hsiang-yüan, and T'an-ch'un, had all four also hit upon the answer, and each had secretly put it in writing; and Chia Huan, Chia Lan and the others were at the same time sent for, and every one of them set to work to exert the energies of his mind, and, when they arrived at a guess, they noted it down on paper; after which every individual member of the family made a choice of some object, and composed a riddle, which was transcribed in a large round hand, and affixed on the lantern. This done, the eunuch took his departure, and when evening drew near, he came out and delivered the commands of the imperial consort. "The conundrum," he said, "written by Her Highness, the other day, has been solved by every one, with the exception of Miss Secunda and master Tertius, who made a wrong guess. Those composed by you, young ladies, have likewise all been guessed; but Her Majesty does not know whether her solutions are right or not." While speaking, he again produced the riddles, which had been written by them, among

which were those which had been solved, as well as those which had not been solved; and the eunuch, in like manner, took the presents, conferred by the imperial consort, and handed them over to those who had guessed right. To each person was assigned a bamboo vase, inscribed with verses, which had been manufactured for palace use, as well as articles of bamboo for tea; with the exception of Ying-ch'un and Chia Huan, who were the only two persons who did not receive any. But as Ying-ch'un looked upon the whole thing as a joke and a trifle, she did not trouble her mind on that score, but Chia Huan at once felt very disconsolate.

“This one devised by Mr. Tertius,” the eunuch was further heard to say, “is not properly done; and as Her Majesty herself has been unable to guess it she commanded me to bring it back, and ask Mr. Tertius what it is about.”

page 343

After the party had listened to these words, they all pressed forward to see what had been written. The burden of it was this:

*The elder brother has horns only eight;
The second brother has horns only two;
The elder brother on the bed doth sit;
Inside the room the second likes to squat.*

After perusal of these lines, they broke out, with one voice, into a loud fit of laughter; and Chia Huan had to explain to the eunuch that the one was a pillow, and the other the head of an animal. Having committed the explanation to memory and accepted a cup of tea, the eunuch took his departure; and old lady Chia, noticing in what buoyant spirits Yüan Ch'un was, felt herself so much the more elated, that issuing forthwith directions to devise, with every despatch, a small but ingenious lantern of fine texture in the shape of a screen, and put it in the Hall, she bade each of her grandchildren secretly compose a conundrum, copy it out clean, and affix it on the frame of the lantern; and she had subsequently scented tea and fine fruits, as well as every kind of nicknacks, got ready, as prizes for those who guessed right.

And when Chia Cheng came from court and found the old lady in such high glee he also came over in the evening, as the season was furthermore holiday time, to avail himself of her good cheer to reap some enjoyment. In the upper part of the

room seated themselves, at one table dowager lady Chia, Chia Cheng, and Pao-yü; madame Wang, Pao-ch'ai, , Hsiang-yüan sat round another table, and Ying-ch'un, Tan-ch'un and Hsi Ch'un the three of them, occupied a separate table, and both these tables were laid in the lower part, while below, all over the floor, stood matrons and waiting-maids for Li Kung-ts'ai and Hsi-feng were both seated in the inner section of the Hall, at another table.

Chia Chen failed to see Chia Lan, and he therefore inquired: "How is it I don't see brother Lan," whereupon the female servants, standing below, hastily entered the inner room and made inquiries of widow Li. "He says," Mrs. Li stood up and rejoined with a smile, "that as your master didn't go just then to ask him round, he has no wish to come!" and when a matron delivered the reply to Chia Cheng; the whole company exclaimed much amused: "How obstinate and perverse his natural disposition is!" But Chia Cheng lost no time in sending Chia Huan, together with two matrons, to fetch Chia Lan; and, on his arrival, dowager lady Chia bade him sit by her side, and, taking a handful of fruits, she gave them to him to eat; after which the party chatted, laughed, and enjoyed themselves.

Ordinarily, there was no one but Pao-yü to say much or talk at any length, but on this day, with Chia Cheng present, his remarks were limited

page 344

to assents. And as to the rest, Hsiang-yüan had, though a young girl, and of delicate physique, nevertheless ever been very fond of talking and discussing; but, on this instance, Chia Cheng was at the feast, so that she also held her tongue and restrained her words. As for she was naturally peevish and listless, and not very much inclined to indulge in conversation; while Pao-ch'ai, who had never been reckless in her words or frivolous in her deportment, likewise behaved on the present occasion in her usual dignified manner. Hence it was that this banquet, although a family party, given for the sake of relaxation, assumed contrariwise an appearance of restraint, and as old lady Chia was herself too well aware that it was to be ascribed to the presence of Chia Cheng alone, she therefore, after the wine had gone round three times, forthwith hurried off Chia Cheng to retire to rest.

No less cognisant was Chia Cheng himself that the old lady's motives in packing him off were to afford a favourable opportunity to the young ladies and young men to enjoy themselves, and that is why, forcing a smile, he observed: "Having

to-day heard that your venerable ladyship had got up in here a large assortment of excellent riddles, on the occasion of the spring festival of lanterns, I too consequently prepared prizes, as well as a banquet, and came with the express purpose of joining the company; and why don't you in some way confer a fraction of the fond love, which you cherish for your grandsons and granddaughters, upon me also, your son?"

"When you're here," old lady Chia replied smilingly, "they won't venture to chat or laugh; and unless you go, you'll really fill me with intense dejection! But if you feel inclined to guess conundrums, well, I'll tell you one for you to solve; but if you don't guess right, mind, you'll be mulcted!"

"Of course I'll submit to the penalty," Chia Cheng rejoined eagerly, as he laughed, "but if I do guess right, I must in like manner receive a reward!"

"This goes without saying!" dowager lady Chia added; whereupon she went on to recite:

The monkey's body gently rests on the tree top!

"This refers," she said, "to the name of a fruit."

Chia Cheng was already aware that it was a lichee, but he designedly made a few guesses at random, and was fined several things; but he subsequently gave, at length, the right answer, and also obtained a present from her ladyship.

page 345

In due course he too set forth this conundrum for old lady Chia to guess:

*Correct its body is in appearance,
Both firm and solid is it in substance;
To words, it is true, it cannot give vent,
But spoken to, it always does assent.*

When he had done reciting it, he communicated the answer in an undertone to Pao-yü; and Pao-yü fathoming what his intention was, gently too told his grandmother Chia, and her ladyship finding, after some reflection, that there was really no mistake about it, readily remarked that it was an inkslab.

“After all,” Chia Cheng smiled; “Your venerable ladyship it is who can hit the right answer with one guess!” and turning his head round, “Be quick,” he cried, “and bring the prizes and present them!” whereupon the married women and waiting-maids below assented with one voice, and they simultaneously handed up the large trays and small boxes.

Old lady Chia passed the things, one by one, under inspection; and finding that they consisted of various kinds of articles, novel and ingenious, of use and of ornament, in vogue during the lantern festival, her heart was so deeply elated that with alacrity she shouted, “Pour a glass of wine for your master!”

Pao-yü took hold of the decanter, while Ying Ch'un presented the cup of wine.

“Look on that screen!” continued dowager lady Chia, “all those riddles have been written by the young ladies; so go and guess them for my benefit!” Chia Cheng signified his obedience, and rising and walking up to the front of the screen, he noticed the first riddle, which was one composed by the Imperial consort Yüan, in this strain:

*The pluck of devils to repress in influence it abounds,
Like bound silk is its frame, and like thunder its breath resounds.
But one report rattles, and men are lo! in fear and dread;
Transformed to ashes 'tis what time to see you turn the head.*

“Is this a cracker?” Chia Cheng inquired.

“It is,” Pao-yü assented.

Chia Cheng then went on to peruse that of Ying-Ch'un's, which referred to an article of use:

*Exhaustless is the principle of heavenly calculations and of human
skill;
Skill may exist, but without proper practice the result to find hard
yet
will be!
Whence cometh all this mixed confusion on a day so still?
Simply it is because the figures Yin and Yang do not agree.*

“It's an abacus,” Chia Cheng observed.

“Quite so!” replied Ying Ch'un smiling; after which they also conned the one below, by T'an-ch'un, which ran thus and had something to do with an object:

*This is the time when 'neath the stairs the pages their heads raise!
The term of “pure brightness” is the meetest time this thing to make!
The vagrant silk it snaps, and slack, without tension it strays!
The East wind don't begrudge because its farewell it did take!*

“It would seem,” Chia Cheng suggested, “as if that must be a kite!”

“It is,” answered T'an C'h'un; whereupon Chia Cheng read the one below, which was written by to this effect and bore upon some thing:

*After the audience, his two sleeves who brings with fumes replete?
Both by the lute and in the quilt, it lacks luck to abide!
The dawn it marks; reports from cock and man renders effete!
At midnight, maids no trouble have a new one to provide!
The head, it glows during the day, as well as in the night!
Its heart, it burns from day to day and 'gain from year to year!
Time swiftly flies and mete it is that we should hold it dear!
Changes might come, but it defies wind, rain, days dark or bright!*

“Isn't this a scented stick to show the watch?” Chia Cheng inquired.

“Yes!” assented Pao-yü, speaking on 's behalf; and Chia Cheng thereupon prosecuted the perusal of a conundrum, which ran as follows, and referred to an object;

*With the South, it sits face to face,
And the North, the while, it doth face;
If the figure be sad, it also is sad,
If the figure be glad, it likewise is glad!*

“Splendid! splendid!” exclaimed Chia Cheng, “my guess is that it's a looking-

glass. It's excellently done!"

Pao-yü smiled. "It is a looking glass!" he rejoined.

"This is, however, anonymous; whose work is it?" Chia Cheng went on to ask, and dowager lady Chia interposed: "This, I fancy, must have been composed by Pao-yü," and Chia Cheng then said not a word, but continued reading the following conundrum, which was that devised by Pao-ch'ai, on some article or other:

*Eyes though it has; eyeballs it has none, and empty 'tis inside!
The lotus flowers out of the water peep, and they with gladness meet,
But when dryandra leaves begin to drop, they then part and divide,
For a fond pair they are, but, united, winter they cannot greet.*

When Chia Cheng finished scanning it, he gave way to reflection. "This object," he pondered, "must surely be limited in use! But for persons of tender years to indulge in all this kind of language, would seem

page 347

to be still less propitious; for they cannot, in my views, be any of them the sort of people to enjoy happiness and longevity!" When his reflections reached this point, he felt the more dejected, and plainly betrayed a sad appearance, and all he did was to droop his head and to plunge in a brown study.

But upon perceiving the frame of mind in which Chia Cheng was, dowager lady Chia arrived at the conclusion that he must be fatigued; and fearing, on the other hand, that if she detained him, the whole party of young ladies would lack the spirit to enjoy themselves, she there and then faced Chia Cheng and suggested: "There's no need really for you to remain here any longer, and you had better retire to rest; and let us sit a while longer; after which, we too will break up!"

As soon as Chia Cheng caught this hint, he speedily assented several consecutive yes's; and when he had further done his best to induce old lady Chia to have a cup of wine, he eventually withdrew out of the Hall. On his return to his bedroom, he could do nothing else than give way to cogitation, and, as he turned this and turned that over in his mind, he got still more sad and pained.

“Amuse yourselves now!” readily exclaimed dowager lady Chia, during this while, after seeing Chia Cheng off; but this remark was barely finished, when she caught sight of Pao-yü run up to the lantern screen, and give vent, as he gesticulated with his hands and kicked his feet about, to any criticisms that first came to his lips. “In this,” he remarked, “this line isn't happy; and that one, hasn't been suitably solved!” while he behaved just like a monkey, whose fetters had been let loose.

“Were the whole party after all,” hastily ventured , “to sit down, as we did a short while back and chat and laugh; wouldn't that be more in accordance with good manners?”

Lady Feng thereupon egressed from the room in the inner end and interposed her remarks. “Such a being as you are,” she said, “shouldn't surely be allowed by Mr. Chia Cheng, an inch or a step from his side, and then you'll be all right. But just then it slipped my memory, for why didn't I, when your father was present, instigate him to bid you compose a rhythmical enigma; and you would, I have no doubt, have been up to this moment in a state of perspiration!”

At these words, Pao-yü lost all patience, and laying hold of lady Feng, he hustled her about for a few moments.

But old lady Chia went on for some time to bandy words with Li Kung-ts'ai, with the whole company of young ladies and the rest, so that she, in fact, felt considerably tired and worn out; and when she heard that the fourth watch had already drawn nigh, she consequently issued directions that

page 348

the eatables should be cleared away and given to the crowd of servants, and suggested, as she readily rose to her feet, “Let us go and rest! for the next day is also a feast, and we must get up at an early hour; and to-morrow evening we can enjoy ourselves again!” whereupon the whole company dispersed.

But now, reader, listen to the sequel given in the chapter which follows.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Pao-yü and Tai-yü make use of some beautiful passages from the Record of the Western Side-building to bandy jokes.

The excellent ballads sung in the Peony Pavilion touch the tender heart of Tai-yü.

Soon after the day on which Chia Yuan-ch'un honoured the garden of Broad Vista with a visit, and her return to the Palace, so our story goes, she forthwith desired that T'an-ch'un should make a careful copy, in consecutive order, of the verses, which had been composed and read out on that occasion, in order that she herself should assign them their rank, and adjudge the good and bad. And she also directed that an inscription should be engraved on a stone, in the Broad Vista park, to serve in future years as a record of the pleasant and felicitous event; and Chia Cheng, therefore, gave orders to servants to go far and wide, and select skilful artificers and renowned workmen, to polish the stone and engrave the characters in the garden of Broad Vista; while Chia Chen put himself at the head of Chia Jung, Chia P'ing and others to superintend the work. And as Chia Se had, on the other hand, the control of Wen Kuan and the rest of the singing girls, twelve in all, as well as of their costumes and other properties, he had no leisure to attend to anything else, and consequently once again sent for Chia Ch'ang and Chia Ling to come and act as overseers.

On a certain day, the works were taken in hand for rubbing the stones smooth with wax, for carving the inscription, and tracing it with vermilion, but without entering into details on these matters too minutely, we will return to the two places, the Yu Huang temple and the Ta Mo monastery. The company of twelve young bonzes and twelve young Taoist priests had now moved out of the Garden of Broad Vista, and Chia Cheng was meditating upon distributing them to various temples to live apart, when unexpectedly Chia Ch'in's mother, nee Chou, —who resided in the back street, and had been at the time contemplating to pay a visit to Chia Cheng on this side so as to obtain some charge, be it either large or small, for her son to look after, that he too should be put in the way of turning up some money to meet his expenses with,—came, as luck would have it, to hear that some

work was in hand in this mansion, and lost no time in driving over in a curricule and making her appeal to lady Feng. And as lady Feng remembered that she had all along not presumed on her position to put on airs, she willingly acceded to her request, and after calling to memory some suitable remarks, she at once went to make her report to madame Wang: "These young bonzes and Taoist priests," she said, "can by no means be sent over to other places; for were the Imperial consort to come out at an unexpected moment, they would then be required to perform services; and in the event of their being scattered, there will, when the time comes to requisition their help, again be difficulties in the way; and my idea is that it would be better to send them all to the family temple, the Iron Fence Temple; and every month all there will be to do will be to depute some one to take over a few taels for them to buy firewood and rice with, that's all, and when there's even a sound of their being required uttered, some one can at once go and tell them just one word 'come,' and they will come without the least trouble!"

Madame Wang gave a patient ear to this proposal, and, in due course, consulted with Chia Cheng.

"You've really," smiled Chia Cheng at these words, "reminded me how I should act! Yes, let this be done!" And there and then he sent for Chia Lien.

Chia Lien was, at the time, having his meal with lady Feng, but as soon as he heard that he was wanted, he put by his rice and was just walking off, when lady Feng clutched him and pulled him back. "Wait a while," she observed with a smirk, "and listen to what I've got to tell you! if it's about anything else, I've nothing to do with it; but if it be about the young bonzes and young Taoists, you must, in this particular matter, please comply with this suggestion of mine," after which, she went on in this way and that way to put him up to a whole lot of hints.

"I know nothing about it," Chia Lien rejoined smilingly, "and as you have the knack you yourself had better go and tell him!"

But as soon as lady Feng heard this remark, she stiffened her head and threw down the chopsticks; and, with an expression on her cheeks, which looked like a smile and yet not a smile, she glanced angrily at Chia Lien. "Are you speaking in earnest," she inquired, "or are you only jesting?"

"Yün Erh, the son of our fifth sister-in-law of the western porch, has come and

appealed to me two or three times, asking for something to look after," Chia Lien laughed, "and I assented and bade him wait; and now, after a great deal of trouble, this job has turned up; and there you are once again snatching it away!"

page 350

"Compose your mind," lady Feng observed grinning, "for the Imperial Consort has hinted that directions should be given for the planting, in the north-east corner of the park, of a further plentiful supply of pine and cedar trees, and that orders should also be issued for the addition, round the base of the tower, of a large number of flowers and plants and such like; and when this job turns up, I can safely tell you that Yun Erh will be called to assume control of these works."

"Well if that be really so," Chia Lien rejoined, "it will after all do! But there's only one thing; all I was up to last night was simply to have some fun with you, but you obstinately and perversely wouldn't."

Lady Feng, upon hearing these words, burst out laughing with a sound of Ch'ih, and spurning disdainfully at Chia Lien, she lowered her head and went on at once with her meal; during which time Chia Lien speedily walked away laughing the while, and betook himself to the front, where he saw Chia Cheng. It was, indeed, about the young bonzes, and Chia Lien readily carried out lady Feng's suggestion. "As from all appearances," he continued, "Ch'in Erh has, actually, so vastly improved, this job should, after all, be entrusted to his care and management; and provided that in observance with the inside custom Ch'in Erh were each day told to receive the advances, things will go on all right." And as Chia Cheng had never had much attention to give to such matters of detail, he, as soon as he heard what Chia Lien had to say, immediately signified his approval and assent. And Chia Lien, on his return to his quarters, communicated the issue to lady Feng; whereupon lady Feng at once sent some one to go and notify dame Chou.

Chia Ch'in came, in due course, to pay a visit to Chia Lien and his wife, and was incessant in his expressions of gratitude; and lady Feng bestowed upon him a further favour by giving him, as a first instalment, an advance of the funds necessary for three months' outlay, for which she bade him write a receipt; while Chia Lien filled up a cheque and signed it; and a counter-order was simultaneously issued, and he came out into the treasury where the sum specified for three months' supplies, amounting to three hundred taels, was paid

out in pure ingots.

Chia Ch'in took the first piece of silver that came under his hand, and gave it to the men in charge of the scales, with which he told them to have a cup of tea, and bidding, shortly after, a boy-servant take the money to his home, he held consultation with his mother; after which, he hired a donkey for himself to ride on, and also bespoke several carriages, and came to the back gate of the Jung Kuo mansion; where having called out the twenty

page 351

young priests, they got into the carriages, and sped straightway beyond the city walls, to the Temple of the Iron Fence, where nothing of any note transpired at the time.

But we will now notice Chia Yuean-ch'un, within the precincts of the Palace. When she had arranged the verses composed in the park of Broad Vista in their order of merit, she suddenly recollected that the sights in the garden were sure, ever since her visit through them, to be diligently and respectfully kept locked up by her father and mother; and that by not allowing any one to go in was not an injustice done to this garden? "Besides," (she pondered), "in that household, there are at present several young ladies, capable of composing odes, and able to write poetry, and why should not permission be extended to them to go and take their quarters in it; in order too that those winsome persons might not be deprived of good cheer, and that the flowers and willows may not lack any one to admire them!"

But remembering likewise that Pao-yü had from his infancy grown up among that crowd of female cousins, and was such a contrast to the rest of his male cousins that were he not allowed to move into it, he would, she also apprehended, be made to feel forlorn; and dreading lest his grandmother and his mother should be displeased at heart, she thought it imperative that he too should be permitted to take up his quarters inside, so that things should be put on a satisfactory footing; and directing the eunuch Hsia Chung to go to the Jung mansion and deliver her commands, she expressed the wish that Pao-ch'ai and the other girls should live in the garden and that it should not be kept closed, and urged that Pao-yü should also shift into it, at his own pleasure, for the prosecution of his studies. And Chia Cheng and madame Wang, upon receiving her commands, hastened, after the departure of Hsia Chung, to explain them to dowager lady Chia, and to despatch servants into the garden to tidy every place,

to dust, to sweep, and to lay out the portieres and bed-curtains. The tidings were heard by the rest even with perfect equanimity, but Pao-yü was immoderately delighted; and he was engaged in deliberation with dowager lady Chia as to this necessary and to that requirement, when suddenly they descried a waiting-maid arrive, who announced: "Master wishes to see Pao-yü."

Pao-yü gazed vacantly for a while. His spirits simultaneously were swept away; his countenance changed colour; and clinging to old lady Chia, he readily wriggled her about, just as one would twist the sugar (to make sweetmeats with), and could not, for the very death of him, summon up courage to go; so that her ladyship had no alternative but to try and reassure him. "My precious darling" she urged, "just you go, and I'll stand by you! He won't venture to be hard upon you; and besides, you've devised

page 352

these excellent literary compositions; and I presume as Her Majesty has desired that you should move into the garden, his object is to give you a few words of advice; simply because he fears that you might be up to pranks in those grounds. But to all he tells you, whatever you do, mind you acquiesce and it will be all right!"

And as she tried to compose him, she at the same time called two old nurses and enjoined them to take Pao-yü over with due care, "And don't let his father," she added, "frighten him!"

The old nurses expressed their obedience, and Pao-yü felt constrained to walk ahead; and with one step scarcely progressing three inches, he leisurely came over to this side. Strange coincidence Chia Cheng was in madame Wang's apartments consulting with her upon some matter or other, and Chin Ch'uan-erh, Ts'ai Yun, Ts'ai Feng, Ts'ai Luan, Hsiu Feng and the whole number of waiting-maids were all standing outside under the verandah. As soon as they caught sight of Pao-yü, they puckered up their mouths and laughed at him; while Chin Ch'uan grasped Pao-yü with one hand, and remarked in a low tone of voice: "On these lips of mine has just been rubbed cosmetic, soaked with perfume, and are you now inclined to lick it or not?" whereupon Ts'ai Yuen pushed off Chin Ch'uan with one shove, as she interposed laughingly, "A person's heart is at this moment in low spirits and do you still go on cracking jokes at him? But avail yourself of this opportunity when master is in good cheer to make haste and get in!"

Pao-yü had no help but to sidle against the door and walk in. Chia Cheng and madame Wang were, in fact, both in the inner rooms, and dame Chou raised the portiere. Pao-yü stepped in gingerly and perceived Chia Cheng and madame Wang sitting opposite to each other, on the stove-couch, engaged in conversation; while below on a row of chairs sat Ying Ch'un, T'an Ch'un, Hsi Ch'un and Chia Huan; but though all four of them were seated in there only T'an Ch'un, Hsi Ch'un and Chia Huan rose to their feet, as soon as they saw him make his appearance in the room; and when Chia Cheng raised his eyes and noticed Pao-yü standing in front of him, with a gait full of ease and with those winsome looks of his, so captivating, he once again realised what a mean being Chia Huan was, and how coarse his deportment. But suddenly he also bethought himself of Chia Chu, and as he reflected too that madame Wang had only this son of her own flesh and blood, upon whom she ever doated as upon a gem, and that his own beard had already begun to get hoary, the consequence was that he unwittingly stifled, well nigh entirely, the feeling of hatred and dislike, which, during the few recent years he had ordinarily fostered towards Pao-yü. And after a long pause, "Her Majesty," he observed, "bade you day after day ramble about outside to disport yourself, with the result that you gradually became

page 353

remiss and lazy; but now her desire is that we should keep you under strict control, and that in prosecuting your studies in the company of your cousins in the garden, you should carefully exert your brains to learn; so that if you don't again attend to your duties, and mind your regular tasks, you had better be on your guard!" Pao-yü assented several consecutive yes's; whereupon madame Wang drew him by her side and made him sit down, and while his three cousins resumed the seats they previously occupied: "Have you finished all the pills you had been taking a short while back?" madame Wang inquired, as she rubbed Pao-yü's neck.

"There's still one pill remaining," Pao-yü explained by way of reply.

"You had better," madame Wang added, "fetch ten more pills tomorrow morning; and every day about bedtime tell Hsi Jen to give them to you; and when you've had one you can go to sleep!"

"Ever since you, mother, bade me take them," Pao-yü rejoined, "Hsi Jen has

daily sent me one, when I was about to turn in.”

“Who's this called Hsi Jen?” Chia Chen thereupon ascertained.

“She's a waiting-maid!” madame Wang answered.

“A servant girl,” Chia Cheng remonstrated, “can be called by whatever name one chooses; anything is good enough; but who's it who has started this kind of pretentious name!”

Madame Wang noticed that Chia Cheng was not in a happy frame of mind, so that she forthwith tried to screen matters for Pao-yü, by saying: “It's our old lady who has originated it!”

“How can it possibly be,” Chia Cheng exclaimed, “that her ladyship knows anything about such kind of language? It must, for a certainty, be Pao-yü!”

Pao-yü perceiving that he could not conceal the truth from him, was under the necessity of standing up and of explaining; “As I have all along read verses, I remembered the line written by an old poet:

“What time the smell of flowers wafts itself into man, one knows the day is warm.”

“And as this waiting-maid's surname was Hua (flower), I readily gave her the name, on the strength of this sentiment.”

“When you get back,” madame Wang speedily suggested addressing Pao-yü, “change it and have done; and you, sir, needn't lose your temper over such a trivial matter!”

“It doesn't really matter in the least,” Chia Cheng continued; “so that there's no necessity of changing it; but it's evident that Pao-yü doesn't apply his mind to legitimate pursuits, but mainly devotes his energies upon

page 354

such voluptuous expressions and wanton verses!” And as he finished these words, he abruptly shouted out: “You brute-like child of retribution! Don't you

yet get out of this?”

“Get away, off with you!” madame Wang in like manner hastened to urge; “our dowager lady is waiting, I fear, for you to have her repast!”

Pao-yü assented, and, with gentle step, he withdrew out of the room, laughing at Chin Ch'uan-erh, as he put out his tongue; and leading off the two nurses, he went off on his way like a streak of smoke. But no sooner had he reached the door of the corridor than he espied Hsi Jen standing leaning against the side; who perceiving Pao-yü come back safe and sound heaped smile upon smile, and asked: “What did he want you for?”

“There was nothing much,” Pao-yü explained, “he simply feared that I would, when I get into the garden, be up to mischief, and he gave me all sorts of advice;” and, as while he explained matters, they came into the presence of lady Chia, he gave her a clear account, from first to last, of what had transpired. But when he saw that Lin Tai-yü was at the moment in the room, Pao-yü speedily inquired of her: “Which place do you think best to live in?”

Tai-yü had just been cogitating on this subject, so that when she unexpectedly heard Pao-yü's inquiry, she forthwith rejoined with a smile: “My own idea is that the Hsio Hsiang Kuan is best; for I'm fond of those clusters of bamboos, which hide from view the tortuous balustrade and make the place more secluded and peaceful than any other!”

Pao-yü at these words clapped his hands and smiled. “That just meets with my own views!” he remarked; “I too would like you to go and live in there; and as I am to stay in the I Hung Yuan, we two will be, in the first place, near each other; and next, both in quiet and secluded spots.”

While the two of them were conversing, a servant came, sent over by Chia Cheng, to report to dowager lady Chia that: “The 22nd of the second moon was a propitious day for Pao-yü and the young ladies to shift their quarters into the garden; that during these few days, servants should be sent in to put things in their proper places and to clean; that Hsueh Pao-ch'ai should put up in the Heng Wu court; that Lin Tai-yü was to live in the Hsiao Hsiang lodge; that Chia Ying-ch'un should move into the Cho Chin two-storied building; that T'an Ch'un should put up in the Ch'iu Yen library; that Hsi Ch'un should take up her quarters in the Liao Feng house; that widow Li should live in the Tao Hsiang village, and

that Pao-yü was to live in the I Hung court. That at every place two old nurses should be added and four servant-girls; that exclusive of the nurse and personal waiting-maid of each, there should, in addition, be servants, whose special

page 355

duties should be to put things straight and to sweep the place; and that on the 22nd, they should all, in a body, move into the garden.”

When this season drew near, the interior of the grounds, with the flowers waving like embroidered sashes, and the willows fanned by the fragrant breeze, was no more as desolate and silent as it had been in previous days; but without indulging in any further irrelevant details, we shall now go back to Pao-yü.

Ever since he shifted his quarters into the park, his heart was full of joy, and his mind of contentment, fostering none of those extraordinary ideas, whose tendency could be to give birth to longings and hankerings. Day after day, he simply indulged, in the company of his female cousins and the waiting-maids, in either reading his books, or writing characters, or in thrumming the lute, playing chess, drawing pictures and scanning verses, even in drawing patterns of argus pheasants, in embroidering phoenixes, contesting with them in searching for strange plants, and gathering flowers, in humming poetry with gentle tone, singing ballads with soft voice, dissecting characters, and in playing at mora, so that, being free to go everywhere and anywhere, he was of course completely happy. From his pen emanate four ballads on the times of the four seasons, which, although they could not be looked upon as first-rate, afford anyhow a correct idea of his sentiments, and a true account of the scenery.

The ballad on the spring night runs as follows:

*The silken curtains, thin as russet silk, at random are spread out.
The croak of frogs from the adjoining lane but faintly strikes the
ear.*

*The pillow a slight chill pervades, for rain outside the window falls.
The landscape, which now meets the eye, is like that seen in dreams by
man.*

*In plenteous streams the candles' tears do drop, but for whom do they
weep?*

Each particle of grief felt by the flowers is due to anger against me.

*It's all because the maids have by indulgence indolent been made.
The cover over me I'll pull, as I am loth to laugh and talk for long.*

This is the description of the aspect of nature on a summer night:

*The beauteous girl, weary of needlework, quiet is plunged in a long
dream.*

*The parrot in the golden cage doth shout that it is time the tea to
brew.*

*The lustrous windows with the musky moon like open palace-mirrors
look;*

*The room abounds with fumes of sandalwood and all kinds of imperial
scents.*

*From the cups made of amber is poured out the slippery dew from the
lotus.*

*The banisters of glass, the cool zephyr enjoy flapped by the willow
trees.*

*In the stream-spanning kiosk, the curtains everywhere all at one time
do wave.*

*In the vermilion tower the blinds the maidens roll, for they have made
the night's toilette.*

page 356

The landscape of an autumnal evening is thus depicted:

*In the interior of the Chiang Yuen house are hushed all clamorous din
and noise.*

*The sheen, which from Selene flows, pervades the windows of carnation
gauze.*

*The moss-locked, streaked rocks shelter afford to the cranes, plunged
in sleep.*

*The dew, blown on the t'ung tree by the well, doth wet the roosting
rooks.*

*Wrapped in a quilt, the maid comes the gold phoenix coverlet to
spread.*

*The girl, who on the rails did lean, on her return drops the
kingfisher flowers!*

*This quiet night his eyes in sleep he cannot close, as he doth long
for wine.*

*The smoke is stifled, and the fire restirred, when tea is ordered to
be brewed.*

The picture of a winter night is in this strain:

*The sleep of the plum trees, the dream of the bamboos the third watch
have already reached.*

*Under the embroidered quilt and the kingfisher coverlet one can't
sleep for the cold.*

*The shadow of fir trees pervades the court, but cranes are all that
meet the eye.*

*Both far and wide the pear blossom covers the ground, but yet the hawk
cannot be heard.*

*The wish, verses to write, fostered by the damsel with the green
sleeves, has waxed cold.*

The master, with the gold sable pelisse, cannot endure much wine.

*But yet he doth rejoice that his attendant knows the way to brew the
tea.*

*The newly-fallen snow is swept what time for tea the water must be
boiled.*

But putting aside Pao-yü, as he leisurely was occupied in scanning some verses, we will now allude to all these ballads. There lived, at that time, a class of people, whose wont was to servilely court the influential and wealthy, and who, upon perceiving that the verses were composed by a young lad of the Jung Kuo mansion, of only twelve or thirteen years of age, had copies made, and taking them outside sang their praise far and wide. There were besides another sort of light-headed young men, whose heart was so set upon licentious and seductive lines, that they even inscribed them on fans and screen-walls, and time and again kept on humming them and extolling them. And to the above reasons must therefore be ascribed the fact that persons came in search of stanzas and in quest of manuscripts, to apply for sketches and to beg for poetical compositions, to the increasing satisfaction of Pao-yü, who day after day, when at home, devoted his time and attention to these extraneous matters. But who would have anticipated that he could ever in his quiet seclusion have become a prey to a spirit of restlessness? Of a sudden, one day he began to feel discontent, finding fault with this and turning up his nose at that; and

going in and coming out he was simply full of ennui. And as all the girls in the garden were just in the prime of youth, and at a time of life when, artless and unaffected, they sat and reclined without regard to retirement, and disported themselves and joked without heed, how could they ever have come to read the secrets which at this time occupied a place in the heart of Pao-yü? But so unhappy was Pao-yü within himself that he soon felt loth to stay in the garden, and took to gadding about outside like an evil spirit; but he behaved also the while in an idiotic manner.

Ming Yen, upon seeing him go on in this way, felt prompted, with the idea of affording his mind some distraction, to think of this and to devise that expedient; but everything had been indulged in with surfeit by Pao-yü, and there was only this resource, (that suggested itself to him,) of which Pao-yü had not as yet had any experience. Bringing his reflections to a close, he forthwith came over to a bookshop, and selecting novels, both of old and of the present age, traditions intended for outside circulation on Fei Yen, Ho Te, Wu Tse-t'ien, and Yang Kuei-fei, as well as books of light literature consisting of strange legends, he purchased a good number of them with the express purpose of enticing Pao-yü to read them. As soon as Pao-yü caught sight of them, he felt as if he had obtained some gem or jewel. "But you mustn't," Ming Yen went on to enjoin him, "take them into the garden; for if any one were to come to know anything about them, I shall then suffer more than I can bear; and you should, when you go along, hide them in your clothes!"

But would Pao-yü agree to not introducing them into the garden? So after much wavering, he picked out only several volumes of those whose style was more refined, and took them in, and threw them over the top of his bed for him to peruse when no one was present; while those coarse and very indecent ones, he concealed in a bundle in the outer library.

On one day, which happened to be the middle decade of the third moon, Pao-yü, after breakfast, took a book, the "Hui Chen Chi," in his hand and walked as far as the bridge of the Hsin Fang lock. Seating himself on a block of rock, that lay under the peach trees in that quarter, he opened the Hui Chen Chi and began to read it carefully from the beginning. But just as he came to the passage: "the falling red (flowers) have formed a heap," he felt a gust of wind blow through the trees, bringing down a whole bushel of peach blossoms; and, as they fell, his whole person, the entire surface of the book as well as a large extent of ground

were simply bestrewn with petals of the blossoms. Pao-yü was bent upon shaking them down; but as he feared lest they should be trodden under foot, he felt constrained to carry the petals in his coat and walk to the bank of the pond and throw them into the stream. The petals floated on the surface of the

page 358

water, and, after whirling and swaying here and there, they at length ran out by the Hsin Fang lock. But, on his return under the tree, he found the ground again one mass of petals, and Pao-yü was just hesitating what to do, when he heard some one behind his back inquire, "What are you up to here?" and as soon as Pao-yü turned his head round, he discovered that it was Lin Tai-yü, who had come over carrying on her shoulder a hoe for raking flowers, that on this hoe was suspended a gauze-bag, and that in her hand she held a broom.

"That's right, well done!" Pao-yü remarked smiling; "come and sweep these flowers, and throw them into the water yonder. I've just thrown a lot in there myself!"

"It isn't right," Lin Tai-yü rejoined, "to throw them into the water. The water, which you see, is clean enough here, but as soon as it finds its way out, where are situated other people's grounds, what isn't there in it? so that you would be misusing these flowers just as much as if you left them here! But in that corner, I have dug a hole for flowers, and I'll now sweep these and put them into this gauze-bag and bury them in there; and, in course of many days, they will also become converted into earth, and won't this be a clean way (of disposing of them)?"

Pao-yü, after listening to these words, felt inexpressibly delighted. "Wait!" he smiled, "until I put down my book, and I'll help you to clear them up!" "What's the book?" Tai-yü inquired.

Pao-yü at this question was so taken aback that he had no time to conceal it. "It's," he replied hastily, "the Chung Yung and the Ta Hsüeh!"

"Are you going again to play the fool with me? Be quick and give it to me to see; and this will be ever so much better a way!"

"Cousin," Pao-yü replied, "as far as you yourself are concerned I don't mind you,

but after you've seen it, please don't tell any one else. It's really written in beautiful style; and were you to once begin reading it, why even for your very rice you wouldn't have a thought?"

As he spoke, he handed it to her; and Tai-yü deposited all the flowers on the ground, took over the book, and read it from the very first page; and the more she perused it, she got so much the more fascinated by it, that in no time she had finished reading sixteen whole chapters. But aroused as she was to a state of rapture by the diction, what remained even of the fascination was enough to overpower her senses; and though she had finished reading, she nevertheless continued in a state of abstraction, and still kept on gently recalling the text to mind, and humming it to herself.

page 359

"Cousin, tell me is it nice or not?" Pao-yü grinned.

"It is indeed full of zest!" Lin Tai-yü replied exultingly.

"I'm that very sad and very sickly person," Pao-yü explained laughing, "while you are that beauty who could subvert the empire and overthrow the city."

Lin Tai-yü became, at these words, unconsciously crimson all over her cheeks, even up to her very ears; and raising, at the same moment, her two eyebrows, which seemed to knit and yet not to knit, and opening wide those eyes, which seemed to stare and yet not to stare, while her peach-like cheeks bore an angry look and on her thin-skinned face lurked displeasure, she pointed at Pao-yü and exclaimed: "You do deserve death, for the rubbish you talk! without any provocation you bring up these licentious expressions and wanton ballads to give vent to all this insolent rot, in order to insult me; but I'll go and tell uncle and aunt."

As soon as she pronounced the two words "insult me," her eyeballs at once were suffused with purple, and turning herself round she there and then walked away; which filled Pao-yü with so much distress that he jumped forward to impede her progress, as he pleaded: "My dear cousin, I earnestly entreat you to spare me this time! I've indeed said what I shouldn't; but if I had any intention to insult you, I'll throw myself to-morrow into the pond, and let the scabby-headed turtle eat me up, so that I become transformed into a large tortoise. And when you shall have

by and by become the consort of an officer of the first degree, and you shall have fallen ill from old age and returned to the west, I'll come to your tomb and bear your stone tablet for ever on my back!"

As he uttered these words, Lin Tai-yü burst out laughing with a sound of "pu ch'ih," and rubbing her eyes, she sneeringly remarked: "I too can come out with this same tune; but will you now still go on talking nonsense? Pshaw! you're, in very truth, like a spear-head, (which looks) like silver, (but is really soft as) wax!"

"Go on, go on!" Pao-yü smiled after this remark; "and what you've said, I too will go and tell!"

"You maintain," Lin Tai-yü rejoined sarcastically, "that after glancing at anything you're able to recite it; and do you mean to say that I can't even do so much as take in ten lines with one gaze?"

Pao-yü smiled and put his book away, urging: "Let's do what's right and proper, and at once take the flowers and bury them; and don't let us allude to these things!"

page 360

Forthwith the two of them gathered the fallen blossoms; but no sooner had they interred them properly than they espied Hsi Jen coming, who went on to observe: "Where haven't I looked for you? What! have you found your way as far as this! But our senior master, Mr. Chia She, over there isn't well; and the young ladies have all gone over to pay their respects, and our old lady has asked that you should be sent over; so go back at once and change your clothes!"

When Pao-yü heard what she said, he hastily picked up his books, and saying good bye to Tai-yü, he came along with Hsi Jen, back into his room, where we will leave him to effect the necessary change in his costume. But during this while, Lin Tai-yü was, after having seen Pao-yü walk away, and heard that all her cousins were likewise not in their rooms, wending her way back alone, in a dull and dejected mood, towards her apartment, when upon reaching the outside corner of the wall of the Pear Fragrance court, she caught, issuing from inside the walls, the harmonious strains of the fife and the melodious modulations of voices singing. Lin Tai-yü readily knew that it was the twelve singing-girls

rehearsing a play; and though she did not give her mind to go and listen, yet a couple of lines were of a sudden blown into her ears, and with such clearness, that even one word did not escape. Their burden was this:

*These troth are beauteous purple and fine carmine flowers, which in
this way all round do bloom,
And all together lie ensconced along the broken well, and the
dilapidated wall!*

But the moment Lin Tai-yü heard these lines, she was, in fact, so intensely affected and agitated that she at once halted and lending an ear listened attentively to what they went on to sing, which ran thus:

*A glorious day this is, and pretty scene, but sad I feel at heart!
Contentment and pleasure are to be found in whose family courts?*

After overhearing these two lines, she unconsciously nodded her head, and sighed, and mused in her own mind. “Really,” she thought, “there is fine diction even in plays! but unfortunately what men in this world simply know is to see a play, and they don't seem to be able to enjoy the beauties contained in them.”

At the conclusion of this train of thought, she experienced again a sting of regret, (as she fancied) she should not have given way to such idle thoughts and missed attending to the ballads; but when she once more came to listen, the song, by some coincidence, went on thus:

*It's all because thy loveliness is like a flower and like the comely
spring,
That years roll swiftly by just like a running stream.*

page 361

When this couplet struck Tai-yü's ear, her heart felt suddenly a prey to excitement and her soul to emotion; and upon further hearing the words:

*Alone you sit in the secluded inner rooms to self-compassion giving
way.*

—and other such lines, she became still more as if inebriated, and like as if out

of her head, and unable to stand on her feet, she speedily stooped her body, and, taking a seat on a block of stone, she minutely pondered over the rich beauty of the eight characters:

*It's all because thy loveliness is like a flower and like the comely
spring,
That years roll swiftly by just like a running stream.*

Of a sudden, she likewise bethought herself of the line:

Water flows away and flowers decay, for both no feelings have.

—which she had read some days back in a poem of an ancient writer, and also of the passage:

*When on the running stream the flowers do fall, spring then is past
and gone;*

—and of:

Heaven (differs from) the human race,

—which also appeared in that work; and besides these, the lines, which she had a short while back read in the Hsi Hiang Chi:

*The flowers, lo, fall, and on their course the waters red do flow!
Petty misfortunes of ten thousand kinds (my heart assail!)*

both simultaneously flashed through her memory; and, collating them all together, she meditated on them minutely, until suddenly her heart was stricken with pain and her soul fled away, while from her eyes trickled down drops of tears. But while nothing could dispel her present state of mind, she unexpectedly realised that some one from behind gave her a tap; and, turning her head round to look, she found that it was a young girl; but who it was, the next chapter will make known.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The drunken Chin Kang makes light of lucre and shows a preference for generosity.

The foolish girl mislays her handkerchief and arouses mutual thoughts.

But to return to our narrative. Lin Tai-yüe's sentimental reflections were the while reeling and ravelling in an intricate maze, when unexpectedly some one from behind gave her a tap, saying: "What are you up to all alone here?" which took Lin Tai-yü so much by surprise that she gave a

page 362

start, and turning her head round to look and noticing that it was Hsiang Ling and no one else; "You stupid girl!" Lin Tai-yüe replied, "you've given me such a fright! But where do you come from at this time?"

Hsiang Ling giggled and smirked. "I've come," she added, "in search of our young lady, but I can't find her anywhere. But your Tzu Chuan is also looking after you; and she says that lady Secunda has sent a present to you of some tea. But you had better go back home and sit down."

As she spoke, she took Tai-yüe by the hand, and they came along back to the Hsiao Hsiang Kuan; where lady Feng had indeed sent her two small cetties of a new season tea, of superior quality. But Lin Tai-yüe sat down, in company with Hsiang Ling, and began to converse on the merits of this tapestry and the fineness of that embroidery; and after they had also had a game at chess, and read a few sentences out of a book, Hsiang Ling took her departure. But we need not speak of either of them, but return now to Pao-yü. Having been found, and brought back home, by Hsi Jen, he discovered Yuan Yang reclining on the bed, in the act of examining Hsi Jen's needlework; but when she perceived Pao-yü arrive, she forthwith remarked: "Where have you been? her venerable ladyship is waiting for you to tell you to go over and pay your obeisance to our Senior master, and don't you still make haste to go and change your clothes and be off!"

Hsi Jen at once walked into the room to fetch his clothes, and Pao-yü sat on the edge of the bed, and pushed his shoes off with his toes; and, while waiting for his boots to put them on, he turned round and perceiving that Yüan Yang, who

was clad in a light red silk jacket and a green satin waistcoat, and girdled with a white crepe sash, had her face turned the other way, and her head lowered giving her attention to the criticism of the needlework, while round her neck she wore a collar with embroidery, Pao-yü readily pressed his face against the nape of her neck, and as he sniffed the perfume about it, he did not stay his hand from stroking her neck, which in whiteness and smoothness was not below that of Hsi Jen; and as he approached her, "My dear girl," he said smiling and with a drivelling face, "do let me lick the cosmetic off your mouth!" clinging to her person, as he uttered these words, like twisted sweetmeat.

"Hsi Jen!" cried Yüan Yang at once, "come out and see! You've been with him a whole lifetime, and don't you give him any advice; but let him still behave in this fashion!" Whereupon, Hsi Jen walked out, clasping the clothes, and turning to Pao-yü, she observed, "I advise you in this way and it's no good, I advise you in that way and you don't mend; and what do you mean to do after all? But if you again behave like this, it will then, in fact, be impossible for me to live any longer in this place!"

page 363

As she tendered these words of counsel, she urged him to put his clothes on, and, after he had changed, he betook himself, along with Yuan Yang, to the front part of the mansion, and bade good-bye to dowager lady Chia; after which he went outside, where the attendants and horses were all in readiness; but when he was about to mount his steed, he perceived Chia Lien back from his visit and in the act of dismounting; and as the two of them stood face to face, and mutually exchanged some inquiries, they saw some one come round from the side, and say: "My respects to you, uncle Pao-yü!"

When Pao-yü came to look at him, he noticed that this person had an oblong face, that his body was tall and lanky, that his age was only eighteen or nineteen, and that he possessed, in real truth, an air of refinement and elegance; but though his features were, after all, exceedingly familiar, he could not recall to mind to what branch of the family he belonged, and what his name was.

"What are you staring vacantly for?" Chia Lien inquired laughing.

"Don't you even recognise him? He's Yün Erh, the son of our fifth sister-in-law, who lives in the back court!"

“Of course!” Pao-yü assented complacently. “How is it that I had forgotten just now!” And having gone on to ask how his mother was, and what work he had to do at present; “I’ve come in search of uncle Secundus, to tell him something,” Chia Yün replied, as he pointed at Chia Lien.

“You’ve really improved vastly from what you were before,” added Pao-yü smiling; “you verily look just as if you were my son!”

“How very barefaced!” Chia Lien exclaimed as he burst out laughing; “here’s a person four or five years your senior to be made your son!”

“How far are you in your teens this year?” Pao-yü inquired with a smile.

“Eighteen!” Chia Yün rejoined.

This Chia Yün was, in real deed, sharp and quick-witted; and when he heard Pao-yü remark that he looked like his son, he readily gave a sarcastic smile and observed, “The proverb is true which says, ‘the grandfather is rocked in the cradle while the grandson leans on a staff.’ But though old enough in years, I’m nevertheless like a mountain, which, in spite of its height, cannot screen the sun from view. Besides, since my father’s death, I’ve had no one to look after me, and were you, uncle Pao, not to disdain your doltish nephew, and to acknowledge me as your son, it would be your nephew’s good fortune!”

“Have you heard what he said?” Chia Lien interposed cynically. “But to acknowledge him as a son is no easy question to settle!” and with these

page 364

words, he walked in; whereupon Pao-yü smilingly said: “To-morrow when you have nothing to do, just come and look me up; but don’t go and play any devilish pranks with them! I’ve just now no leisure, so come to-morrow, into the library, where I’ll have a chat with you for a whole day, and take you into the garden for some fun!”

With this remark still on his lips, he laid hold of the saddle and mounted his horse; and, followed by the whole bevy of pages, he crossed over to Chia She’s on this side; where having discovered that Chia She had nothing more the matter

with him than a chill which he had suddenly contracted, he commenced by delivering dowager lady Chia's message, and next paid his own obeisance. Chia She, at first, stood up and made suitable answer to her venerable ladyship's inquiries, and then calling a servant, "Take the gentleman," he said, "into my lady's apartment to sit down."

Pao-yü withdrew out of the room, and came by the back to the upper apartment; and as soon as madame Hsing caught sight of him, she, before everything else, rose to her feet and asked after old lady Chia's health; after which, Pao-yü made his own salutation, and madame Hsing drew him on to the stove-couch, where she induced him to take a seat, and eventually inquired after the other inmates, and also gave orders to serve the tea. But scarcely had they had tea, before they perceived Chia Tsung come in to pay his respects to Pao-yü.

"Where could one find such a living monkey as this!" madame Hsing remarked; "is that nurse of yours dead and gone that she doesn't even keep you clean and tidy, and that she lets you go about with those eyebrows of yours so black and that mouth so filthy! you scarcely look like the child of a great family of scholars."

While she spoke, she perceived both Chia Huan and Chia Lan, one of whom was a young uncle and the other his nephew, also advance and present their compliments, and madame Hsing bade the two of them sit down on the chairs. But when Chia Huan noticed that Pao-yü sat on the same rug with madame Hsing, and that her ladyship was further caressing and petting him in every possible manner, he soon felt so very unhappy at heart, that, after sitting for a short time, he forthwith made a sign to Chia Lan that he would like to go; and as Chia Lan could not but humour him, they both got up together to take their leave. But when Pao-yü perceived them rise, he too felt a wish to go back along with them, but madame Hsing remarked smilingly, "You had better sit a while as I've something more to tell you," so that Pao-yü had no alternative but to stay. "When you get back," madame Hsing added, addressing the other two, "present, each one of you, my regards to your respective mothers. The young ladies, your cousins, are all here making such a row that my head is dazed, so that I won't to-day

keep you to have your repast here." To which Chia Huan and Chia Lan assented

and quickly walked out.

“If it be really the case that all my cousins have come over,” Pao-yü ventured with a smirk, “how is it that I don't see them?”

“After sitting here for a while,” madame Hsing explained, “they all went at the back; but in what rooms they have gone, I don't know.”

“My senior aunt, you said you had something to tell me, Pao-yü observed; what's it, I wonder?”

“What can there possibly be to tell you?” madame Hsing laughed; “it was simply to make you wait and have your repast with the young ladies and then go; but there's also a fine plaything that I'll give you to take back to amuse yourself with.”

These two, the aunt and her nephew, were going on with their colloquy when, much to their surprise, it was time for dinner and the young ladies were all invited to come. The tables and chairs were put in their places, and the cups and plates were arranged in proper order; and, after the mother, her daughter and the cousins had finished their meal, Pao-yü bade good-bye to Chia She and returned home in company with all the young ladies; and when they had said good-night to dowager lady Chia, madame Wang and the others, they each went back into their rooms and retired to rest; where we shall leave them without any further comment and speak of Chia Yün's visit to the mansion. As soon as he saw Chia Lien, he inquired what business it was that had turned up, and Chia Lien consequently explained: “The other day something did actually present itself, but as it happened that your aunt had again and again entreated me, I gave it to Chia Ch'in; as she promised me that there would be by and by in the garden several other spots where flowers and trees would be planted; and that when this job did occur, she would, for a certainty, give it to you and finish!”

Chia Yün, upon hearing these words, suggested after a short pause; “If that be so, there's nothing for me to do than to wait; but, uncle, you too mustn't make any allusion beforehand in the presence of aunt to my having come to-day to make any inquiries; for there will really be ample time to speak to her when the job turns up!”

“Why should I allude to it?” Chia Lien rejoined. “Have I forsooth got all this

leisure to talk of irrelevant matters! But to-morrow, besides, I've got to go as far as Hsing Yi for a turn, and it's absolutely necessary that I should hurriedly come back the very same day; so off with you now and go and wait; and the day after to-morrow, after the watch has been set, come and ask for news; but mind at any earlier hour, I shan't have any leisure!" With these words, he hastily went at the back to change his

page 366

clothes. And from the time Chia Yun put his foot out of the door of the Jung Kuo mansion, he was, the whole way homeward, plunged in deep thought; but having bethought himself of some expedient, he straightway wended his steps towards the house of his maternal uncle, Pu Shih-jen. This Pu Shih-jen, it must be explained, kept, at the present date, a shop for the sale of spices. He had just returned home from his shop, and as soon as he noticed Chia Yun, he inquired of him what business brought him there.

"There's something," Chia Yun replied, "in which I would like to crave your assistance, uncle; I'm in need of some baroos camphor and musk, so please, uncle, give me on credit four ounces of each kind, and on the festival of the eighth moon, I'll bring you the amount in full."

Pu Shih-jen gave a sardonic smile. "Don't," he said, "again allude to any such thing as selling on tick! Some time back a partner in our establishment got several ounces of goods for his relatives on credit, and up to this date the bill hasn't as yet been settled; the result being that we've all had to make the amount good, so that we've entered into an agreement that we should no more allow any one to obtain on tick anything on behalf of either relative or friend, and that whoever acted contrary to this resolution should be, at once, fined twenty taels, with which to stand a treat. Besides, the stock of these articles is now short, and were you also to come, with ready money to this our mean shop to buy any, we wouldn't even have as much to give you. The best way therefore is for you to go elsewhere. This is one side of the question; for on the other, you can't have anything above-board in view; and were you to obtain what you want as a loan you would again go and play the giddy dog! But you'll simply say that on every occasion your uncle sees you, he avails himself of it to find fault with you, but a young fellow like you doesn't know what's good and what is bad; and you should, besides, make up your mind to earn a few cash, wherewith to clothe and feed yourself, so that, when I see you, I too may rejoice!"

“What you, uncle, say,” Chia Yun rejoined smiling, “is perfectly right; the only thing is that at the time of my father's death, I was likewise so young in years that I couldn't understand anything; but later on, I heard my mother explain how that for everything, it was lucky that you, after all, my uncles, went over to our house and devised the ways and means, and managed the funeral; and is it likely you, uncle, aren't aware of these things? Besides, have I forsooth had a single acre of land or a couple of houses, the value of which I've run through as soon as it came into my hands? An ingenious wife cannot make boiled rice without raw rice; and what would you have me do? It's your good fortune however that you've got to deal with one such as I am, for had it been any one else barefaced and shameless, he would have come, twice every three days, to worry you, uncle, by asking

page 367

for two pints of rice and two of beans, and you then, uncle, would have had no help for it.”

“My dear child,” Pu Shih-jen exclaimed, “had I anything that I could call my own, your uncle as I am, wouldn't I feel bound to do something for you? I've day after day mentioned to your aunt that the misfortune was that you had no resources. But should you ever succeed in making up your mind, you should go into that mighty household of yours, and when the gentlemen aren't looking, forthwith pocket your pride and hobnob with those managers, or possibly with the butlers, as you may, even through them, be able to get some charge or other! The other day, when I was out of town, I came across that old Quartus of the third branch of the family, astride of a tall donkey, at the head of four or five carriages, in which were about forty to fifty bonzes and Taoist priests on their way to the family fane, and that man can't lack brains, for such a charge to have fallen to his share!”

Chia Yün, upon hearing these words, indulged in a long and revolting rigmarole, and then got up to take his leave.

“What are you in such a hurry for?” Pu Shih-jen remarked. “Have your meal and then go!”

But this remark was scarcely ended when they heard his wife say: “Are you

again in the clouds? When I heard that there was no rice, I bought half a catty of dry rice paste, and brought it here for you to eat; and do you pray now still put on the airs of a well-to-do, and keep your nephew to feel the pangs of hunger?"

"Well, then, buy half a catty more, and add to what there is, that's all," Pu Shih-jen continued; whereupon her mother explained to her daughter, Yin Chieh, "Go over to Mrs. Wang's opposite, and ask her if she has any cash, to lend us twenty or thirty of them; and to-morrow, when they're brought over, we'll repay her."

But while the husband and wife were carrying on this conversation, Chia Yün had, at an early period, repeated several times: "There's no need to go to this trouble," and off he went, leaving no trace or shadow behind. But without passing any further remarks on the husband and wife of the Pu family, we will now confine ourselves to Chia Yün. Having gone in high dudgeon out of the door of his uncle's house, he started straight on his way back home; but while distressed in mind, and preoccupied with his thoughts, he paced on with drooping head, he unexpectedly came into collision with a drunken fellow, who gripped Chia Yün, and began to abuse him, crying: "Are your eyes gone blind, that you come bang against me?"

The tone of voice, when it reached Chia Yün ears, sounded like that of some one with whom he was intimate; and, on careful scrutiny, he found,

page 368

in fact, that it was his next-door neighbour, Ni Erh. This Ni Erh was a dissolute knave, whose only idea was to give out money at heavy rates of interest and to have his meals in the gambling dens. His sole delight was to drink and to fight.

He was, at this very moment, coming back home from the house of a creditor, whom he had dunned, and was already far gone with drink, so that when, at an unforeseen moment, Chia Yün ran against him, he meant there and then to start a scuffle with him.

"Old Erh!" Chia Yün shouted, "stay your hand; it's I who have hustled against you."

As soon as Ni Erh heard the tone of his voice, he opened wide his drunken eyes and gave him a look; and realising that it was Chia Yün, he hastened to loosen

his grasp and to remark with a smile, as he staggered about, "Is it you indeed, master Chia Secundus? where were you off to now?"

"I couldn't tell you!" Chia Yün rejoined; "I've again brought displeasure upon me, and all through no fault of mine."

"Never mind!" urged Ni Erh, "if you're in any trouble you just tell me, and I'll give vent to your spite for you; for in these three streets, and six lanes, no matter who may give offence to any neighbours of mine, of me, Ni Erh, the drunken Chin Kang, I'll wager that I compel that man's family to disperse, and his home to break up!"

"Old Ni, don't lose your temper," Chia Yün protested, "but listen and let me tell you what happened!" After which, he went on to tell Ni Erh the whole affair with Pu Shih-jen. As soon as Ni Erh heard him, he got into a frightful rage; "Were he not," he shouted, a "relative of yours, master Secundus, I would readily give him a bit of my mind! Really resentment will stifle my breath! but never mind! you needn't however distress yourself. I've got here a few taels ready at hand, which, if you require, don't scruple to take; and from such good neighbours as you are, I won't ask any interest upon this money."

With this remark still on his lips, he produced from his pouch a bundle of silver.

"Ni Erh has, it is true, ever been a rogue," Chia Yün reflected in his own mind, "but as he is regulated in his dealings by a due regard to persons, he enjoys, to a great degree, the reputation of generosity; and were I to-day not to accept this favour of his, he'll, I fear, be put to shame; and it won't contrariwise be nice on my part! and isn't it better that I should make use of his money, and by and by I can repay him double, and things will be all right!"

page 369

"Old Erh," he therefore observed aloud with a smile, "you're really a fine fellow, and as you've shown me such eminent consideration, how can I presume not to accept your offer! On my return home, I'll write the customary I.O.U., and send it to you, and all will be in order."

Ni Erh gave a broad grin. "It's only fifteen taels and three mace," he answered, "and if you insist upon writing an I.O.U., I won't then lend it to you!"

Chia Yün at these words, took over the money, smiling the while. "I'll readily," he retorted, "comply with your wishes and have done; for what's the use of exasperating you!"

"Well then that will be all right!" Ni Erh laughed; "but the day is getting dark; and I shan't ask you to have a cup of tea or stand you a drink, for I've some small things more to settle. As for me, I'm going over there, but you, after all, should please wend your way homewards; and I shall also request you to take a message for me to my people. Tell them to close the doors and turn in, as I'm not returning home; and that in the event of anything occurring, to bid our daughter come over to-morrow, as soon as it is daylight, to short-legged Wang's house, the horse-dealer's, in search of me!" And as he uttered this remark he walked away, stumbling and hobbling along. But we will leave him without further notice and allude to Chia Yün.

He had, at quite an unexpected juncture, met this piece of luck, so that his heart was, of course, delighted to the utmost degree. "This Ni Erh," he mused, "is really a good enough sort of fellow, but what I dread is that he may have been open-handed in his fit of drunkenness, and that he mayn't, by and by, ask for his money to be paid twice over; and what will I do then? Never mind," he suddenly went on to ponder, "when that job has become an accomplished fact, I shall even have the means to pay him back double the original amount."

Prompted by this resolution, he came over to a money-shop, and when he had the silver weighed, and no discrepancy was discovered in the weight, he was still more elated at heart; and on his way back, he first and foremost delivered Ni Erh's message to his wife, and then returned to his own home, where he found his mother seated all alone on a stove-couch spinning thread. As soon as she saw him enter, she inquired where he had been the whole day long, in reply to which Chia Yün, fearing lest his parent should be angry, forthwith made no allusion to what transpired with Pu Shih-jen, but simply explained that he had been in the western mansion, waiting for his uncle Secundus, Lien. This over, he asked his mother whether she had had her meal or not, and his parent said by way of reply: "I've had it, but I've kept something for you in there," and calling to the servant-maid, she bade her

bring it round, and set it before him to eat. But as it was already dark, when the lamps had to be lit, Chia Yün, after partaking of his meal, got ready and turned in.

Nothing of any notice transpired the whole night; but the next day, as soon it was dawn, he got up, washed his face, and came to the main street, outside the south gate, and purchasing some musk from a perfumery shop, he, with rapid stride, entered the Jung Kuo mansion; and having, as a result of his inquiries, found out that Chia Lien had gone out of doors, Chia Yün readily betook himself to the back, in front of the door of Chia Lien's court, where he saw several servant-lads, with immense brooms in their hands, engaged in that place in sweeping the court. But as he suddenly caught sight of Chou Jui's wife appear outside the door, and call out to the young boys; "Don't sweep now, our lady is coming out," Chia Yün eagerly walked up to her and inquired, with a face beaming with smiles: "Where's aunt Secunda going to?"

To this inquiry, Chou Jui's wife explained: "Our old lady has sent for her, and I expect, it must be for her to cut some piece of cloth or other." But while she yet spoke, they perceived a whole bevy of people, pressing round lady Feng, as she egressed from the apartment.

Chia Yün was perfectly aware that lady Feng took pleasure in flattery, and delighted in display, so that hastily dropping his arms, he with all reverence, thrust himself forward and paid his respects to her. But lady Feng did not even so much as turn to look at him with straight eyes; but continued, as hitherto, her way onwards, simply confining herself to ascertaining whether his mother was all right, and adding: "How is it that she doesn't come to our house for a stroll?"

"The thing is," Chia Yün replied, "that she's not well: she, however, often thinks fondly of you, aunt, and longs to see you; but as for coming round, she's quite unable to do so."

"You have, indeed, the knack of telling lies!" lady Feng laughed with irony; "for hadn't I alluded to her, she would never have thought of me!"

"Isn't your nephew afraid," Chia Yün protested smilingly, "of being blasted by lightning to have the audacity of telling lies in the presence of an elder! Even so late as yesterday evening, she alluded to you, aunt! 'Though naturally,' she said, 'of a weak constitution, you had, however, plenty to attend to! that it's thanks to your supremely eminent energies, aunt, that you're, after all, able to manage

everything in such a perfect manner; and that had you ever made the slightest slip, there would have long ago crept up, goodness knows, what troubles!"

page 371

As soon as lady Feng heard these words, her whole face beamed with smiles, and she unconsciously halted her steps, while she proceeded to ask: "How is it that, both your mother and yourself, tattle about me behind my back, without rhyme or reason?"

"There's a reason for it," Chia Yün observed, "which is simply this. I've an excellent friend with considerable money of his own at home, who recently kept a perfumery shop; but as he obtained, by purchase, the rank of deputy sub-prefect, he was, the other day, selected for a post in Yunnan, in some prefecture or other unknown to me; whither he has gone together with his family. He even closed this shop of his, and forthwith collecting all his wares, he gave away, what he could give away, and what he had to sell at a discount, was sold at a loss; while such valuable articles, as these, were all presented to relatives or friends; and that's why it is that I came in for some baroos camphor and musk. But I at the time, deliberated with my mother that to sell them below their price would be a pity, and that if we wished to give them as a present to any one, there was no one good enough to use such perfumes. But remembering how you, aunt, had all along in years gone by, even to this day, to spend large bundles of silver, in purchasing such articles, and how, not to speak of this year with an imperial consort in the Palace, what's even required for this dragon boat festival, will also necessitate the addition of hundred times as much as the quantity of previous years, I therefore present them to you, aunt, as a token of my esteem!"

With these words still on his lips, he simultaneously produced an ornamented box, which he handed over to her. And as lady Feng was, at this time, making preparations for presents for the occasion of the dragon boat festival, for which perfumes were obligatory, she, with all promptitude, directed Feng Erh: "Receive Mr. Yün's present and take it home and hand it over to P'ing Erh. To one," she consequently added, "who seems to me so full of discrimination, it isn't a wonder that your uncle is repeatedly alluding, and that he speaks highly of you; how that you talk with all intelligence and that you have experience stored up in your mind."

Chia Yün upon hearing this propitious language, hastily drew near one step, and

designedly asked: "Does really uncle often refer to me?"

The moment lady Feng caught this question, she was at once inclined to tell him all about the charge to be entrusted to him, but on second thought, she again felt apprehensive lest she should be looked lightly upon by him, by simply insinuating that she had promptly and needlessly promised him something to do, so soon as she got a little scented ware; and this consideration urged her to once more restrain her tongue, so that she never made the slightest reference even to so much as one word

page 372

about his having been chosen to look after the works of planting the flowers and trees. And after confining herself to making the first few irrelevant remarks which came to her lips, she hastily betook herself into dowager lady Chia's apartments.

Chia Yün himself did not feel as if he could very well advert to the subject, with the result that he had no alternative but to retrace his steps homewards. But as when he had seen Pao-yü the previous day, he had asked him to go into the outer library and wait for him, he therefore finished his meal and then once again entered the mansion and came over into the I Hsia study, situated outside the ceremonial gate, over at old lady Chia's part of the compound, where he discovered the two lads Ming Yen, whose name had been changed into Pei Ming, and Chu Yo playing at chess, and just arguing about the capture of a castle; and besides them, Yin Ch'uan, Sao Hua, T'iao Yün, Pan Ho, these four or five of them, up to larks, stealing the young birds from the nests under the eaves of the house.

As soon as Chia Yün entered the court, he stamped his foot and shouted, "The monkeys are up to mischief! Here I am, I've come;" and when the company of servant-boys perceived him, they one and all promptly dispersed; while Chia Yün walked into the library, and seating himself at once in a chair, he inquired, "Has your master Secundus, Mr. Pao, come down?"

"He hasn't been down here at all to-day," Pei Ming replied, "but if you, Mr. Secundus, have anything to tell him, I'll go and see what he's up to for you."

Saying this he there and then left the room; and Chia Yün meanwhile gave

himself to the inspection of the pictures and nicknacks. But some considerable time elapsed, and yet he did not see him arrive; and noticing besides that the other lads had all gone to romp, he was just plunged in a state of despondency, when he heard outside the door a voice cry out, with winning tone, and tender accents: "My elder brother!"

Chia Yün looked out, and saw that it was a servant-maid of fifteen or sixteen, who was indeed extremely winsome and spruce. As soon however as the maid caught a glimpse of Chia Yün, she speedily turned herself round and withdrew out of sight. But, as luck would have it, it happened that Pei Ming was coming along, and seeing the servant-maid in front of the door, he observed: "Welcome, welcome! I was quite at a loss how to get any news of Pao-yü." And as Chia Yün discerned Pei Ming, he hastily too, ran out in pursuit of him, and ascertained what was up; whereupon Pei Ming returned for answer: "I waited a whole day long, and not a single soul came over; but this girl is attached to master Secundus' (Mr. Pao's) rooms!" and, "My dear girl," he consequently went on to say, "go in and take a message. Say that Mr. Secundus, who lives under the portico, has come!"

page 373

The servant-maid, upon hearing these words, knew at once that he was a young gentleman belonging to the family in which she served, and she did not skulk out of sight, as she had done in the first instance; but with a gaze sufficient to kill, she fixed her two eyes upon Chia Yün, when she heard Chia Yün interpose: "What about over the portico and under the portico; you just tell him that Yün Erh is come, that's all."

After a while this girl gave a sarcastic smile. "My idea is," she ventured, "that you, master Secundus, should really, if it so please you, go back, and come again to-morrow; and to-night, if I find time, I'll just put in a word with him!"

"What's this that you're driving at?" Pei Ming then shouted.

And the maid rejoined: "He's not even had a siesta to-day, so that he'll have his dinner at an early hour, and won't come down again in the evening; and is it likely that you would have master Secundus wait here and suffer hunger? and isn't it better than he should return home? The right thing is that he should come to-morrow; for were even by and by some one to turn up, who could take a

message, that person would simply acquiesce with the lips, but would he be willing to deliver the message in for you?"

Chia Yün, upon finding how concise and yet how well expressed this girl's remarks had been, was bent upon inquiring what her name was; but as she was a maid employed in Pao-yü's apartments, he did not therefore feel justified in asking the question, and he had no other course but to add, "What you say is quite right, I'll come to-morrow!" and as he spoke, he there and then was making his way outside, when Pei Ming remarked: "I'll go and pour a cup of tea; and master Secundus, have your tea and then go."

Chia Yün turned his head round, as he kept on his way, and said by way of rejoinder: "I won't have any tea; for I've besides something more to attend to!" and while with his lips he uttered these words, he, with his eyes, stared at the servant-girl, who was still standing in there.

Chia Yün wended his steps straightway home; and the next day, he came to the front entrance, where, by a strange coincidence, he met lady Feng on her way to the opposite side to pay her respects. She had just mounted her carriage, but perceiving Chia Yün arrive, she eagerly bade a servant stop him, and, with the window between them, she smiled and observed: "Yün Erh, you're indeed bold in playing your pranks with me! I thought it strange that you should give me presents; but the fact is you had a favour to ask of me; and your uncle told me even yesterday that you had appealed to him!"

Chia Yün smiled. "Of my appeal to uncle, you needn't, aunt, make any mention; for I'm at this moment full of regret at having made it. Had

page 374

I known, at an early hour, that things would have come to this pass, I would, from the very first, have made my request to you, aunt; and by this time everything would have been settled long ago! But who would have anticipated that uncle was, after all, a man of no worth!"

"Strange enough," lady Feng remarked sneeringly, "when you found that you didn't succeed in that quarter, you came again yesterday in search of me!"

"Aunt, you do my filial heart an injustice," Chia Yün protested; "I never had

such a thought; had I entertained any such idea, wouldn't I, aunt, have made my appeal to you yesterday? But as you are now aware of everything, I'll really put uncle on one side, and prefer my request to you; for circumstances compel me to entreat you, aunt, to be so good as to show me some little consideration!"

Lady Feng laughed sardonically. "You people will choose the long road to follow and put me also in a dilemma! Had you told me just one word at an early hour, what couldn't have been brought about? an affair of state indeed to be delayed up to this moment! In the garden, there are to be more trees planted and flowers laid down, and I couldn't think of any person that I could have recommended, and had you spoken before this, wouldn't the whole question have been settled soon enough?"

"Well, in that case, aunt," ventured Chia Yün with a smile, "you had better depute me to-morrow, and have done!"

"This job," continued lady Feng after a pause, "is not, my impression is, very profitable; and if you were to wait till the first moon of next year, when the fireworks, lanterns, and candles will have to be purveyed, I'll depute you as soon as those extensive commissions turn up."

"My dear aunt," pleaded Chia Yün, "first appoint me to this one, and if I do really manage this satisfactorily, you can then commission me with that other!"

"You know in truth how to draw a long thread," lady Feng observed laughing. "But hadn't it been that your uncle had spoken to me on your account, I wouldn't have concerned myself about you. But as I shall cross over here soon after the repast, you had better come at eleven a.m., and fetch the money, for you to enter into the garden the day after to-morrow, and have the flowers planted!"

As she said this, she gave orders to drive the "scented" carriage, and went on her way by the quickest cut; while Chia Yün, who was irrepressibly delighted, betook himself into the I Hsia study, and inquired after Pao-yü. But, who would have thought it, Pao-yü had, at an early hour, gone to the mansion of the Prince of Pei Ching, so that Chia Yün had to sit in

a listless mood till noon; and when he found out that lady Feng had returned, he

speedily wrote an acknowledgment and came to receive the warrant. On his arrival outside the court, he commissioned a servant to announce him, and Ts'ai Ming thereupon walked out, and merely asking for the receipt, went in, and, after filling in the amount, the year and moon, he handed it over to Chia Yün together with the warrant. Chia Yün received them from him, and as the entry consisted of two hundred taels, his heart was full of exultant joy; and turning round, he hurried to the treasury, where after he had taken over the amount in silver, he returned home and laid the case before his mother, and needless to say, that both the parent and her son were in high spirits. The next day, at the fifth watch, Chia Yun first came in search of Ni Erh, to whom he repaid the money, and then taking fifty taels along with him, he sped outside the western gate to the house of Fang Ch'un, a gardener, to purchase trees, where we will leave him without saying anything more about him.

We will now resume our story with Pao-yü. The day on which he encountered Chia Yün, he asked him to come in on the morrow and have a chat with him, but this invitation was practically the mere formal talk of a rich and well-to-do young man, and was not likely to be so much as borne in mind; and so it was that it readily slipped from his memory. On the evening of the day, however, on which he returned home from the mansion of the Prince Pei Ching, he came, after paying his salutations to dowager lady Chia, madame Wang, and the other inmates, back into the garden; but upon divesting himself of all his fineries, he was just about to have his bath, when, as Hsi Jen had, at the invitation of Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai, crossed over to tie a few knotted buttons, as Ch'in Wen and Pi Hen had both gone to hurry the servants to bring the water, as T'an Yun had likewise been taken home, on account of her mother's illness, and She Yueh, on the other hand, was at present ailing in her quarters, while the several waiting-maids, who were in there besides to attend to the dirty work, and answer the calls, had, surmising that he would not requisition their services, one and all gone out in search of their friends and in quest of their companions, it occurred, contrary to their calculations, that Pao-yü remained this whole length of time quite alone in his apartments; and as it so happened that Pao-yü wanted tea to drink, he had to call two or three times before he at last saw three old matrons walk in. But at the sight of them, Pao-yü hastily waved his hand and exclaimed: "No matter, no matter; I don't want you," whereupon the matrons had no help but to withdraw out of the rooms; and as Pao-yü perceived that there were no waiting-maids at hand, he had to come down and take a cup and go up to the teapot to pour the tea; when he heard some one from behind him observe: "Master Secundus, beware, you'll scorch your hand; wait until I come to pour it!" And as

she spoke, she walked up to him, and took the cup from his grasp, to the intense surprise, in fact, of Pao-yü, who inquired: "Where were you that you have suddenly come to give me a start?"

The waiting-maid smiled as she handed him the tea. "I was in the back court," she replied, "and just came in from the back door of the inner rooms; and is it likely that you didn't, sir, hear the sound of my footsteps?"

Pao-yü drank his tea, and as he simultaneously passed the servant-girl under a minute inspection, he found that though she wore several articles of clothing the worse for wear, she was, nevertheless, with that head of beautiful hair, as black as the plumage of a raven, done up in curls, her face so oblong, her figure so slim and elegant, indeed, supremely beautiful, sweet, and spruce, and Pao-yü eagerly inquired: "Are you also a girl attached to this room of mine?"

"I am," rejoined that waiting-maid.

"But since you belong to this room, how is it I don't know you?" Pao-yü added.

When the maid heard these words, she forced a laugh. "There are even many," she explained, "that are strangers to you; and is it only myself? I've never, before this, served tea, or handed water, or brought in anything; nor have I attended to a single duty in your presence, so how could you know me?"

"But why don't you attend to any of those duties that would bring you to my notice?" Pao-yü questioned.

"I too," answered the maid, "find it as difficult to answer such a question. There's however one thing that I must report to you, master Secundus. Yesterday, some Mr. Yün Erh or other came to see you; but as I thought you, sir, had no leisure, I speedily bade Pei Ming tell him to come early to-day. But you unexpectedly went over again to the mansion of the Prince of Pei Ching."

When she had spoken as far as this, she caught sight of Ch'iu Wen and Pi Hen enter the court, giggling and laughing; the two of them carrying between them a bucket of water; and while raising their skirts with one hand, they hobbled along,

as the water spurted and plashed. The waiting-maid hastily come out to meet them so as to relieve them of their burden, but Ch'iu Wen and Pi Hen were in the act of standing face to face and finding fault with each other; one saying, "You've wetted my clothes," the other adding, "You've trod on my shoes," and upon, all of a sudden, espying some one walk out to receive the water, and discovering, when they came to see, that it was actually no one else than Hsiao Hung, they were at once both so taken aback that, putting down the bucket, they hurried

page 377

into the room; and when they looked about and saw that there was no other person inside besides Pao-yü they were at once displeased. But as they were meanwhile compelled to get ready the articles necessary for his bath, they waited until Pao-yü was about to divest himself of his clothes, when the couple of them speedily pulled the door to behind them, as they went out, and walked as far as the room on the opposite side, in search of Hsiao Hung; of whom they inquired: "What were you doing in his room a short while back?"

"When was I ever in the room?" Hsiao Hung replied; "simply because I lost sight of my handkerchief, I went to the back to try and find it, when unexpectedly Mr. Secundus, who wanted tea, called for you sisters; and as there wasn't one even of you there, I walked in and poured a cup for him, and just at that very moment you sisters came back."

"You barefaced, low-bred thing!" cried Ch'iu Wen, turning towards her and spurting in her face. "It was our bounden duty to tell you to go and hurry them for the water, but you simply maintained that you were busy and made us go instead, in order to afford you an opportunity of performing these wily tricks! and isn't this raising yourself up li by li? But don't we forsooth, even so much as come up to you? and you just take that looking-glass and see for yourself, whether you be fit to serve tea and to hand water or not?"

"To-morrow," continued Pi Hea, "I'll tell them that whenever there's anything to do connected with his wanting tea, or asking for water, or with fetching things for him, not one of us should budge, and that she alone should be allowed to go, and have done!"

"If this be your suggestion," remarked Ch'iu Wen, "wouldn't it be still better that

we should all disperse, and let her reign supreme in this room!”

But while the two of them were up to this trouble, one saying one thing, and another, another, they caught sight of two old nurses walk in to deliver a message from lady Feng; who explained: “To-morrow, someone will bring in gardeners to plant trees, and she bids you keep under more rigorous restraint, and not sun your clothes and petticoats anywhere and everywhere; nor air them about heedlessly; that the artificial hill will, all along, be entirely shut in by screening curtains, and that you mustn't be running about at random.”

“I wonder,” interposed Ch'iu Wen with alacrity, “who it is that will bring the workmen to-morrow, and supervise the works?”

“Some one or other called Mr. Yün, living at the back portico,” the old woman observed.

But Ch'iu Wen and Pi Hen were neither of them acquainted with him, and they went on promiscuously asking further questions on his account, but Hsiao Hung knew distinctly in her mind who it was, and was well aware

page 378

that it was the person whom she had seen, the previous day, in the outer library.

The surname of this Hsiao Hung had, in fact, been originally Lin, while her infant name had been Hung Yü; but as the word Yü improperly corresponded with the names of Pao-yü and Tai-yü, she was, in due course, simply called Hsiao Hung. She was indeed an hereditary servant of the mansion; and her father had latterly taken over the charge of all matters connected with the farms and farmhouses in every locality. This Hung-yü came, at the age of sixteen, into the mansion, to enter into service, and was attached to the Hung Yuan, where in point of fact she found both a quiet and pleasant home; and when contrary to all expectation, the young ladies as well as Pao-yü, were subsequently permitted to move their quarters into the garden of Broad Vista, it so happened that this place was, moreover, fixed upon by Pao-yü. This Hsiao Hung was, it is true, a girl without any experience, but as she could, to a certain degree, boast of a pretty face, and as, in her own heart, she recklessly fostered the idea of exalting herself to a higher standard, she was ever ready to thrust herself in Pao-yü's way, with a view to showing herself off. But attached to Pao-yü's personal service were a lot

of servants, all of whom were glib and specious, so that how could she ever find an opportunity of thrusting herself forward? But contrary to her anticipations, there turned up, eventually on this day, some faint glimmer of hope, but as she again came in for a spell of spiteful abuse from Ch'iu Wen and her companion, her expectations were soon considerably frustrated, and she was just plunged in a melancholy mood, when suddenly she heard the old nurse begin the conversation about Chia Yün, which unconsciously so affected her heart that she hastily returned, quite disconsolate, into her room, and lay herself down on her bed, giving herself quietly to reflection. But while she was racking and torturing her brain and at a moment when she was at a loss what decision to grasp, her ear unexpectedly caught, emanating from outside the window, a faint voice say: "Hsiao Hung, I've picked up your pocket handkerchief in here!" and as soon as Hsiao Hung heard these words, she walked out with hurried step and found that it was no one else than Chia Yün in person; and as Hsiao Hung unwillingly felt her powdered face suffused with brushes: "Where did you pick it up, Mr. Secundus?" she asked.

"Come over," Chia Yün smiled, "and I'll tell you!" And as he uttered these words, he came up and drew her to him; but Hsiao Hung twisted herself round and ran away; but was however tripped over by the step of the door.

Now, reader, do you want to know the sequel? If so the next chapter will explain.

END OF BOOK I

夢樓紅
HUNG LOU MENG;
OR,
THE DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER.
A CHINESE NOVEL.

BOOK II.

TRANSLATED BY
H. BENCRAFT JOLY,
H.B.M. CONSULAR SERVICE,
CHINA.

MACAO:
"TYPOGRAPHIA COMMERCIAL."

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED]

MACAO:
Printed at the "Typographia Commercial."

1893

THE DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER

BOOK II

CHAPTER XXV.

By a demoniacal art, a junior uncle and an elder brother's wife (Pao Yü and lady Feng) come across five devils.

The gem of Spiritual Perception meets, in a fit of torpor, the two perfect men.

Hsiao Hung, the story continues, was much unsettled in her mind. Her thoughts rolled on in one connected string. But suddenly she became drowsy, and falling asleep, she encountered Chia Yün, who tried to carry out his intention to drag her near him. She twisted herself round, and endeavoured to run away; but was tripped over by the doorstep. This gave her such a start that she woke up. Then, at length, she realised that it was only a dream. But so restlessly did she, in consequence of this fright, keep on rolling and tossing that she could not close her eyes during the whole night. As soon as the light of the next day dawned, she got up. Several waiting-maids came at once to tell her to go and sweep the floor of the rooms, and to bring water to wash the face with. Hsiao Hung did not even wait to arrange her hair or perform her ablutions; but, turning towards the looking-glass, she pinned her chevelure up anyhow; and, rinsing her hands, and, tying a sash round her waist, she repaired directly to sweep the apartments.

Who would have thought it, Pao Yü also had set his heart upon her the moment he caught sight of her the previous day. Yet he feared, in the first place, that if he mentioned her by name and called her over into his service, Hsi Jen and the other girls might feel the pangs of jealousy. He did not, either in the second place, have any idea what her disposition was like. The consequence was that he felt downcast; so much so, that when he got up at an early hour, he did not even comb his hair or wash, but simply remained seated, and brooded in a state of abstraction. After a while, he lowered the window. Through the gauze frame, from which he could distinctly discern what was going on outside, he espied several servant-girls, engaged in sweeping the court. All of them were rouged

and powdered;

page 2

they had flowers inserted in their hair, and were grandly got up. But the only one, of whom he failed to get a glimpse, was the girl he had met the day before.

Pao Yü speedily walked out of the door with slipshod shoes. Under the pretence of admiring the flowers, he glanced, now towards the east; now towards the west. But upon raising his head, he descried, in the southwest corner, some one or other leaning by the side of the railing under the covered passage. A crab-apple tree, however, obstructed the view and he could not see distinctly who it was, so advancing a step further in, he stared with intent gaze. It was, in point of fact, the waiting-maid of the day before, tarrying about plunged in a reverie. His wish was to go forward and meet her, but he did not, on the other hand, see how he could very well do so. Just as he was cogitating within himself, he, of a sudden, perceived Pi Hen come and ask him to go and wash his face. This reminder placed him under the necessity of betaking himself into his room. But we will leave him there, without further details, so as to return to Hsiao Hung.

She was communing with her own thoughts. But unawares perceiving Hsi Jen wave her hand and call her by name, she had to walk up to her.

“Our watering-pot is spoilt,” Hsi Jen smiled and said, “so go to Miss Lin's over there and find one for us to use.”

Hsiao Hung hastened on her way towards the Hsiao Hsiang Kuan. When she got as far as the Ts'ui Yen bridge, she saw, on raising her head and looking round, the mounds and lofty places entirely shut in by screens, and she bethought herself that labourers were that day to plant trees in that particular locality.

At a great distance off, a band of men were, in very deed, engaged in digging up the soil, while Chia Yün was seated on a boulder on the hill, superintending the works. The time came for Hsiao Hung to pass by, but she could not muster the courage to do so. Nevertheless she had no other course than to quietly proceed to the Hsiao Hsiang Kuan. Then getting the watering-pot, she sped on her way back again. But being in low spirits, she retired alone into her room and lay herself down. One and all, however, simply maintained that she was out of sorts, so they did not pay any heed to her.

A day went by. On the morrow fell, in fact, the anniversary of the birth of Wang Tzu-t'eng's spouse, and some one was despatched from his residence to come and invite dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang. Madame Wang found out however that dowager lady Chia would not avail herself of the invitation, and neither would she go. So Mrs. Hsüeh went along with

page 3

lady Feng, and the three sisters of the Chia family, and Pao-ch'ai and Pao Yü, and only returned home late in the evening.

Madame Wang was sitting in Mrs. Hsüeh's apartments, whither she had just crossed, when she perceived Chia Huan come back from school, and she bade him transcribe incantations out of the Chin Kang Canon and intonate them. Chia Huan accordingly came and seated himself on the stove-couch, occupied by Madame Wang, and, directing a servant to light the candles, he started copying in an ostentatious and dashing manner. Now he called Ts'ai Hsia to pour a cup of tea for him. Now he asked Yu Ch'uan to take the scissors and cut the snuff of the wick. "Chin Ch'uan!" he next cried, "you're in the way of the rays of the lamp."

The servant-girls had all along entertained an antipathy for him, and not one of them therefore worried her mind about what he said. Ts'ai Hsia was the only one who still got on well with him, so pouring a cup of tea, she handed it to him. But she felt prompted to whisper to him: "Keep quiet a bit! what's the use of making people dislike you?"

"I know myself how matters stand," Chia Huan rejoined, as he cast a steady glance at her; "so don't you try and befool me! Now that you are on intimate terms with Pao Yü, you don't pay much heed to me. I've also seen through it myself."

Ts'ai Hsiao set her teeth together, and gave him a fillip on the head. "You heartless fellow!" she cried. "You're like the dog, that bit Lü T'ung-pin. You have no idea of what's right and what's wrong!"

While these two nagged away, they noticed lady Feng and Madame Wang cross together over to them. Madame Wang at once assailed him with questions. She asked him how many ladies had been present on that day, whether the play had

been good or bad, and what the banquet had been like.

But a brief interval over, Pao Yü too appeared on the scene. After saluting Madame Wang, he also made a few remarks, with all decorum; and then bidding a servant remove his frontlet, divest him of his long gown and pull off his boots, he rushed head foremost, into his mother's lap.

Madame Wang caressed and patted him. But while Pao Yü clung to his mother's neck, he spoke to her of one thing and then another.

“My child,” said Madame Wang, “you've again had too much to drink; your face is scalding hot, and if you still keep on rubbing and scraping it, why, you'll by and bye stir up the fumes of wine! Don't you yet go and lie down quietly over there for a little!”

page 4

Chiding him the while, she directed a servant to fetch a pillow. Pao Yü therefore lay himself down at the back of Madame Wang, and called Ts'ai Hsia to come and stroke him.

Pao Yü then began to bandy words with Ts'ai Hsia. But perceiving that Ts'ai Hsia was reserved, and, that instead of paying him any attention, she kept her eyes fixed upon Chia Huan, Pao Yü eagerly took her hand. “My dear girl!” he said; “do also heed me a little;” and as he gave utterance to this appeal, he kept her hand clasped in his.

Ts'ai Hsia, however, drew her hand away and would not let him hold it. “If you go on in this way,” she vehemently exclaimed, “I'll shout out at once.”

These two were in the act of wrangling, when verily Chia Huan overheard what was going on. He had, in fact, all along hated Pao Yü; so when on this occasion, he espied him up to his larks with Ts'ai Hsia, he could much less than ever stifle feelings of resentment in his heart. After some reflection, therefore, an idea suggested itself to his mind, and pretending that it was by a slip of the hand, he shoved the candle, overflowing with tallow, into Pao Yü's face.

“Ai ya!” Pao Yü was heard to exclaim. Every one in the whole room was plunged in consternation. With precipitate haste, the lanterns, standing on the

floor, were moved over; and, with the first ray of light, they discovered that Pao Yü's face was one mass of tallow.

Madame Wang gave way to anger as well as anxiety. At one time, she issued directions to the servants to rub and wash Pao Yü clean. At another, she heaped abuse upon Chia Huan.

Lady Feng jumped on to the stone-couch by leaps and bounds. But while intent upon removing the stuff from Pao Yü's face, she simultaneously ejaculated: "Master Tertius, are you still such a trickster! I'll tell you what, you'll never turn to any good account! Yet dame Chao should ever correct and admonish him."

This single remark suggested the idea to Madame Wang, and she lost no time in sending for Mrs. Chao to come round.

"You bring up," she berated her, "such a black-hearted offspring like this, and don't you, after all, advise and reprove him? Time and again I paid no notice whatever to what happened, and you and he have become more audacious, and have gone from worse to worse!"

Mrs. Chao had no alternative but to suppress every sense of injury, silence all grumblings, and go herself and lend a hand to the others in tidying Pao Yü. She then perceived that a whole row of blisters had risen on the left side of Pao Yü's face, but that fortunately no injury had been done to his eyes.

page 5

When Madame Wang's attention was drawn to them she felt her heart sore. It fell a prey to fears also lest when dowager lady Chia made any inquiries about them she should find it difficult to give her any satisfactory reply. And so distressed did she get that she gave Mrs. Chao another scolding. But while she tried to comfort Pao Yü, she, at the same time, fetched some powder for counteracting the effects of the virus, and applied it on his face.

"It's rather sore," said Pao Yü, "but it's nothing to speak of. Tomorrow when my old grandmother asks about it, I can simply explain that I scalded it myself; that will be quite enough to tell her."

"If you say that you scalded it yourself," lady Feng observed, "why, she'll also

call people to task for not looking out; and a fit of rage will, beyond doubt, be the outcome of it all.”

Madame Wang then ordered the servants to take care and escort Pao Yü back to his room. On their arrival, Hsi Jen and his other attendants saw him, and they were all in a great state of flurry.

As for Lin Tai-yü, when she found that Pao Yü had gone out of doors, she continued the whole day a prey to ennui. In the evening, she deputed messengers two and three times to go and inquire about him. But when she came to know that he had been scalded, she hurried in person to come and see him. She then discovered Pao Yü all alone, holding a glass and scanning his features in it; while the left side of his face was plastered all over with some medicine.

Lin Tai-yü imagined that the burn was of an extremely serious nature, and she hastened to approach him with a view to examine it. Pao Yü, however, screened his face, and, waving his hand, bade her leave the room; for knowing her usual knack for tidiness he did not feel inclined to let her get a glimpse of his face. Tai-yü then gave up the attempt, and confined herself to asking him: “whether it was very painful?”

“It isn't very sore,” replied Pao Yü, “if I look after it for a day or two, it will get all right.”

But after another short stay, Lin Tai-yü repaired back to her quarters.

The next day Pao Yü saw dowager lady Chia. But in spite of his confession that he himself was responsible for the scalding of his face, his grandmother could not refrain from reading another lecture to the servants who had been in attendance.

A day after, Ma, a Taoist matron, whose name was recorded as Pao Yü's godmother, came on a visit to the mansion. Upon perceiving Pao Yü, she was very much taken aback, and asked all about the circumstances of the accident. When he explained that he had been scalded, she forthwith shook her head and

heaved a sigh; then while making with her fingers a few passes over Pao Yü's

face, she went on to mutter incantations for several minutes. "I can guarantee that he'll get all right," she added, "for this is simply a sudden and fleeting accident!"

Turning towards dowager lady Chia: "Venerable ancestor," she observed, "Venerable Buddha! how could you ever be aware of the existence of the portentous passage in that Buddhistic classic, 'to the effect that a son of every person, who holds the dignity of prince, duke or high functionary, has no sooner come into the world and reached a certain age than numerous evil spirits at once secretly haunt him, and pinch him, when they find an opportunity; or dig their nails into him; or knock his bowl of rice down, during, meal-time; or give him a shove and send him over, while he is quietly seated.' So this is the reason why the majority of the sons and grandsons of those distinguished families do not grow up to attain manhood."

Dowager lady Chia, upon hearing her speak in this wise, eagerly asked: "Is there any Buddhistic spell, by means of which to check their influence or not?"

"This is an easy job!" rejoined the Taoist matron Ma, "all one need do is to perform several meritorious deeds on his account so as to counteract the consequences of retribution and everything will then be put right. That canon further explains: 'that in the western part of the world there is a mighty Buddha, whose glory illumines all things, and whose special charge is to cast his lustre on the evil spirits in dark places; that if any benevolent man or virtuous woman offers him oblations with sincerity of heart, he is able to so successfully perpetuate the peace and quiet of their sons and grandsons that these will no more meet with any calamities arising from being possessed by malevolent demons.'"

"But what, I wonder," inquired dowager lady Chia, "could be offered to this god?"

"Nothing of any great value," answered the Taoist matron, Ma. "Exclusive of offerings of scented candles, several caddies of scented oil can be added, each day, to keep the lantern of the Great Sea alight. This 'Great Sea' lantern is the visible embodiment and Buddhistic representation of this divinity, so day and night we don't venture to let it go out!"

"For a whole day and a whole night," asked dowager lady Chia, "how much oil

is needed, so that I too should accomplish a good action?"

"There is really no limit as to quantity. It rests upon the goodwill of the donor," Ma, the Taoist matron, put in by way of reply. "In my quarters, for instance, I have several lanterns, the gifts of the consorts of princes

page 7

and the spouses of high officials living in various localities. The consort of the mansion of the Prince of Nan Au has been prompted in her beneficence by a liberal spirit; she allows each day forty-eight catties of oil, and a catty of wick; so that her 'Great Sea' lamp is only a trifle smaller than a water-jar. The spouse of the marquis of Chin Hsiang comes next, with no more than twenty catties a day. Besides these, there are several other families; some giving ten catties; some eight catties; some three; some five; subject to no fixed rule; and of course I feel bound to keep the lanterns alight on their behalf."

Dowager lady Chia nodded her head and gave way to reflection.

"There's still another thing," continued the Taoist matron, Ma. "If it be on account of father or mother or seniors, any excessive donation would not matter. But were you, venerable ancestor, to bestow too much in your offering for Pao Yü, our young master won't, I fear, be equal to the gift; and instead of being benefited, his happiness will be snapped. If you therefore want to make a liberal gift seven catties will do; if a small one, then five catties will even be sufficient."

"Well, in that case," responded dowager lady Chia, "let us fix upon five catties a day, and every month come and receive payment of the whole lump sum!"

"O-mi-to-fu!" exclaimed Ma, the Taoist matron, "Oh merciful, and mighty P'u Sa!"

Dowager lady Chia then called the servants and impressed on their minds that whenever Pao Yü went out of doors in the future, they should give several strings of cash to the pages to bestow on charity among the bonzes and Taoist priests, and the poor and needy they might meet on the way.

These directions concluded, the Taoist matron trudged into the various quarters, and paid her respects, and then strolled leisurely about. Presently, she entered Mrs. Chao's apartments. After the two ladies had exchanged salutations, Mrs.

Chao bade a young servant-girl hand her guest a cup of tea. While Mrs. Chao busied herself pasting shoes, Ma, the Taoist matron, espied, piled up in a heap on the stove-couch, sundry pieces of silks and satins. "It just happens," she consequently remarked, "that I have no facings for shoes, so my lady do give me a few odd cuttings of silk and satin, of no matter what colour, to make myself a pair of shoes with."

Mrs. Chao heaved a sigh. "Look," she said, "whether there be still among them any pieces good for anything. But anything that's worth anything doesn't find its way in here. If you don't despise what's worthless,

page 8

you're at liberty to select any two pieces and to take them away, and have done."

The Taoist matron, Ma, chose with alacrity several pieces and shoved them in her breast.

"The other day," Mrs. Chao went on to inquire, "I sent a servant over with five hundred cash; have you presented any offerings before the god of medicine or not?"

"I've offered them long ago for you," the Taoist matron Ma rejoined.

"O-mi-to-fu!" ejaculated Mrs. Chao with a sigh, "were I a little better off, I'd also come often and offer gifts; but though my will be boundless, my means are insufficient!"

"Don't trouble your mind on this score," suggested Ma, the Taoist matron. "By and bye, when Mr. Huan has grown up into a man and obtained some official post or other, will there be then any fear of your not being able to afford such offerings as you might like to make?"

At these words Mrs. Chao gave a smile. "Enough, enough!" she cried. "Don't again refer to such contingencies! the present is a fair criterion. For up to whom in this house can my son and I come? Pao Yü is still a mere child; but he is such that he wins people's love. Those big people may be partial to him, and love him a good deal, I've nothing to say to it; but I can't eat humble pie to this sort of mistress!"

While uttering this remark, she stretched out her two fingers.

Ma, the Taoist matron, understood the meaning she desired to convey. "It's your lady Secunda, Lien, eh?" she forthwith asked.

Mrs. Chao was filled with trepidation. Hastily waving her hand, she got to her feet, raised the portiere, and peeped outside. Perceiving that there was no one about, she at length retraced her footsteps. "Dreadful!" she then said to the Taoist matron. "Dreadful! But speaking of this sort of mistress, I'm not so much as a human being, if she doesn't manage to shift over into her mother's home the whole of this family estate."

"Need you tell me this!" Ma, the Taoist matron, at these words, remarked with a view to ascertain what she implied. "Haven't I, forsooth, discovered it all for myself? Yet it's fortunate that you don't trouble your minds about her; for it's far better that you should let her have her own way."

"My dear woman," rejoined Mrs. Chao, "Not let her have her own way! why, is it likely that any one would have the courage to tell her anything?"

"I don't mean to utter any words that may bring upon me retribution,"

page 9

added Ma, the Taoist matron, "but you people haven't got the wits. But it's no matter of surprise. Yet if you daren't openly do anything, why, you could stealthily have devised some plan. And do you still tarry up to this day?"

Mrs. Chao realised that there lurked something in her insinuation, and she felt an inward secret joy. "What plan could I stealthily devise?" she asked. "I've got the will right enough, but I'm not a person gifted with this sort of gumption. So were you to impart to me some way or other, I would reward you most liberally."

When the Taoist matron, Ma, heard this, she drew near to her. "O-mi-to-fu! desist at once from asking me!" she designedly exclaimed. "How can I know anything about such matters, contrary as they are to what is right?"

"There you are again!" Mrs. Chao replied. "You're one ever most ready to

succour those in distress, and to help those in danger, and is it likely that you'll quietly look on, while some one comes and compasses my death as well as that of my son? Are you, pray, fearful lest I shouldn't give you any reward?"

Ma, the Taoist matron, greeted this remark with a smile. "You're right enough in what you say," she ventured, "of my being unable to bear the sight of yourself and son receiving insult from a third party; but as for your mention of rewards, why, what's there of yours that I still covet?"

This answer slightly reassured Mrs. Chao's mind. "How is it," she speedily urged, "that an intelligent person like you should have become so dense? If, indeed, the spell prove efficacious, and we exterminate them both, is there any apprehension that this family estate won't be ours? and when that time comes, won't you get all you may wish?"

At this disclosure, Ma, the Taoist matron, lowered her head for a long time. "When everything," she observed, "shall have been settled satisfactorily, and when there'll be, what's more, no proof at all, will you still pay any heed to me?"

"What's there hard about this?" remarked Mrs. Chao. "I've saved several taels from my own pin-money, and have besides a good number of clothes and head-ornaments. So you can first take several of these away with you. And I'll further write an I.O.U., and entrust it to you, and when that time does come, I'll pay you in full."

"That will do!" answered the Taoist matron, Ma.

Mrs. Chao thereupon dismissed even a young servant-girl, who happened to be in the room, and hastily opening a trunk, she produced several articles of clothing and jewelry, as well as a few odd pieces of silver from her own

page 10

pocket-money. Then also writing a promissory note for fifty taels, she surrendered the lot to Ma, the Taoist matron. "Take these," she said, "in advance for presents in your temple."

At the sight of the various articles and of the promissory note, the Taoist matron became at once unmindful of what was right and what was wrong; and while her mouth was full of assent, she stretched out her arm, and first and foremost laid

hold of the hard cash, and next clutched the I.O.U. Turning then towards Mrs. Chao, she asked for a sheet of paper; and taking up a pair of scissors, she cut out two human beings and gave them to Mrs. Chao, enjoining her to write on the upper part of them the respective ages of the two persons in question. Looking further for a sheet of blue paper, she cut out five blue-faced devils, which she bade her place together side by side with the paper men, and taking a pin she made them fast. "When I get home," she remarked, "I'll have recourse to some art, which will, beyond doubt, prove efficacious."

When she however had done speaking, she suddenly saw Madame Wang's waiting-maid make her appearance inside the room. "What! my dame, are you in here!" the girl exclaimed. "Why, our lady is waiting for you!"

The two dames then parted company.

But passing them over, we will now allude to Lin Tai-y mu. As Pao Yü had scalded his face, and did not go out of doors very much, she often came to have a chat with him. On this particular day she took up, after her meal, some book or other and read a couple of pages out of it. Next, she busied herself a little with needlework, in company with Tzu Chuan. She felt however thoroughly dejected and out of sorts. So she strolled out of doors along with her. But catching sight of the newly sprouted bamboo shoots, in front of the pavilion, they involuntarily stepped out of the entrance of the court, and penetrated into the garden. They cast their eyes on all four quarters; but not a soul was visible. When they became conscious of the splendour of the flowers and the chatter of the birds, they, with listless step, turned their course towards the I Hung court. There they found several servant-girls baling out water; while a bevy of them stood under the verandah, watching the thrushes having their bath. They heard also the sound of laughter in the rooms.

The fact is that Li Kung-ts'ai, lady Feng, and Pao-ch'ai were assembled inside. As soon as they saw them walk in, they with one voice shouted, smiling: "Now, are not these two more!"

"We are a full company to-day," laughed Tai-yü, "but who has issued the cards and invited us here?"

“The other day,” interposed lady Feng, “I sent servants with a present of two caddies of tea for you, Miss Lin; was it, after all, good?”

“I had just forgotten all about it,” Tai-yü rejoined, “many thanks for your kind attention!”

“I tasted it,” observed Pao Yü. “I did not think it anything good. But I don't know how others, who've had any of it, find it.”

“Its flavour,” said Tai-yü, “is good; the only thing is, it has no colour.”

“It's tribute tea from the Laos Kingdom,” continued lady Feng. “When I tried it, I didn't either find it anything very fine. It's not up to what we ordinarily drink.”

“To my taste, it's all right,” put in Tai-yü. “But what your palates are like, I can't make out.”

“As you say it's good,” suggested Pao Yü, “you're quite at liberty to take all I have for your use.”

“I've got a great deal more of it over there,” lady Feng remarked.

“I'll tell a servant-girl to go and fetch it,” Tai-yü replied.

“No need,” lady Feng went on. “I'll send it over with some one. I also have a favour to ask of you to-morrow, so I may as well tell the servant to bring it along at the same time.”

When Lin Tai-yü heard these words, she put on a smile. “You just mark this,” she observed. “I've had to-day a little tea from her place, and she at once begins making a tool of me!”

“Since you've had some of our tea,” lady Feng laughed, “how is it that you have not yet become a wife in our household?”

The whole party burst out laughing aloud. So much so, that they found it difficult to repress themselves. But Tai-yü's face was suffused with blushes. She turned her head the other way, and uttered not a word.

“Our sister-in-law Secunda's jibes are first-rate!” Pao-ch'ai chimed in with a laugh.

“What jibes!” exclaimed Tai-yü; “they're purely and simply the prattle of a mean mouth and vile tongue! They're enough to evoke people's displeasure!”

Saying this, she went on to sputter in disgust.

“Were you,” insinuated lady Feng, “to become a wife in my family, what is there that you would lack?” Pointing then at Pao Yü, “Look here!” she cried—“Is not this human being worthy of you? Is not his station in life good enough for you? Are not our stock and estate sufficient for you? and in what slight degree can he make you lose caste?”

page 12

Tai-yü rose to her feet, and retired immediately. But Pao-ch'ai shouted out: “Here's P'in Erh in a huff! Don't you yet come back? when you've gone, there will really be no fun!”

While calling out to her, she jumped up to pull her back. As soon, however, as she reached the door of the room, she beheld Mrs. Chao, accompanied by Mrs. Chou; both coming to look up Pao Yü. Pao Yü and his companions got up in a body and pressed them into a seat. Lady Feng was the sole person who did not heed them.

But just as Pao-ch'ai was about to open her lips, she perceived a servant-girl, attached to Madame Wang's apartments, appear on the scene. “Your maternal uncle's wife has come,” she said, “and she requests you, ladies and young ladies, to come out and see her.”

Li Kung-ts'ai hurriedly walked away in company with lady Feng. The two dames, Mrs. Chao and Mrs. Chou, in like manner took their leave and quitted the room.

“As for me, I can't go out,” Pao Yü shouted. “But whatever you do, pray, don't ask aunt to come in here.” “Cousin Lin,” he went on to say, “do stay on a while; I've got something to tell you.”

Lady Feng overheard him. Turning her head towards Lin Tai-yü, "There's some one," she cried; "who wants to speak to you." And forthwith laying hold of Lin Tai-yü, she pushed her back and then trudged away, along with Li Kung-ts'ai.

During this time, Pao Yü clasped Tai-yü's hand in his. He did nothing than smile. But not a word did he utter. Tai-yü naturally, therefore, got crimson in the face, and struggled to escape his importunities.

"Ai-ya!" exclaimed Pao Yü. "How my head is sore!"

"It should be!" rejoined Tai-yü. "O-mi-to-fu."

Pao Yü then gave vent to a loud shout. His body bounced three or four feet high from the ground. His mouth was full of confused shrieks. But all he said was rambling talk.

Tai-yü and the servant-girls were full of consternation, and, with all possible haste, they ran and apprised Madame Wang and dowager lady Chia.

Wang Tzu-t'eng's wife was, at this time, also with them, so they all came in a body to see him. Pao Yü behaved more and more as if determined to clutch a sword or seize a spear to put an end to his existence. He raged in a manner sufficient to subvert the heavens and upset the earth.

As soon as dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang caught sight of him, they were struck with terror. They trembled wildly like a piece of clothing

page 13

that is being shaken. Uttering a shout of: "My son," and another of: "My flesh," they burst out into a loud fit of crying. Presently, all the inmates were seized with fright. Even Chia She, Madame Hsing, Chia Cheng, Chia Chen, Chia Lien, Chia Jung, Chia Yün, Chia P'ing, Mrs. Hsüeh, Hsüeh P'an, Chou Jui's wife, and the various members of the household, whether high or low, and the servant-girls and married women too, rushed into the garden to see what was up.

The confusion that prevailed was, at the moment, like entangled flax. Every one was at a loss what to do, when they espied lady Feng dash into the garden, a glistening sword in hand, and try to cut down everything that came in her way,

ogle vacantly whomsoever struck her gaze, and make forthwith an attempt to despatch them. A greater panic than ever broke out among the whole assemblage. But placing herself at the head of a handful of sturdy female servants, Chou Jui's wife precipitated herself forward, and clasping her tight, they succeeded in snatching the sword from her grip, and carrying her back into her room.

P'ing Erh, Feng Erh, and the other girls began to weep. They invoked the heavens and appealed to the earth. Even Chia Cheng was distressed at heart. One and all at this stage started shouting, some, one thing; some, another. Some suggested exorcists. Some cried out for the posture-makers to attract the devils. Others recommended that Chang, the Taoist priest, of the Yü Huang temple, should catch the evil spirits. A thorough turmoil reigned supreme for a long time. The gods were implored. Prayers were offered. Every kind of remedy was tried, but no benefit whatever became visible.

After sunset, the spouse of Wang Tzu-t'eng said good-bye and took her departure. On the ensuing day, Wang Tzu-t'eng himself also came to make inquiries. Following closely upon him, arrived, in a body, messengers from the young marquis Shih, Madame Hsing's young brother, and their various relatives to ascertain for themselves how (lady Feng and Pao Yü) were progressing. Some brought charm-water. Some recommended bonzes and Taoist priests. Others spoke highly of doctors. But that young fellow and his elder brother's wife fell into such greater and greater stupor that they lost all consciousness. Their bodies were hot like fire. As they lay prostrate on their beds, they talked deliriously. With the fall of the shades of night their condition aggravated. So much so, that the matrons and servant-girls did not venture to volunteer their attendance. They had, therefore, to be both moved into Madame Wang's quarters, where servants were told off to take their turn and watch them.

Dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang, Madame Hsing and Mrs. Hsüeh did not budge an inch or a step from their side. They sat round them, and did

page 14

nothing but cry. Chia She and Chia Cheng too were a prey, at this juncture, to misgivings lest weeping should upset dowager lady Chia. Day and night oil was burnt and fires were, mindless of expense, kept alight. The bustle and confusion was such that no one, either master or servant, got any rest.

Chia She also sped on every side in search of Buddhist and Taoist priests. But Chia Cheng had witnessed how little relief these things could afford, and he felt constrained to dissuade Chia She from his endeavours. "The destiny," he argued, "of our son and daughter is entirely dependent upon the will of Heaven, and no human strength can prevail. The malady of these two persons would not be healed, even were every kind of treatment tried, and as I feel confident that it is the design of heaven that things should be as they are, all we can do is to allow it to carry out its purpose."

Chia She, however, paid no notice to his remonstrances and continued as hitherto to fuss in every imaginable way. In no time three days elapsed. Lady Feng and Pao Yü were still confined to their beds. Their very breaths had grown fainter. The whole household, therefore, unanimously arrived at the conclusion that there was no hope, and with all despatch they made every necessary preparation for the subsequent requirements of both their relatives.

Dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang, Chia Lien, P'ing Erh, Hsi Jen and the others indulged in tears with keener and keener anguish. They hung between life and death. Mrs. Chao alone was the one who assumed an outward sham air of distress, while in her heart she felt her wishes gratified.

The fourth day arrived. At an early hour Pao Yü suddenly opened his eyes and addressed himself to his grandmother Chia. "From this day forward," he said, "I may no longer abide in your house, so you had better send me off at once!"

These words made dowager lady Chia feel as if her very heart had been wrenched out of her. Mrs. Chao, who stood by, exhorted her. "You shouldn't, venerable lady," she said, "indulge in excessive grief. This young man has been long ago of no good; so wouldn't it be as well to dress him up and let him go back a moment sooner from this world. You'll also be thus sparing him considerable suffering. But, if you persist, in not reconciling yourself to the separation and this breath of his is not cut off, he will lie there and suffer without any respite...."

Her arguments were scarcely ended, when she was spat upon by dowager lady Chia. "You rotten-tongued, good-for-nothing hag!" she cried abusively. "What makes you fancy him of no good! You wish him dead and gone; but what benefit will you then derive? Don't give way to any dreams; for, if he does die, I'll just exact your lives from you! It's all because you've

been continuously at him, inciting and urging him to read and write, that his spirit has become so intimidated that, at the sight of his father, he behaves just like a rat trying to get out of the way of a cat! And is not all this the result of the bullying of such a mean herd of women as yourselves! Could you now drive him to death, your wishes would immediately be fulfilled; but which of you will I let off?"

Now she shed tears; now she gave vent to abuse.

Chia Cheng, who stood by, heard these invectives; and they so enhanced his exasperation that he promptly shouted out and made Mrs. Chao withdraw. He then exerted himself for a time to console (his senior) by using kindly accents. But suddenly some one came to announce that the two coffins had been completed. This announcement pierced, like a dagger, dowager lady Chia to the heart; and while weeping with despair more intense, she broke forth in violent upbraidings.

"Who is it,"—she inquired; "who gave orders to make the coffins? Bring at once the coffin-makers and beat them to death!"

A stir ensued sufficient to convulse the heavens and to subvert the earth. But at an unforeseen moment resounded in the air the gentle rapping of a 'wooden fish' bell. A voice recited the sentence: "Ave! Buddha able to unravel retribution and dispel grievances! Should any human being lie in sickness, and his family be solicitous on his account; or should any one have met with evil spirits and come across any baleful evils, we have the means to effect a cure."

Dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang at once directed servants to go out into the street and find out who it was. It turned out to be, in fact, a mangy-headed bonze and a hobbling Taoist priest. What was the appearance of the bonze?

*His nose like a suspended gall; his two eyebrows so long,
His eyes, resembling radiant stars, possessed a precious glow,
His coat in tatters and his shoes of straw, without a home;
Rolling in filth, and, a worse fate, his head one mass of boils.*

And the Taoist priest, what was he like?

*With one leg perched high he comes, with one leg low;
His whole frame drenching wet, bespattered all with mud.
If you perchance meet him, and ask him where's his home,
"In fairyland, west of the 'Weak Water,' he'll say."*

Chia Cheng ordered the servants to invite them to walk in. "On what hill," he asked those two persons, "do you cultivate the principles of reason?"

"Worthy official!" the bonze smiled, "you must not ask too many questions! It's because we've learnt that there are inmates of your honourable

page 16

mansion in a poor state of health that we come with the express design of working a cure."

"There are," explained Chia Cheng, "two of our members, who have been possessed of evil spirits. But, is there, I wonder, any remedy by means of which they could be healed?"

"In your family," laughingly observed the Taoist priest, "you have ready at hand a precious thing, the like of which is rare to find in the world. It possesses the virtue of alleviating the ailment, so why need you inquire about remedies?"

Chia Cheng's mind was forthwith aroused. "It's true," he consequently rejoined, "that my son brought along with him, at the time of his birth, a piece of jade, on the surface of which was inscribed that it had the virtue of dispelling evil influences, but we haven't seen any efficacy in it."

"There is, worthy officer," said the bonze, "something in it which you do not understand. That precious jade was, in its primitive state, efficacious, but consequent upon its having been polluted by music, lewdness, property and gain it has lost its spiritual properties. But produce now that valuable thing and wait till I have taken it into my hands and pronounced incantations over it, when it will become as full of efficacy as of old!"

Chia Cheng accordingly unclasped the piece of jade from Pao Yü's neck, and

handed it to the two divines. The Buddhist priest held it with reverence in the palm of his hand and heaving a deep sigh, "Since our parting," he cried, "at the foot of the Ch'ing Keng peak, about thirteen years have elapsed. How time flies in the mortal world! Thine earthly destiny has not yet been determined. Alas, alas! how admirable were the qualities thou did'st possess in those days!

*"By Heaven unrestrained, without constraint from Earth,
No joys lived in thy heart, but sorrows none as well;
Yet when perception, through refinement, thou did'st reach,
Thou went'st among mankind to trouble to give rise.
How sad the lot which thou of late hast had to hear!
Powder prints and rouge stains thy precious lustre dim.
House bars both day and night encage thee like a duck.
Deep wilt thou sleep, but from thy dream at length thou'lt wake,
Thy debt of vengeance, once discharged, thou wilt depart."*

At the conclusion of this recital, he again rubbed the stone for a while, and gave vent to some nonsensical utterances, after which he surrendered it to Chia Cheng. "This object," he said, "has already resumed its efficacy; but you shouldn't do anything to desecrate it. Hang it on the post of the door in his bedroom, and with the exception of his own relatives, you must not let any outside female pollute it. After the expiry of thirty-three days, he will, I can guarantee, be all right."

page 17

Chia Cheng then gave orders to present tea; but the two priests had already walked away. He had, however, no alternative but to comply with their injunctions, and lady Feng and Pao Yü, in point of fact, got better from day to day. Little by little they returned to their senses and experienced hunger. Dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang, at length, felt composed in their minds. All the cousins heard the news outside. Tai-yü, previous to anything else, muttered a prayer to Buddha; while Pao-ch'ai laughed and said not a word.

"Sister Pao," inquired Hsi Ch'un, "what are you laughing for?"

"I laugh," replied Pao-ch'ai, "because the 'Thus-Come' Joss has more to do than any human being. He's got to see to the conversion of all mankind, and to take care of the ailments, to which all flesh is heir; for he restores every one of them

at once to health; and he has as well to control people's marriages so as to bring them about through his aid; and what do you say, has he ample to do or not? Now, isn't this enough to make one laugh, eh?"

Lin Tai-yü blushed. "Ts'ui!" she exclaimed; "none of you are good people. Instead of following the example of worthy persons, you try to rival the mean mouth of that hussey Feng."

As she uttered these words, she raised the portiere and made her exit.

But, reader, do you want to know any further circumstances? If so, the next chapter will explain them to you.

CHAPTER XXVI.

On the Feng Yao bridge, Hsiao Hung makes known sentimental matters in equivocal language.

In the Hsiao Hsiang lodge, Tai-yü gives, while under the effects of the spring lassitude, expression to her secret feelings.

After thirty days' careful nursing, Pao Yü, we will now notice, not only got strong and hale in body, but the scars even on his face completely healed up; so he was able to shift his quarters again into the garden of Broad Vista.

But we will banish this topic as it does not deserve any additional explanations. Let us now turn our attention elsewhere. During the time that Pao Yü was of late laid up in bed, Chia Yün along with the young pages of the household sat up on watch to keep an eye over him, and both day and night, they tarried on this side of the mansion. But Hsiao Hung as well as all the other waiting-maids remained in the same part to nurse Pao Yü, so (Chia Yün) and she saw a good deal of each other on several occasions, and gradually an intimacy sprung up between them.

page 18

Hsiao Hung observed that Chia Yün held in his hand a handkerchief very much like the one she herself had dropped some time ago and was bent upon asking him for it, but she did, on the other hand, not think she could do so with propriety. The unexpected visit of the bonze and Taoist priest rendered, however, superfluous the services of the various male attendants, and Chia Yün had therefore to go again and oversee the men planting the trees. Now she had a mind to drop the whole question, but she could not reconcile herself to it; and now she longed to go and ask him about it, but fears rose in her mind lest people should entertain any suspicions as to the relations that existed between them. But just as she faltered, quite irresolute, and her heart was thoroughly unsettled, she unawares heard some one outside inquire: "Sister, are you in the room or not?"

Hsiao Hung, upon catching this question, looked out through a hole in the window; and perceiving at a glance that it was no one else than a young servant-girl, attached to the same court as herself, Chia Hui by name, she consequently said by way of reply: "Yes, I am; come in!"

When these words reached her ear, Chia Hui ran in, and taking at once a seat on the bed, she observed with a smile: "How lucky I've been! I was a little time back in the court washing a few things, when Pao Yü cried out that some tea should be sent over to Miss Lin, and sister Hua handed it to me to go on the errand. By a strange coincidence our old lady had presented some money to Miss Lin and she was engaged at the moment in distributing it among their servant-girls. As soon therefore as she saw me get there, Miss Lin forthwith grasped two handfuls of cash and gave them to me; how many there are I don't know, but do keep them for me!"

Speedily then opening her handkerchief, she emptied the cash. Hsiao Hung counted them for her by fives and tens at a time. She was beginning to put them away, when Chia Hui remarked: "How are you, after all, feeling of late in your mind? I'll tell you what; you should really go and stay at home for a couple of days. And were you to ask a doctor round and to have a few doses of medicine you'll get all right at once!"

"What are you talking about?" Hsiao Hung replied. "What shall I go home for, when there's neither rhyme nor reason for it!"

"Miss Lin, I remember, is naturally of a weak physique, and has constantly to take medicines," Chia Hui added, "so were you to ask her for some and bring them over and take them, it would come to the same thing."

"Nonsense!" rejoined Hsiao Hung, "are medicines also to be recklessly taken?"

"You can't so on for ever like this," continued Chia Hui; "you're

page 19

besides loth to eat and loth to drink, and what will you be like in the long run?"

"What's there to fear?" observed Hsiao Hung; "won't it anyhow be better to die a little earlier? It would be a riddance!"

"Why do you deliberately come out with all this talk?" Chia Hui demurred.

"How could you ever know anything of the secrets of my heart?" Hsiao Hung inquired.

Chia Hui nodded her head and gave way to reflection. "I don't think it strange on your part," she said after a time; "for it is really difficult to abide in this place! Yesterday, for instance, our dowager lady remarked that the servants in attendance had had, during all the days that Pao Yü was ill, a good deal to put up with, and that now that he has recovered, incense should be burnt everywhere, and the vows fulfilled; and she expressed a wish that those in his service should, one and all, be rewarded according to their grade. I and several others can be safely looked upon as young in years, and unworthy to presume so high; so I don't feel in any way aggrieved; but how is it that one like you couldn't be included in the number? My heart is much annoyed at it! Had there been any fear that Hsi Jen would have got ten times more, I could not even then have felt sore against her, for she really deserves it! I'll just tell you an honest truth; who else is there like her? Not to speak of the diligence and carefulness she has displayed all along, even had she not been so diligent and careful, she couldn't have been set aside! But what is provoking is that that lot, like Ch'ing Wen and Ch'i Hsia, should have been included in the upper class. Yet it's because every one places such reliance on the fine reputation of their father and mother that they exalt them. Now, do tell me, is this sufficient to anger one or not?"

"It won't do to be angry with them!" Hsiao Hung observed. "The proverb says: 'You may erect a shed a thousand li long, but there is no entertainment from which the guests will not disperse!' And who is it that will tarry here for a whole lifetime? In another three years or five years every single one of us will have gone her own way; and who will, when that time comes, worry her mind about any one else?"

These allusions had the unexpected effect of touching Chia Hui to the heart; and in spite of herself the very balls of her eyes got red. But so uneasy did she feel at crying for no reason that she had to exert herself to force a smile. "What you say is true," she ventured. "And yet, Pao Yü even yesterday explained how the rooms should be arranged by and bye; and how the clothes should be made, just as if he was bound to hang on to dear life for several hundreds of years."

page 20

Hsiao Hung, at these words, gave a couple of sardonic smiles. But when about to pass some remark, she perceived a youthful servant-girl, who had not as yet let her hair grow, walk in, holding in her hands several patterns and two sheets of

paper. "You are asked," she said, "to trace these two designs!"

As she spoke, she threw them at Hsiao Hung, and twisting herself round, she immediately scampered away.

"Whose are they, after all?" Hsiao Hung inquired, addressing herself outside. "Couldn't you wait even so much as to conclude what you had to say, but flew off at once? Who is steaming bread and waiting for you? Or are you afraid, forsooth, lest it should get cold?"

"They belong to sister Ch'i," the young servant-girl merely returned for answer from outside the window; and raising her feet high, she ran tramp-tramp on her way back again.

Hsiao Hung lost control over her temper, and snatching the designs, she flung them on one side. She then rummaged in a drawer for a pencil, but finding, after a prolonged search, that they were all blunt; "Where did I," she thereupon ejaculated, "put that brand-new pencil the other day? How is it I can't remember where it is?"

While she soliloquised, she became wrapt in thought. After some reflection she, at length, gave a smile. "Of course!" she exclaimed, "the other evening Ying Erh took it away." And turning towards Chia Hui, "Fetch it for me," she shouted.

"Sister Hua," Chia Hui rejoined, "is waiting for me to get a box for her, so you had better go for it yourself!"

"What!" remarked Hsiao Hung, "she's waiting for you, and are you still squatting here chatting leisurely? Hadn't it been that I asked you to go and fetch it, she too wouldn't have been waiting for you; you most perverse vixen!"

With these words on her lips, she herself walked out of the room, and leaving the I Hung court, she straightway proceeded in the direction of Pao-ch'ai's court. As soon, however, as she reached the Hsin Fang pavilion, she saw dame Li, Pao Yü's nurse, appear in view from the opposite side; so Hsiao Hung halted and putting on a smile, "Nurse Li," she asked, "where are you, old dame, bound for? How is it you're coming this way?"

Nurse Li stopped short, and clapped her hands. "Tell me," she said, "has he

deliberately again gone and fallen in love with that Mr. something or other like Yun (cloud), or Yü (rain)? They now insist upon my bringing him inside, but if they get wind of it by and bye in the upper rooms, it won't again be a nice thing."

page 21

"Are you, old lady," replied Hsiao Hung smiling, "taking things in such real earnest that you readily believe them and want to go and ask him in here?"

"What can I do?" rejoined nurse Li.

"Why, that fellow," added Hsiao Hung laughingly, "will, if he has any idea of decency, do the right thing and not come."

"Besides, he's not a fool!" pleaded nurse Li; "so why shouldn't he come in?"

"Well, if he is to come," answered Hsiao Hung, "it will devolve upon you, worthy dame, to lead him along with you; for were you by and bye to let him penetrate inside all alone and knock recklessly about, why, it won't do at all."

"Have I got all that leisure," retorted nurse Li, "to trudge along with him? I'll simply tell him to come; and later on I can despatch a young servant-girl or some old woman to bring him in, and have done."

Saying this, she continued her way, leaning on her staff.

After listening to her rejoinder, Hsiao Hung stood still; and plunging in abstraction, she did not go and fetch the pencil. But presently, she caught sight of a servant-girl running that way. Espying Hsiao Hung lingering in that spot, "Sister Hung," she cried, "what are you doing in here?"

Hsiao Hung raised her head, and recognised a young waiting-maid called Chui Erh. "Where are you off too?" Hsiao Hung asked.

"I've been told to bring in master Secundus, Mr. Yün," Chui Erh replied. After which answer, she there and then departed with all speed.

Hsiao Hung reached, meanwhile, the Feng Yao bridge. As soon as she approached the gateway, she perceived Chui Erh coming along with Chia Yün from the opposite direction. While advancing Chia Yün ogled Hsiao Hung; and

Hsiao Hung too, though pretending to be addressing herself to Chui Erh, cast a glance at Chia Yün; and their four eyes, as luck would have it, met. Hsiao Hung involuntarily blushed all over; and turning herself round, she walked off towards the Heng Wu court. But we will leave her there without further remarks.

During this time, Chia Yün followed Chui Erh, by a circuitous way, into the I Hung court. Chui Erh entered first and made the necessary announcement. Then subsequently she ushered in Chia Yün. When Chia Yün scrutinised the surroundings, he perceived, here and there in the court, several blocks of rockery, among which were planted banana-trees. On the opposite side were two storks preening their feathers under the fir trees. Under the covered passage were suspended, in a row, cages of every description, containing all sorts of fairylike, rare birds. In the upper part were five diminutive anterooms,

page 22

uniformly carved with, unique designs; and above the framework of the door was hung a tablet with the inscription in four huge characters—"I Hung K'uai Lü, the happy red and joyful green."

"I thought it strange," Chia Yün argued mentally, "that it should be called the I Hung court; but are these, in fact, the four characters inscribed on the tablet!"

But while he was communing within himself, he heard some one laugh and then exclaim from the inner side of the gauze window: "Come in at once! How is it that I've forgotten you these two or three months?"

As soon as Chia Yün recognised Pao Yü's voice, he entered the room with hurried step. On raising his head, his eye was attracted by the brilliant splendour emitted by gold and jade and by the dazzling lustre of the elegant arrangements. He failed, however, to detect where Pao Yü was ensconced. The moment he turned his head round, he espied, on the left side, a large cheval-glass; behind which appeared to view, standing side by side, two servant-girls of fifteen or sixteen years of age. "Master Secundus," they ventured, "please take a seat in the inner room."

Chia Yün could not even muster courage to look at them straight in the face; but promptly assenting, he walked into a green gauze mosquito-house, where he saw a small lacquered bed, hung with curtains of a deep red colour, with clusters of

flowers embroidered in gold. Pao Yü, wearing a house-dress and slipshod shoes, was reclining on the bed, a book in hand. The moment he perceived Chia Yün walk in, he discarded his book, and forthwith smiled and raised himself up. Chia Yün hurriedly pressed forward and paid his salutation. Pao Yü then offered him a seat; but he simply chose a chair in the lower part of the apartment.

“Ever since the moon in which I came across you,” Pao Yü observed smilingly, “and told you to come into the library, I’ve had, who would have thought it, endless things to continuously attend to, so that I forgot all about you.”

“It’s I, indeed, who lacked good fortune!” rejoined Chia Yün, with a laugh; “particularly so, as it again happened that you, uncle, fell ill. But are you quite right once more?”

“All right!” answered Pao Yü. “I heard that you’ve been put to much trouble and inconvenience on a good number of days!”

“Had I even had any trouble to bear,” added Chia Yün, “it would have been my duty to bear it. But your complete recovery, uncle, is really a blessing to our whole family.”

As he spoke, he discerned a couple of servant-maids come to help him to

page 23

a cup of tea. But while conversing with Pao Yü, Chia Yün was intent upon scrutinising the girl with slim figure, and oval face, and clad in a silvery-red jacket, a blue satin waistcoat and a white silk petticoat with narrow pleats.

At the time of Pao Yü’s illness, Chia Yün had spent a couple of days in the inner apartments, so that he remembered half of the inmates of note, and the moment he set eyes upon this servant-girl he knew that it was Hsi Jen; and that she was in Pao Yü’s rooms on a different standing to the rest. Now therefore that she brought the tea in herself and that Pao Yü was, besides, sitting by, he rose to his feet with alacrity and put on a smile. “Sister,” he said, “how is it that you are pouring tea for me? I came here to pay uncle a visit; what’s more I’m no stranger, so let me pour it with my own hands!”

“Just you sit down and finish!” Pao Yü interposed; “will you also behave in this

fashion with servant-girls?”

“In spite of what you say;” remarked Chia Yün smiling, “they are young ladies attached to your rooms, uncle, and how could I presume to be disorderly in my conduct?”

So saying, he took a seat and drank his tea. Pao Yü then talked to him about trivial and irrelevant matters; and afterwards went on to tell him in whose household the actresses were best, and whose gardens were pretty. He further mentioned to him in whose quarters the servant-girls were handsome, whose banquets were sumptuous, as well as in whose home were to be found strange things, and what family possessed remarkable objects. Chia Yün was constrained to humour him in his conversation; but after a chat, which lasted for some time, he noticed that Pao Yü was somewhat listless, and he promptly stood up and took his leave. And Pao Yü too did not use much pressure to detain him. “Tomorrow, if you have nothing to do, do come over!” he merely observed; after which, he again bade the young waiting-maid, Chui Erh, see him out.

Having left the I Hung court, Chia Yün cast a glance all round; and, realising that there was no one about, he slackened his pace at once, and while proceeding leisurely, he conversed, in a friendly way, with Chui Erh on one thing and another. First and foremost he inquired of her what was her age; and her name. “Of what standing are your father and mother?” he said, “How many years have you been in uncle Pao's apartments? How much money do you get a month? In all how many girls are there in uncle Pao's rooms?”

As Chui Erh heard the questions set to her, she readily made suitable reply to each.

“The one, who was a while back talking to you,” continued Chia Yün, “is called Hsiao Hung, isn't she?”

page 24

“Yes, her name is Hsiao Hung!” replied Chui Erh smiling; “but why do you ask about her?”

“She inquired of you just now about some handkerchief or other,” answered Chia Yün; “well, I've picked one up.”

Chui Erh greeted this response with a smile. "Many are the times," she said; "that she has asked me whether I had seen her handkerchief; but have I got all that leisure to worry my mind about such things? She spoke to me about it again to-day; and she suggested that I should find it for her, and that she would also recompense me. This she told me when we were just now at the entrance of the Heng Wu court, and you too, Mr. Secundus, overheard her, so that I'm not lying. But, dear Mr. Secundus, since you've picked it up, give it to me. Do! And I'll see what she will give me as a reward."

The truth is that Chia Yün had, the previous moon when he had come into the garden to attend to the planting of trees, picked up a handkerchief, which he conjectured must have been dropped by some inmate of those grounds; but as he was not aware whose it was, he did not consequently presume to act with indiscretion. But on this occasion, he overheard Hsiao Hung make inquiries of Chui Erh on the subject; and concluding that it must belong to her, he felt immeasurably delighted. Seeing, besides, how importunate Chui Erh was, he at once devised a plan within himself, and vehemently producing from his sleeve a handkerchief of his own, he observed, as he turned towards Chui Erh with a smile: "As for giving it to you, I'll do so; but in the event of your obtaining any present from her, you mustn't impose upon me."

Chui Erh assented to his proposal most profusely; and, taking the handkerchief, she saw Chia Yün out and then came back in search of Hsiao Hung. But we will leave her there for the present.

We will now return to Pao Yü. After dismissing Chia Yün, he lay in such complete listlessness on the bed that he betrayed every sign of being half asleep. Hsi Jen walked up to him, and seated herself on the edge of the bed, and pushing him, "What are you about to go to sleep again," she said. "Would it not do your languid spirits good if you went out for a bit of a stroll?"

Upon hearing her voice, Pao Yü grasped her hand in his. "I would like to go out," he smiled, "but I can't reconcile myself to the separation from you!"

"Get up at once!" laughed Hsi Jen. And as she uttered these words, she pulled Pao Yü up.

"Where can I go?" exclaimed Pao Yü. "I'm quite surfeited with everything."

“Once out you'll be all right,” Hsi Jen answered, “but if you simply give way to this languor, you'll be more than ever sick of everything at heart.”

Pao Yü could not do otherwise, dull and out of sorts though he was, than accede to her importunities. Strolling leisurely out of the door of the room, he amused himself a little with the birds suspended under the verandah; then he wended his steps outside the court, and followed the course of the Hsin Fang stream; but after admiring the golden fish for a time, he espied, on the opposite hillock, two young deer come rushing down as swift as an arrow. What they were up to Pao Yü could not discern; but while abandoning himself to melancholy, he caught sight of Chia Lan, following behind, with a small bow in his hand, and hurrying down hill in pursuit of them.

As soon as he realised that Pao Yü stood ahead of him, he speedily halted. “Uncle Secundus,” he smiled, “are you at home? I imagined you had gone out of doors!”

“You are up to mischief again, eh?” Pao Yü rejoined. “They've done nothing to you, and why shoot at them with your arrows?”

“I had no studies to attend to just now, so, being free with nothing to do,” Chia Lan replied laughingly, “I was practising riding and archery.”

“Shut up!” exclaimed Pao Yü. “When are you not engaged in practising?”

Saying this, he continued his way and straightway reached the entrance of a court. Here the bamboo foliage was thick, and the breeze sighed gently. This was the Hsiao Hsiang lodge. Pao Yü listlessly rambled in. He saw a bamboo portiere hanging down to the ground. Stillness prevailed. Not a human voice fell on the ear. He advanced as far as the window. Noticing that a whiff of subtle scent stole softly through the green gauze casement, Pao Yü applied his face closely against the frame to peep in, but suddenly he caught the faint sound of a deep sigh and the words: “Day after day my feelings slumber drowsily!” Upon overhearing this exclamation, Pao Yü unconsciously began to feel a prey to inward longings; but casting a second glance, he saw Tai-yü stretching herself on the bed.

“Why is it,” smiled Pao Yü, from outside the window, “that your feelings day after day slumber drowsily?” So saying, he raised the portiere and stepped in.

The consciousness that she had not been reticent about her feelings made Tai-yü unwittingly flush scarlet. Taking hold of her sleeve, she screened her face; and, turning her body round towards the inside, she pretended to be fast asleep. Pao Yü drew near her. He was about to pull her round when he saw Tai-yü's nurse enter the apartment, followed by two matrons.

page 26

“Is Miss asleep?” they said. “If so, we'll ask her over, when she wakes up.”

As these words were being spoken, Tai-yü eagerly twisted herself round and sat up. “Who's asleep?” she laughed.

“We thought you were fast asleep, Miss,” smiled the two or three matrons as soon as they perceived Tai-yü get up. This greeting over, they called Tzu Chüan. “Your young mistress,” they said, “has awoke; come in and wait on her!”

While calling her, they quitted the room in a body. Tai-yü remained seated on the bed. Raising her arms, she adjusted her hair, and smilingly she observed to Pao Yü, “When people are asleep, what do you walk in for?”

At the sight of her half-closed starlike eyes and of her fragrant cheeks, suffused with a crimson blush, Pao Yü's feelings were of a sudden awakened; so, bending his body, he took a seat on a chair, and asked with a smile: “What were you saying a short while back?”

“I wasn't saying anything,” Tai-yü replied.

“What a lie you're trying to ram down my throat!” laughed Pao Yü. “I heard all.”

But in the middle of their colloquy, they saw Tzu Chüan enter. Pao Yü then put on a smiling face. “Tzu Chüan!” he cried, “pour me a cup of your good tea!”

“Where's the good tea to be had?” Tzu Chüan answered. “If you want good tea, you'd better wait till Hsi Jen comes.”

“Don't heed him!” interposed Tai-yü. “Just go first and draw me some water.”

“He's a visitor,” remonstrated Tzu Chüan, “and, of course, I should first pour him a cup of tea, and then go and draw the water.”

With this answer, she started to serve the tea.

“My dear girl,” Pao Yü exclaimed laughingly, “If I could only share the same bridal curtain with your lovable young mistress, would I ever be able (to treat you as a servant) by making you fold the covers and make the beds.”

Lin Tai-yü at once drooped her head. “What are you saying?” she remonstrated.

“What, did I say anything?” smiled Pao Yü.

Tai-yü burst into tears. “You've recently,” she observed, “got into a new way. Whatever slang you happen to hear outside you come and tell me. And whenever you read any improper book, you poke your fun at me. What! have I become a laughing-stock for gentlemen!”

As she began to cry, she jumped down from bed, and promptly left the

page 27

room. Pao Yü was at a loss how to act. So agitated was he that he hastily ran up to her, “My dear cousin,” he pleaded, “I do deserve death; but don't go and tell any one! If again I venture to utter such kind of language, may blisters grow on my mouth and may my tongue waste away!”

But while appealing to her feelings, he saw Hsi Jen approach him. “Go back at once,” she cried, “and put on your clothes as master wants to see you.”

At the very mention of his father, Pao Yü felt suddenly as if struck by lightning. Regardless of everything and anything, he rushed, as fast as possible, back to his room, and changing his clothes, he came out into the garden. Here he discovered Pei Ming, standing at the second gateway, waiting for him.

“Do you perchance know what he wants me for?” Pao Yü inquired.

“Master, hurry out at once!” Pei Ming replied. “You must, of course, go and see

him. When you get there, you are sure to find out what it's all about.”

This said, he urged Pao Yü on, and together they turned past the large pavilion. Pao Yü was, however, still labouring under suspicion, when he heard, from the corner of the wall, a loud outburst of laughter. Upon turning his head round, he caught sight of Hsüeh P'an jump out, clapping his hands. “Hadn't I said that my uncle wanted you?” he laughed. “Would you ever have rushed out with such alacrity?”

Pei Ming also laughed, and fell on his knees. But Pao Yü remained for a long time under the spell of utter astonishment, before he, at length, realised that it was Hsüeh P'au who had inveigled him to come out.

Hsüeh P'an hastily made a salutation and a curtsy, and confessed his fault. He next gave way to entreaties, saying: “Don't punish the young servant, for it is simply I who begged him go.”

Pao Yü too had then no other alternative but to smile. “I don't mind your playing your larks on me; but why,” he inquired, “did you mention my father? Were I to go and tell my aunt, your mother, to see to the rights and the wrongs of the case, how would you like it?”

“My dear cousin,” remarked Hsüeh P'an vehemently, “the primary idea I had in view was to ask you to come out a moment sooner and I forgot to respectfully shun the expression. But by and bye, when you wish to chaff me, just you likewise allude to my father, and we'll thus be square.”

“Ai-ya!” exclaimed Pao Yü. “You do more than ever deserve death!!” Then turning again towards Pei Ming, “You ruffian!” he said, “what are you still kneeling for?”

Pei Ming began to bump his head on the ground with vehemence.

“Had it been for anything else,” Hsüeh P'an chimed in, “I wouldn't have made bold to disturb you; but it's simply in connection with my birthday

page 28

which is to-morrow, the third day of the fifth moon. Ch'eng Jih-hsing, who is in

that curio shop of ours, unexpectedly brought along, goodness knows where he fished them from, fresh lotus so thick and so long, so mealy and so crisp; melons of this size; and a Siamese porpoise, that long and that big, smoked with cedar, such as is sent as tribute from the kingdom of Siam. Are not these four presents, pray, rare delicacies? The porpoise is not only expensive, but difficult to get, and that kind of lotus and melon must have cost him no end of trouble to grow! I lost no time in presenting some to my mother, and at once sent some to your old grandmother, and my aunt. But a good many of them still remain now; and were I to eat them all alone, it would, I fear, be more than I deserve; so I concluded, after thinking right and left, that there was, besides myself, only you good enough to partake of some. That is why I specially invite you to taste them. But, as luck would have it, a young singing-boy has also come, so what do you say to you and I having a jolly day of it?"

As they talked, they walked; and, as they walked, they reached the interior of the library. Here they discovered a whole assemblage consisting of Tan Kuang, Ch'eng Jih-hsing, Hu Ch'i-lai, Tan T'ing-jen and others, and the singing-boy as well. As soon as these saw Pao Yü walk in, some paid their respects to him; others inquired how he was; and after the interchange of salutations, tea was drunk. Hsüeh P'an then gave orders to serve the wine. Scarcely were the words out of his mouth than the servant-lads bustled and fussed for a long while laying the table. When at last the necessary arrangements had been completed, the company took their seats.

Pao Yü verily found the melons and lotus of an exceptional description. "My birthday presents have not as yet been sent round," he felt impelled to say, a smile on his lips, "and here I come, ahead of them, to trespass on your hospitality."

"Just so!" retorted Hsüeh P'an, "but when you come to-morrow to congratulate me we'll consider what novel kind of present you can give me."

"I've got nothing that I can give you," rejoined Pao Yü. "As far as money, clothes, eatables and other such articles go, they are not really mine: all I can call my own are such pages of characters that I may write, or pictures that I may draw."

"Your reference to pictures," added Hsüeh P'an smiling, "reminds me of a book I saw yesterday, containing immodest drawings; they were, truly, beautifully done. On the front page there figured also a whole lot of characters. But I didn't

carefully look at them; I simply noticed the name of the person, who had executed them. It was, in fact, something or other like Keng Huang. The pictures were, actually, exceedingly good!”

This allusion made Pao Yü exercise his mind with innumerable conjectures.

“Of pictures drawn from past years to the present, I have,” he said, “seen a good many, but I've never come across any Keng Huang.”

After considerable thought, he could not repress himself from bursting out laughing. Then asking a servant to fetch him a pencil, he wrote a couple of words on the palm of his hand. This done, he went on to inquire of Hsüeh P'an: “Did you see correctly that it read Keng Huang?”

“How could I not have seen correctly?” ejaculated Hsüeh P'an.

Pao Yü thereupon unclenched his hand and allowed him to peruse, what was written in it. “Were they possibly these two characters?” he remarked. “These are, in point of fact, not very dissimilar from what Keng Huang look like?”

On scrutinising them, the company noticed the two words T'ang Yin, and they all laughed. “They must, we fancy, have been these two characters!” they cried. “Your eyes, Sir, may, there's no saying, have suddenly grown dim!”

Hsüeh P'an felt utterly abashed. “Who could have said,” he smiled, “whether they were T'ang Yin or Kuo Yin, (candied silver or fruit silver).”

As he cracked this joke, however, a young page came and announced that Mr. Feng had arrived. Pao Yü concluded that the new comer must be Feng Tzu-ying, the son of Feng T'ang, general with the prefix of Shen Wu.”

“Ask him in at once,” Hsüeh P'an and his companions shouted with one voice.

But barely were these words out of their mouths, than they realised that Feng Tzu-ying had already stepped in, talking and laughing as he approached.

The company speedily rose from table and offered him a seat.

“That's right!” smiled Feng Tzu-ying. “You don't go out of doors, but remain at home and go in for high fun!”

Both Pao Yü and Hsüeh P'an put on a smile. “We haven't,” they remarked, “seen

you for ever so long. Is your venerable father strong and hale?"

"My father," rejoined Tzu-ying, "is, thanks to you, strong and hale; but my mother recently contracted a sudden chill and has been unwell for a couple of days."

Hsüeh P'an discerned on his face a slight bluish wound. "With whom have you again been boxing," he laughingly inquired, "that you've hung up this sign board?"

"Since the occasion," laughed Feng Tzu-ying, "on which I wounded lieutenant-colonel Ch'ou's son, I've borne the lesson in mind, and never lost my temper. So how is it you say that I've again been boxing? This thing

page 30

on my face was caused, when I was out shooting the other day on the T'ieh Wang hills, by a flap from the wing of the falcon."

"When was that?" asked Pao Yü.

"I started," explained Tzu-ying, "on the 28th of the third moon and came back only the day before yesterday."

"It isn't to be wondered at then," observed Pao Yü, "that when I went the other day, on the third and fourth, to a banquet at friend Shen's house, I didn't see you there. Yet I meant to have inquired about you; but I don't know how it slipped from my memory. Did you go alone, or did your venerable father accompany you?"

"Of course, my father went," Tzu-ying replied, "so I had no help but to go. For is it likely, forsooth, that I've gone mad from lack of anything to do! Don't we, a goodly number as we are, derive enough pleasure from our wine-bouts and plays that I should go in quest of such kind of fatiguing recreation! But in this instance a great piece of good fortune turned up in evil fortune!"

Hsüeh P'an and his companions noticed that he had finished his tea. "Come along," they one and all proposed, "and join the banquet; you can then quietly recount to us all your experiences."

At this suggestion Feng Tzu-ying there and then rose to his feet. "According to etiquette," he said. "I should join you in drinking a few cups; but to-day I have still a very urgent matter to see my father about on my return so that I truly cannot accept your invitation."

Hsüeh P'an, Pao Yü and the other young fellows would on no account listen to his excuses. They pulled him vigorously about and would not let him go.

"This is, indeed, strange!" laughed Feng Tzu-ying. "When have you and I had, during all these years, to have recourse to such proceedings! I really am unable to comply with your wishes. But if you do insist upon making me have a drink, well, then bring a large cup and I'll take two cups full and finish."

After this rejoinder, the party could not but give in. Hsüeh P'an took hold of the kettle, while Pao Yü grasped the cup, and they poured two large cups full. Feng Tzu-ying stood up and quaffed them with one draught.

"But do, after all," urged Pao Yü, "finish this thing about a piece of good fortune in the midst of misfortune before you go."

"To tell you this to-day," smiled Feng Tzu-ying, "will be no great fun. But for this purpose I intend standing a special entertainment, and inviting you all to come and have a long chat; and, in the second place, I've also got a favour to ask of you."

page 31

Saying this, he pushed his way and was going off at once, when Hsüeh P'an interposed. "What you've said," he observed, "has put us more than ever on pins and needles. We cannot brook any delay. Who knows when you will ask us round; so better tell us, and thus avoid keeping people in suspense!"

"The latest," rejoined Feng Tzu-ying, "in ten days; the earliest in eight." With this answer he went out of the door, mounted his horse, and took his departure.

The party resumed their seats at table. They had another bout, and then eventually dispersed.

Pao Yü returned into the garden in time to find Hsi Jen thinking with solicitude that he had gone to see Chia Cheng and wondering whether it foreboded good or evil. As soon as she perceived Pao Yü come back in a drunken state, she felt urged to inquire the reason of it all. Pao Yü told her one by one the particulars of what happened.

“People,” added Hsi Jen, “wait for you with lacerated heart and anxious mind, and there you go and make merry; yet you could very well, after all, have sent some one with a message.”

“Didn't I purpose sending a message?” exclaimed Pao Yü. “Of course, I did! But I failed to do so, as on the arrival of friend Feng, I got so mixed up that the intention vanished entirely from my mind.”

While excusing himself, he saw Pao-ch'ai enter the apartment. “Have you tasted any of our new things?” she asked, a smile curling her lips.

“Cousin,” laughed Pao Yü, “you must have certainly tasted what you've got in your house long before us.”

Pao-ch'ai shook her head and smiled. “Yesterday,” she said, “my brother did actually make it a point to ask me to have some; but I had none; I told him to keep them and send them to others, so confident am I that with my mean lot and scanty blessings I little deserve to touch such dainties.”

As she spoke, a servant-girl poured her a cup of tea and brought it to her. While she sipped it, she carried on a conversation on irrelevant matters; which we need not notice, but turn our attention to Lin Tai-yü.

The instant she heard that Chia Cheng had sent for Pao Yü, and that he had not come back during the whole day, she felt very distressed on his account. After supper, the news of Pao Yü's return reached her, and she keenly longed to see him and ask him what was up. Step by step she trudged along, when espying Pao-ch'ai going into Pao Yü's garden, she herself followed close in her track. But on their arrival at the Hsin Fang bridge, she caught sight of the various kinds of water-fowl, bathing together in the pond, and although unable to discriminate the numerous species, her gaze became so transfixed by their respective variegated and bright plumage and by their exceptional

beauty, that she halted. And it was after she had spent some considerable time in admiring them that she repaired at last to the I Hung court. The gate was already closed. Tai-yü, however, lost no time in knocking. But Ch'ing Wen and Pi Hen had, who would have thought it, been having a tiff, and were in a captious mood, so upon unawares seeing Pao-ch'ai step on the scene, Ch'ing Wen at once visited her resentment upon Pao-ch'ai. She was just standing in the court giving vent to her wrongs, shouting: "You're always running over and seating yourself here, whether you've got good reason for doing so or not; and there's no sleep for us at the third watch, the middle of the night though it be," when, all of a sudden, she heard some one else calling at the door. Ch'ing Wen was the more moved to anger. Without even asking who it was, she rapidly bawled out: "They've all gone to sleep; you'd better come to-morrow."

Lin Tai-yü was well aware of the natural peculiarities of the waiting-maids, and of their habit of playing practical jokes upon each other, so fearing that the girl in the inner room had failed to recognise her voice, and had refused to open under the misconception that it was some other servant-girl, she gave a second shout in a higher pitch. "It's I!" she cried, "don't you yet open the gate?"

Ch'ing Wen, as it happened, did not still distinguish her voice; and in an irritable strain, she rejoined: "It's no matter who you may be; Mr. Secundus has given orders that no one at all should be allowed to come in."

As these words reached Lin Tai-yü's ear, she unwittingly was overcome with indignation at being left standing outside. But when on the point of raising her voice to ask her one or two things, and to start a quarrel with her; "albeit," she again argued mentally, "I can call this my aunt's house, and it should be just as if it were my own, it's, after all, a strange place, and now that my father and mother are both dead, and that I am left with no one to rely upon, I have for the present to depend upon her family for a home. Were I now therefore to give way to a regular fit of anger with her, I'll really get no good out of it."

While indulging in reflection, tears trickled from her eyes. But just as she was feeling unable to retrace her steps, and unable to remain standing any longer, and quite at a loss what to do, she overheard the sound of jocular language inside, and listening carefully, she discovered that it was, indeed, Pao Yü and Pao-ch'ai. Lin Tai-yü waxed more wroth. After much thought and cogitation, the incidents

of the morning flashed unawares through her memory. "It must, in fact," she mused, "be because Pao Yü is angry with me for having explained to him the true reasons. But why did I ever go and tell you? You should, however, have made inquiries before you lost your

page 33

temper to such an extent with me as to refuse to let me in to-day; but is it likely that we shall not by and bye meet face to face again?"

The more she gave way to thought, the more she felt wounded and agitated; and without heeding the moss, laden with cold dew, the path covered with vegetation, and the chilly blasts of wind, she lingered all alone, under the shadow of the bushes at the corner of the wall, so thoroughly sad and dejected that she broke forth into sobs.

Lin Tai-yü was, indeed, endowed with exceptional beauty and with charms rarely met with in the world. As soon therefore as she suddenly melted into tears, and the birds and rooks roosting on the neighbouring willow boughs and branches of shrubs caught the sound of her plaintive tones, they one and all fell into a most terrific flutter, and, taking to their wings, they flew away to distant recesses, so little were they able to listen with equanimity to such accents. But the spirits of the flowers were, at the time, silent and devoid of feeling, the birds were plunged in dreams and in a state of stupor, so why did they start? A stanza appositely assigns the reason:—

*P'in Erh's mental talents and looks must in the world be rare—
Alone, clasped in a subtle smell, she quits her maiden room.
The sound of but one single sob scarcely dies away,
And drooping flowers cover the ground and birds fly in dismay.*

Lin Tai-yü was sobbing in her solitude, when a creaking noise struck her ear and the door of the court was flung open. Who came out, is not yet ascertained; but, reader, should you wish to know, the next chapter will explain.

CHAPTER XXVII.

In the Ti Ts'ui pavilion, Pao-ch'ai diverts herself with the multi-coloured butterflies.

Over the mound, where the flowers had been interred, Tai-yü bewails their withered bloom.

Tai-yü, we must explain in taking up the thread of our narrative, was disconsolately bathed in tears, when her ear was suddenly attracted by the creak of the court gate, and her eyes by the appearance of Pao-ch'ai beyond the threshold. Pao Yü, Hsi Jen and a whole posse of inmates then walked out. She felt inclined to go up to Pao Yü and ask him a question; but dreading that if she made any inquiries in the presence of such a company, Pao Yü would be put to the blush and placed in an awkward position, she slipped aside and allowed Pao-ch'ai to prosecute her way. And it was only after Pao Yü and the rest of the party had entered and closed the gate behind them

page 34

that she at last issued from her retreat. Then fixing her gaze steadfastly on the gateway, she dropped a few tears. But inwardly conscious of their utter futility she retraced her footsteps and wended her way back into her apartment. And with heavy heart and despondent spirits, she divested herself of the remainder of her habiliments.

Tzu Chüan and Hsüeh Yen were well aware, from the experience they had reaped in past days, that Tai-yü was, in the absence of anything to occupy her mind, prone to sit and mope, and that if she did not frown her eyebrows, she anyway heaved deep sighs; but they were quite at a loss to divine why she was, with no rhyme or reason, ever so ready to indulge, to herself, in inexhaustible gushes of tears. At first, there were such as still endeavoured to afford her solace; or who, suspecting lest she brooded over the memory of her father and mother, felt home-sick, or aggrieved, through some offence given her, tried by every persuasion to console and cheer her; but, as contrary to all expectations, she subsequently persisted time and again in this dull mood, through each succeeding month and year, people got accustomed to her eccentricities and did not extend to her the least sympathy. Hence it was that no one (on this occasion) troubled her mind about her, but letting her sit and sulk to her heart's content,

they one and all turned in and went to sleep.

Tai-yü leaned against the railing of the bed, clasping her knees with both hands, her eyes suffused with tears. She looked, in very truth, like a carved wooden image or one fashioned of mud. There she sat straight up to the second watch, even later, when she eventually fell asleep.

The whole night nothing remarkable transpired. The morrow was the 26th day of the fourth moon. Indeed on this day, at one p.m., commenced the season of the 'Sprouting seeds,' and, according to an old custom, on the day on which this feast of 'Sprouting seeds' fell, every one had to lay all kinds of offerings and sacrificial viands on the altar of the god of flowers. Soon after the expiry of this season of 'Sprouting seeds' follows summertime, and as plants in general then wither and the god of flowers resigns his throne, it is compulsory to feast him at some entertainment, previous to his departure.

In the ladies' apartments this custom was observed with still more rigour; and, for this reason, the various inmates of the park of Broad Vista had, without a single exception, got up at an early hour. The young people either twisted flowers and willow twigs in such a way as to represent chairs and horses, or made tufted banners with damask, brocaded gauze and silk, and bound them with variegated threads. These articles of decoration were alike attached on every tree and plant; and throughout the whole expanse of the park, embroidered sashes waved to and fro, and ornamented branches nodded their heads

page 35

about. In addition to this, the members of the family were clad in such fineries that they put the peach tree to shame, made the almond yield the palm, the swallow envious and the hawk to blush. We could not therefore exhaustively describe them within our limited space of time.

Pao-ch'ai, Ying Ch'un, T'an Ch'un, Hsi Ch'un, Li Wan, lady Feng and other girls, as well as Ta Chieh Erh, Hsiang Ling and the waiting-maids were, one and all, we will now notice, in the garden enjoying themselves; the only person who could not be seen was Tai-yü.

“How is it,” consequently inquired Ying Ch'un, “that I don't see cousin Liu? What a lazy girl! Is she forsooth fast asleep even at this late hour of the day?”

“Wait all of you here,” rejoined Pao-ch'ai, “and I'll go and shake her up and bring her.”

With these words, she speedily left her companions and repaired straightway into the Hsiao Hsiang lodge.

While she was going on her errand, she met Wen Kuan and the rest of the girls, twelve in all, on their way to seek the party. Drawing near, they inquired after her health. After exchanging a few commonplace remarks, Pao-ch'ai turned round and pointing, said: “you will find them all in there; you had better go and join them. As for me, I'm going to fetch Miss Lin, but I'll be back soon.”

Saying this, she followed the winding path, and came to the Hsiao Hsiang lodge. Upon suddenly raising her eyes, she saw Pao Yü walk in. Pao-ch'ai immediately halted, and, lowering her head, she gave way to meditation for a time. “Pao Yü and Tai-yü,” she reflected, “have grown up together from their very infancy. But cousins, though they be, there are many instances in which they cannot evade suspicion, for they joke without heeding propriety; and at one time they are friends and at another at daggers drawn. Tai-yü has, moreover, always been full of envy; and has ever displayed a peevish disposition, so were I to follow him in at this juncture, why, Pao Yü would, in the first place, not feel at ease, and, in the second, Tai-yü would give way to jealousy. Better therefore for me to turn back.”

At the close of this train of thought, she retraced her steps. But just as she was starting to join her other cousins, she unexpectedly descried, ahead of her, a pair of jade-coloured butterflies, of the size of a circular fan. Now they soared high, now they made a swoop down, in their flight against the breeze; much to her amusement.

Pao-ch'ai felt a wish to catch them for mere fun's sake, so producing a fan from inside her sleeve, she descended on to the turfed ground to flap them with it. The two butterflies suddenly were seen to rise; suddenly to drop: sometimes

to come; at others to go. Just as they were on the point of flying across the stream to the other side, the enticement proved too much for Pao-ch'ai, and she

pursued them on tiptoe straight up to the Ti Ts'ui pavilion, nestling on the bank of the pond; while fragrant perspiration dripped drop by drop, and her sweet breath panted gently. But Pao-ch'ai abandoned the idea of catching them, and was about to beat a retreat, when all at once she overheard, in the pavilion, the chatter of people engaged in conversation.

This pavilion had, it must be added, a verandah and zig-zag balustrades running all round. It was erected over the water, in the centre of a pond, and had on the four sides window-frames of carved wood work, stuck with paper. So when Pao-ch'ai caught, from without the pavilion, the sound of voices, she at once stood still and lent an attentive ear to what was being said.

“Look at this handkerchief,” she overheard. “If it's really the one you've lost, well then keep it; but if it isn't you must return it to Mr. Yün.”

“To be sure it is my own,” another party observed, “bring it along and give it to me.”

“What reward will you give me?” she further heard. “Is it likely that I've searched all for nothing!”

“I've long ago promised to recompense you, and of course I won't play you false,” some one again rejoined.

“I found it and brought it round,” also reached her ear, “and you naturally will recompense me; but won't you give anything to the person who picked it up?”

“Don't talk nonsense,” the other party added, “he belongs to a family of gentlemen, and anything of ours he may pick up it's his bounden duty to restore to us. What reward could you have me give him?”

“If you don't reward him,” she heard some one continue, “what will I be able to tell him? Besides, he enjoined me time after time that if there was to be no recompense, I was not to give it to you.”

A short pause ensued. “Never mind!” then came out again to her, “take this thing of mine and present it to him and have done! But do you mean to let the cat out of the bag with any one else? You should take some oath.”

“If I tell any one,” she likewise overheard, “may an ulcer grow on my mouth,

and may I, in course of time, die an unnatural death!”

“Ai-ya!” was the reply she heard; “our minds are merely bent upon talking, but some one might come and quietly listen from outside; wouldn't it be as well to push all the venetians open. Any one seeing us in here will then imagine that we are simply chatting about nonsense. Besides, should

page 37

they approach, we shall be able to observe them, and at once stop our conversation!”

Pao-ch'ai listened to these words from outside, with a heart full of astonishment. “How can one wonder,” she argued mentally, “if all those lewd and dishonest people, who have lived from olden times to the present, have devised such thorough artifices! But were they now to open and see me here, won't they feel ashamed. Moreover, the voice in which those remarks were uttered resembles very much that of Hung Erh, attached to Pao Yü's rooms, who has all along shown a sharp eye and a shrewd mind. She's an artful and perverse thing of the first class! And as I have now overheard her peccadilloes, and a person in despair rebels as sure as a dog in distress jumps over the wall, not only will trouble arise, but I too shall derive no benefit. It would be better at present therefore for me to lose no time in retiring. But as I fear I mayn't be in time to get out of the way, the only alternative for me is to make use of some art like that of the cicada, which can divest itself of its *exuviae*.”

She had scarcely brought her reflections to a close before a sound of 'ko-chih' reached her ears. Pao-ch'ai purposely hastened to tread with heavy step. “P'in Erh, I see where you're hiding!” she cried out laughingly; and as she shouted, she pretended to be running ahead in pursuit of her.

As soon as Hsiao Hung and Chui Erh pushed the windows open from inside the pavilion, they heard Pao-ch'ai screaming, while rushing forward; and both fell into a state of trepidation from the fright they sustained.

Pao-ch'ai turned round and faced them. “Where have you been hiding Miss Lin?” she smiled.

“Who has seen anything of Miss Lin,” retorted Chui Erh.

“I was just now,” proceeded Pao-ch'ai, “on that side of the pool, and discerned Miss Lin squatting down over there and playing with the water. I meant to have gently given her a start, but scarcely had I walked up to her, when she saw me, and, with a detour towards the East, she at once vanished from sight. So mayn't she be concealing herself in there?”

As she spoke, she designedly stepped in and searched about for her. This over, she betook herself away, adding: “she's certain to have got again into that cave in the hill, and come across a snake, which must have bitten her and put an end to her.”

So saying, she distanced them, feeling again very much amused. “I have managed,” she thought, “to ward off this piece of business, but I wonder what those two think about it.”

Hsiao Hung, who would have anticipated, readily credited as gospel the remarks she heard Pao-ch'ai

page 38

make. But allowing just time enough to Pao-ch'ai to get to a certain distance, she instantly drew Chui Erh to her. “Dreadful!” she observed, “Miss Lin was squatting in here and must for a certainty have overheard what we said before she left.”

Albeit Chui Erh listened to her words, she kept her own counsel for a long time. “What's to be done?” Hsiao Hung consequently exclaimed.

“Even supposing she did overhear what we said,” rejoined Chui Erh by way of answer, “why should she meddle in what does not concern her? Every one should mind her own business.”

“Had it been Miss Pao, it would not have mattered,” remarked Hsiao Hung, “but Miss Lin delights in telling mean things of people and is, besides, so petty-minded. Should she have heard and anything perchance comes to light, what will we do?”

During their colloquy, they noticed Wen Kuan, Hsiang Ling, Ssu Ch'i, Shih Shu and the other girls enter the pavilion, so they were compelled to drop the

conversation and to play and laugh with them. They then espied lady Feng standing on the top of the hillock, waving her hand, beckoning to Hsiao Hung. Hurriedly therefore leaving the company, she ran up to lady Feng and with smile heaped upon smile, "my lady," she inquired, "what is it that you want?"

Lady Feng scrutinised her for a time. Observing how spruce and pretty she was in looks, and how genial in her speech, she felt prompted to give her a smile. "My own waiting-maid," she said, "hasn't followed me in here to-day; and as I've just this moment bethought myself of something and would like to send some one on an errand, I wonder whether you're fit to undertake the charge and deliver a message faithfully."

"Don't hesitate in entrusting me with any message you may have to send," replied Hsiao Hung with a laugh. "I'll readily go and deliver it. Should I not do so faithfully, and blunder in fulfilling your business, my lady, you may visit me with any punishment your ladyship may please, and I'll have nothing to say."

"What young lady's servant are you," smiled lady Feng? "Tell me, so that when she comes back, after I've sent you out, and looks for you, I may be able to tell her about you."

"I'm attached to our Master Secundus, Mr. Pao's rooms," answered Hsiao Hung.

"Ai-ya!" ejaculated lady Feng, as soon as she heard these words. "Are you really in Pao Yü's rooms! How strange! Yet it comes to the same thing. Well, if he asks for you, I'll tell him where you are. Go now to our house and tell your sister P'ing that she'll find on the table in the outer apartment and under the stand with the plate from the Ju kiln, a bundle of silver;

page 39

that it contains the one hundred and twenty taels for the embroiderers' wages; and that when Chang Ts'ai's wife comes, the money should be handed to her to take away, after having been weighed in her presence and been given to her to tally. Another thing too I want. In the inner apartment and at the head of the bed you'll find a small purse, bring it along to me."

Hsiao Hung listened to her orders and then started to carry them out. On her return, in a short while, she discovered that lady Feng was not on the hillock. But

perceiving Ssu Ch'i egress from the cave and stand still to tie her petticoat, she walked up to her. "Sister, do you know where our lady Secunda is gone to?" she asked.

"I didn't notice," rejoined Ssu Ch'i.

At this reply, Hsiao Hung turned round and cast a glance on all four quarters. Seeing T'an Ch'un and Pao-ch'ai standing by the bank of the pond on the opposite side and looking at the fish, Hsiao Hung advanced up to them. "Young ladies," she said, straining a smile, "do you perchance have any idea where our lady Secunda is gone to now?"

"Go into your senior lady's court and look for her!" T'an Ch'un answered.

Hearing this, Hsiao Hung was proceeding immediately towards the Tao Hsiang village, when she caught sight, just ahead of her, of Ch'ing Wen, Ch'i Hsia, Pi Hen, Ch'iu Wen, She Yüeh, Shih Shu, Ju Hua, Ying Erh and some other girls coming towards her in a group.

The moment Ch'ing Wen saw Hsiao Hung, she called out to her. "Are you gone clean off your head?" she exclaimed. "You don't water the flowers, nor feed the birds or prepare the tea stove, but gad about outside!"

"Yesterday," replied Hsiao Hung, "Mr. Secundus told me that there was no need for me to water the flowers to-day; that it was enough if they were watered every other day. As for the birds, you're still in the arms of Morpheus, sister, when I give them their food."

"And what about the tea-stove?" interposed Pi Hen.

"To-day," retorted Hsiao Hung, "is not my turn on duty, so don't ask me whether there be any tea or not!"

"Do you listen to that mouth of hers!" cried Ch'i Hsia, "but don't you girls speak to her; let her stroll about and have done!"

"You'd better all go and ask whether I've been gadding about or not," continued Hsiao Hung. "Our lady Secunda has just bidden me go and deliver a message, and fetch something."

Saying this, she raised the purse and let them see it; and they, finding they could hit upon nothing more to taunt her with, trudged along onwards.

Ch'ing Wen smiled a sarcastic smile. "How funny!" she cried. "Lo, she climbs up a high branch and doesn't condescend to look at any one of us!

page 40

All she told her must have been just some word or two, who knows! But is it likely that our lady has the least notion of her name or surname that she rides such a high horse, and behaves in this manner! What credit is it in having been sent on a trifling errand like this! Will we, by and bye, pray, hear anything more about you? If you've got any gumption, you'd better skedaddle out of this garden this very day. For, mind, it's only if you manage to hold your lofty perch for any length of time that you can be thought something of!"

As she derided her, she continued on her way.

During this while, Hsiao Hung listened to her, but as she did not find it a suitable moment to retaliate, she felt constrained to suppress her resentment and go in search of lady Feng.

On her arrival at widow Li's quarters, she, in point of fact, discovered lady Feng seated inside with her having a chat. Hsiao Hung approached her and made her report. "Sister P'ing says," she observed, "that as soon as your ladyship left the house, she put the money by, and that when Chang Ts'ai's wife went in a little time to fetch it, she had it weighed in her presence, after which she gave it to her to take away."

With these words, she produced the purse and presented it to her. "Sister P'ing bade me come and tell your ladyship," she added, continuing, "that Wang Erh came just now to crave your orders, as to who are the parties from whom he has to go and (collect interest on money due) and sister P'ing explained to him what your wishes were and sent him off."

"How could she tell him where I wanted him to go?" Lady Feng laughed.

"Sister P'ing says," Hsiao Hung proceeded, "that our lady presents her

compliments to your ladyship (widow Li) here-(*To lady Feng*) that our master Secundus has in fact not come home, and that albeit a delay of (a day) or two will take place (in the collection of the money), your ladyship should, she begs, set your mind at ease. (*To Li Wan*). That when lady Quinta is somewhat better, our lady will let lady Quinta know and come along with her to see your ladyship. (*To lady Feng*). That lady Quinta sent a servant the day before yesterday to come over and say that our lady, your worthy maternal aunt, had despatched a letter to inquire after your ladyship's health; that she also wished to ask you, my lady, her worthy niece in here, for a couple of 'long-life-great-efficacy-full-of-every-virtue' pills; and that if you have any, they should, when our lady bids a servant come over, be simply given her to bring to our lady here, and that any one bound to-morrow for that side could then deliver them on her way to her ladyship, your aunt yonder, to take along with her."

page 41

"Ai-yo-yo!" exclaimed widow Li, before the close of the message. "It's impossible for me to make out what you're driving at! What a heap of ladyships and misters!"

"It's not to be wondered at that you can't make them out," interposed lady Feng laughing. "Why, her remarks refer to four or five distinct families."

While speaking, she again faced Hsiao Hung. "My dear girl," she smiled, "what a trouble you've been put to! But you speak decently, and unlike the others who keep on buzz-buzz-buzz, like mosquitoes! You're not aware, sister-in-law, that I actually dread uttering a word to any of the girls outside the few servant-girls and matrons in my own immediate service; for they invariably spin out, what could be condensed in a single phrase, into a long interminable yarn, and they munch and chew their words; and sticking to a peculiar drawl, they groan and moan; so much so, that they exasperate me till I fly into a regular rage. Yet how are they to know that our P'ing Erh too was once like them. But when I asked her: 'must you forsooth imitate the humming of a mosquito, in order to be accounted a handsome girl?' and spoke to her, on several occasions, she at length improved considerably."

"What a good thing it would be," laughed Li Kung-ts'ai, "if they could all be as smart as you are."

“This girl is first-rate!” rejoined lady Feng, “she just now delivered two messages. They didn't, I admit, amount to much, yet to listen to her, she spoke to the point.”

“To-morrow,” she continued, addressing herself to Hsiao Hung smilingly, “come and wait on me, and I'll acknowledge you as my daughter; and the moment you come under my control, you'll readily improve.”

At this news, Hsiao Hung spurted out laughing aloud.

“What are you laughing for?” Lady Feng inquired. “You must say to yourself that I am young in years and that how much older can I be than yourself to become your mother; but are you under the influence of a spring dream? Go and ask all those people older than yourself. They would be only too ready to call me mother. But snapping my fingers at them, I to-day exalt you.”

“I wasn't laughing about that,” Hsiao Hung answered with a smiling face. “I was amused by the mistake your ladyship made about our generations. Why, my mother claims to be your daughter, my lady, and are you now going to recognise me too as your daughter?”

“Who's your mother?” Lady Feng exclaimed.

“Don't you actually know her?” put in Li Kung-ts'ai with a smile. “She's Lin Chih-hsiao's child.”

page 42

This disclosure greatly surprised lady Feng. “What!” she consequently cried, “is she really his daughter?”

“Why Lin Chih-hsiao and his wife,” she resumed smilingly, “couldn't either of them utter a sound if even they were pricked with an awl. I've always maintained that they're a well-suited couple; as the one is as deaf as a post, and the other as dumb as a mute. But who would ever have expected them to have such a clever girl! By how much are you in your teens?”

“I'm seventeen,” replied Hsia Hung.

“What is your name?” she went on to ask.

“My name was once Hung Yü.” Hsiao Hung rejoined. “But as it was a duplicate of that of Master Secundus, Mr. Pao Yü, I'm now simply called Hsiao Hung.”

Upon hearing this explanation, lady Feng raised her eyebrows into a frown, and turning her head round: “It's most disgusting!” she remarked, “Those bearing the name Yü would seem to be very cheap; for your name is Yü, and so is also mine Yü. Sister-in-law,” she then observed; “I never let you know anything about it, but I mentioned to her mother that Lai Ta's wife has at present her hands quite full, and that she hasn't either any notion as to who is who in this mansion. 'You had better,' (I said), 'carefully select a couple of girls for my service.' She assented unreservedly, but she put it off and never chose any. On the contrary, she sent this girl to some other place. But is it likely that she wouldn't have been well off with me?”

“Here you are again full of suspicion!” Li Wan laughed. “She came in here long before you ever breathed a word to her! So how could you bear a grudge against her mother?”

“Well, in that case,” added lady Feng, “I'll speak to Pao Yü to-morrow, and induce him to find another one, and to allow this girl to come along with me. I wonder, however, whether she herself is willing or not?”

“Whether willing or not,” interposed Hsiao Hung smiling, “such as we couldn't really presume to raise our voices and object. We should feel it our privilege to serve such a one as your ladyship, and learn a little how to discriminate when people raise or drop their eyebrows and eyes (with pleasure or displeasure), and reap as well some experience in such matters as go out or come in, whether high or low, great and small.”

But during her reply, she perceived Madame Wang's waiting-maid come and invite lady Feng to go over. Lady Feng bade good-bye at once to Li Kung-ts'ai and took her departure.

Hsiao Hung then returned into the I Hung court, where we will leave her and devote our attention for the present to Tai-yü.

As she had had but little sleep in the night, she got up the next day at a

late hour. When she heard that all her cousins were collected in the park, giving a farewell entertainment for the god of flowers, she hastened, for fear people should laugh at her for being lazy, to comb her hair, perform her ablutions, and go out and join them. As soon as she reached the interior of the court, she caught sight of Pao Yü, entering the door, who speedily greeted her with a smile. "My dear cousin," he said, "did you lodge a complaint against me yesterday? I've been on pins and needles the whole night long."

Tai-yü forthwith turned her head away. "Put the room in order," she shouted to Tzu Chüan, "and lower one of the gauze window-frames. And when you've seen the swallows come back, drop the curtain; keep it down then by placing the lion on it, and after you have burnt the incense, mind you cover the censer."

So saying she stepped outside.

Pao Yü perceiving her manner, concluded again that it must be on account of the incident of the previous noon, but how could he have had any idea about what had happened in the evening? He kept on still bowing and curtseying; but Tai-yü did not even so much as look at him straight in the face, but egressing alone out of the door of the court, she proceeded there and then in search of the other girls.

Pao Yü fell into a despondent mood and gave way to conjectures.

"Judging," he reflected, "from this behaviour of hers, it would seem as if it could not be for what transpired yesterday. Yesterday too I came back late in the evening, and, what's more, I didn't see her, so that there was no occasion on which I could have given her offence."

As he indulged in these reflections, he involuntarily followed in her footsteps to try and catch her up, when he descried Pao-ch'ai and T'an-ch'un on the opposite side watching the frolics of the storks.

As soon as they saw Tai-yü approach, the trio stood together and started a friendly chat. But noticing Pao Yü also come up, T'an Ch'un smiled. "Brother Pao," she said, "are you all right. It's just three days that I haven't seen anything of you?"

“Are you sister quite well?” Pao Yü rejoined, a smile on his lips. “The other day, I asked news of you of our senior sister-in-law.”

“Brother Pao,” T'an Ch'un remarked, “come over here; I want to tell you something.”

The moment Pao Yü heard this, he quickly went with her. Distancing Pao-ch'ai and Tai-yü, the two of them came under a pomegranate tree. “Has father sent for you these last few days?” T'an Ch'un then asked.

“He hasn't,” Pao Yü answered laughingly by way of reply.

“Yesterday,” proceeded T'an Ch'un, “I heard vaguely something or

page 44

other about father sending for you to go out.”

“I presume,” Pao Yü smiled, “that some one must have heard wrong, for he never sent for me.”

“I've again managed to save during the last few months,” added T'an Ch'un with another smile, “fully ten tiao, so take them and bring me, when at any time you stroll out of doors, either some fine writings or some ingenious knickknack.”

“Much as I have roamed inside and outside the city walls,” answered Pao Yü, “and seen grand establishments and large temples, I've never come across anything novel or pretty. One simply sees articles made of gold, jade, copper and porcelain, as well as such curios for which we could find no place here. Besides these, there are satins, eatables, and wearing apparel.”

“Who cares for such baubles!” exclaimed T'an Ch'un. “How could they come up to what you purchased the last time; that wee basket, made of willow twigs, that scent-box, scooped out of a root of real bamboo, that portable stove fashioned of glutinous clay; these things were, oh, so very nice! I was as fond of them as I don't know what; but, who'd have thought it, they fell in love with them and bundled them all off, just as if they were precious things.”

“Is it things of this kind that you really want?” laughed Pao Yü. “Why, these are

worth nothing! Were you to take a hundred cash and give them to the servant-boys, they could, I'm sure, bring two cart-loads of them.”

“What do the servant-boys know?” T'an Ch'un replied. “Those you chose for me were plain yet not commonplace. Neither were they of coarse make. So were you to procure me as many as you can get of them, I'll work you a pair of slippers like those I gave you last time, and spend twice as much trouble over them as I did over that pair you have. Now, what do you say to this bargain?”

“Your reference to this,” smiled Pao Yü, “reminds me of an old incident. One day I had them on, and by a strange coincidence, I met father, whose fancy they did not take, and he inquired who had worked them. But how could I muster up courage to allude to the three words: my sister Tertia, so I answered that my maternal aunt had given them to me on the recent occasion of my birthday. When father heard that they had been given to me by my aunt, he could not very well say anything. But after a while, 'why uselessly waste,' he observed, 'human labour, and throw away silks to make things of this sort!' On my return, I told Hsi Jen about it. 'Never mind,' said Hsi Jen; but Mrs. Chao got angry. 'Her own brother,' she murmured indignantly, 'wears slipshod shoes and socks in holes, and there's no one to look after him, and does she go and work all these things!’”

page 45

T'an Ch'un, hearing this, immediately lowered her face. “Now tell me, aren't these words utter rot!” she shouted. “What am I that I have to make shoes? And is it likely that Huan Erh hasn't his own share of things! Clothes are clothes, and shoes and socks are shoes and socks; and how is it that any grudges arise in the room of a mere servant-girl and old matron? For whose benefit does she come out with all these things! I simply work a pair or part of a pair when I am at leisure, with time on my hands. And I can give them to any brother, elder or younger, I fancy; and who has a right to interfere with me? This is just another bit of blind anger!”

After listening to her, Pao Yü nodded his head and smiled. “Yet,” he said, “you don't know what her motives may be. It's but natural that she should also cherish some expectations.”

This apology incensed T'an Ch'un more than ever, and twisting her head round, “Even you have grown dull!” she cried. “She does, of course, indulge in

expectations, but they are actuated by some underhand and paltry notion! She may go on giving way to these ideas, but I, for my part, will only care for Mr. Chia Cheng and Madame Wang. I won't care a rap for any one else. In fact, I'll be nice with such of my sisters and brothers, as are nice to me; and won't even draw any distinction between those born of primary wives and those of secondary ones. Properly speaking, I shouldn't say these things about her, but she's narrow-minded to a degree, and unlike what she should be. There's besides another ridiculous thing. This took place the last time I gave you the money to get me those trifles. Well, two days after that, she saw me, and she began again to represent that she had no money and that she was hard up. Nevertheless, I did not worry my brain with her goings on. But as it happened, the servant-girls subsequently quitted the room, and she at once started finding fault with me. 'Why,' she asked, 'do I give you my savings to spend and don't, after all, let Huan Erh have them and enjoy them?' When I heard these reproaches, I felt both inclined to laugh, and also disposed to lose my temper; but I there and then skedaddled out of her quarters, and went over to our Madame Wang."

As she was recounting this incident, "Well," she overheard Pao-ch'ai sarcastically observe from the opposite direction, "have you done spinning your yarns? If you have, come along! It's quite evident that you are brother and sister, for here you leave every one else and go and discuss your own private matters. Couldn't we too listen to a single sentence of what you have to say?"

While she taunted them, T'an Ch'un and Pao Yü eventually drew near her with smiling faces.

page 46

Pao Yü, however, failed to see Tai-yü and he concluded that she had dodged out of the way and gone elsewhere. "It would be better," he muttered, after some thought, "that I should let two days elapse, and give her temper time to evaporate before I go to her." But as he drooped his head, his eye was attracted by a heap of touch-me-nots, pomegranate blossom and various kinds of fallen flowers, which covered the ground thick as tapestry, and he heaved a sigh. "It's because," he pondered, "she's angry that she did not remove these flowers; but I'll take them over to the place, and by and bye ask her about them."

As he argued to himself, he heard Pao-ch'ai bid them go out. "I'll join you in a moment," Pao Yü replied; and waiting till his two cousins had gone some

distance, he bundled the flowers into his coat, and ascending the hill, he crossed the stream, penetrated into the arbour, passed through the avenues with flowers and wended his way straight for the spot, where he had, on a previous occasion, interred the peach-blossoms with the assistance of Tai-yü. But scarcely had he reached the mound containing the flowers, and before he had, as yet, rounded the brow of the hill, than he caught, emanating from the off side, the sound of some one sobbing, who while giving way to invective, wept in a most heart-rending way.

“I wonder,” soliloquised Pao Yü, “whose servant-girl this is, who has been so aggrieved as to run over here to have a good cry!”
While speculating within himself, he halted. He then heard, mingled with wails:

*Flowers wither and decay; and flowers do fleet; they fly all o'er the
skies;
Their bloom wanes; their smell dies; but who is there with them to
sympathise?
While vagrant gossamer soft doth on fluttering spring-bowers bind its
coils,
And drooping catkins lightly strike and cling on the embroidered
screens,
A maiden in the inner rooms, I sore deplore the close of spring.
Such ceaseless sorrow fills my breast, that solace nowhere can I find.
Past the embroidered screen I issue forth, taking with me a hoe,
And on the faded flowers to tread I needs must, as I come and go.
The willow fibres and elm seeds have each a fragrance of their own.
What care I, peach blossoms may fall, pear flowers away be blown;
Yet peach and pear will, when next year returns, burst out again in
bloom,
But can it e'er be told who will next year dwell in the inner room?
What time the third moon comes, the scented nests have been already
built.
And on the beams the swallows perch, excessive spiritless and staid;
Next year, when the flowers bud, they may, it's true, have ample to
feed on:
But they know not that when I'm gone beams will be vacant and nests
fall!
In a whole year, which doth consist of three hundred and sixty days,*

*Winds sharp as swords and frost like unto spears each other rigorous
press,
So that how long can last their beauty bright; their fresh charm how
long stays?
Sudden they droop and fly; and whither they have flown, 'tis hard to
guess.
Flowers, while in bloom, easy the eye attract; but, when they wither,
hard they are to find.*

page 47

*Now by the footsteps, I bury the flowers, but sorrow will slay me.
Alone I stand, and as I clutch the hoe, silent tears trickle down,
And drip on the bare twigs, leaving behind them the traces of blood.
The goatsucker hath sung his song, the shades lower of eventide,
So with the lotus hoe I return home and shut the double doors.
Upon the wall the green lamp sheds its rays just as I go to sleep.
The cover is yet cold; against the window patters the bleak rain.
How strange! Why can it ever be that I feel so wounded at heart!
Partly, because spring I regret; partly, because with spring I'm
vexed!
Regret for spring, because it sudden comes; vexed, for it sudden goes.
For without warning, lo! it comes; and without asking it doth fleet.
Yesterday night, outside the hall sorrowful songs burst from my mouth,
For I found out that flowers decay, and that birds also pass away.
The soul of flowers, and the spirit of birds are both hard to
restrain.
Birds, to themselves when left, in silence plunge; and flowers, alone,
they blush.
Oh! would that on my sides a pair of wings could grow,
That to the end of heaven I may fly in the wake of flowers!
Yea to the very end of heaven,
Where I could find a fragrant grave!
For better, is it not, that an embroidered bag should hold my
well-shaped bones,
And that a heap of stainless earth should in its folds my winsome
charms enshroud.
For spotless once my frame did come, and spotless again it will go!
Far better than that I, like filthy mire, should sink into some drain!*

*Ye flowers are now faded and gone, and, lo, I come to bury you.
But as for me, what day I shall see death is not as yet divined!
Here I am fain these flowers to inter; but humankind will laugh me as
a fool.
Who knows, who will, in years to come, commit me to my grave!
Mark, and you'll find the close of spring, and the gradual decay of
flowers,
Resemble faithfully the time of death of maidens ripe in years!
In a twinkle, spring time draws to a close, and maidens wax in age.
Flowers fade and maidens die; and of either nought any more is known.*

After listening to these effusions, Pao Yü unconsciously threw himself down in a wandering frame of mind.

But, reader, do you feel any interest in him? If you do, the subsequent chapter contains further details about him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

*Chiang Yü-han lovingly presents a rubia-scented silk sash.
Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai blushing covers her musk-perfumed string of red
beads.*

Lin Tai-yü, the story goes, dwelt, after Ch'ing Wen's refusal, the previous night, to open the door, under the impression that the blame lay with Pao-yü. The following day, which by another remarkable coincidence, happened to

page 48

correspond with the season, when the god of flowers had to be feasted, her total ignorance of the true circumstances, and her resentment, as yet unspent, aroused again in her despondent thoughts, suggested by the decline of spring time. She consequently gathered a quantity of faded flowers and fallen petals, and went and interred them. Unable to check the emotion, caused by the decay of the flowers, she spontaneously recited, after giving way to several loud lamentations, those verses which Pao-yü, she little thought, overheard from his position on the mound. At first, he did no more than nod his head and heave sighs, full of feeling. But when subsequently his ear caught:

*“Here I am fain these flowers to inter, but humankind will laugh me as
a fool;
Who knows who will, in years to come, commit me to my grave!
In a twinkle springtime draws to an end, and maidens wax in age.
Flowers fade and maidens die; and of either naught any more is known.”*

he unconsciously was so overpowered with grief that he threw himself on the mound, bestrewing the whole ground with the fallen flowers he carried in his coat, close to his chest. “When Tai-yü's flowerlike charms and moon-like beauty,” he reflected, “by and bye likewise reach a time when they will vanish beyond any hope of recovery, won't my heart be lacerated and my feelings be mangled! And extending, since Tai-yü must at length some day revert to a state when it will be difficult to find her, this reasoning to other persons, like Pao-ch'ai, Hsiang Ling, Hsi Jen and the other girls, they too are equally liable to attain a state beyond the reach of human search. But when Pao-ch'ai and all the

rest have ultimately reached that stage when no trace will be visible of them, where shall I myself be then? And when my own human form will have vanished and gone, whither I know not yet, to what person, I wonder, will this place, this garden and these plants, revert?"

From one to a second, and from a second to a third, he thus pursued his reflections, backwards and forwards, until he really did not know how he could best, at this time and at such a juncture, dispel his fit of anguish. His state is adequately described by:

*The shadow of a flower cannot err from the flower itself to the left
or the right.*

*The song of birds can only penetrate into the ear from the east or the
west.*

Lin Tai-yü was herself a prey to emotion and agitation, when unawares sorrowful accents also struck her ear, from the direction of the mound. "Every one," she cogitated, "laughs at me for labouring under a foolish mania, but is there likely another fool besides myself?" She then raised her head, and, casting a glance about her, she discovered that it was Pao-yü. "Ts'ui!" eagerly cried Tai-yü, "I was wondering who it was; but is it truly this ruthless-hearted and short-lived fellow!"

But the moment the two words "short-lived" dropped from her mouth,

page 49

she sealed her lips; and, heaving a deep sigh, she turned herself round and hurriedly walked off.

Pao-yü, meanwhile, remained for a time a prey to melancholy. But perceiving that Tai-yü had retired, he at once realised that she must have caught sight of him and got out of his way; and, as his own company afforded him no pleasure, he shook the dust off his clothes, rose to his feet and descending the hill, he started for the I Hung court by the path by which he had come. But he espied Tai-yü walking in advance of him, and with rapid stride, he overtook her. "Stop a little!" he cried. "I know you don't care a rap for me; but I'll just make one single remark, and from this day forward we'll part company."

Tai-yü looked round. Observing that it was Pao-yü, she was about to ignore him; hearing him however mention that he had only one thing to say, "Please tell me what it is," she forthwith rejoined.

Pao-yü smiled at her. "If I pass two remarks will you listen to me; yes or no?" he asked.

At these words, Tai-yü twisted herself round and beat a retreat. Pao-yü however followed behind.

"Since this is what we've come to now," he sighed, "what was the use of what existed between us in days gone by?"

As soon as Tai-yü heard his exclamation, she stopped short impulsively. Turning her face towards him, "what about days gone by," she remarked, "and what about now?"

"Ai!" ejaculated Pao-yü, "when you got here in days gone by, wasn't I your playmate in all your romps and in all your fun? My heart may have been set upon anything, but if you wanted it you could take it away at once. I may have been fond of any eatable, but if I came to learn that you too fancied it, I there and then put away what could be put away, in a clean place, to wait, Miss, for your return. We had our meals at one table; we slept in one and the same bed; whatever the servant-girls could not remember, I reminded them of, for fear lest your temper, Miss, should get ruffled. I flattered myself that cousins, who have grown up together from their infancy, as you and I have, would have continued, through intimacy or friendship, either would have done, in peace and harmony until the end, so as to make it palpable that we are above the rest. But, contrary to all my expectations, now that you, Miss, have developed in body as well as in mind, you don't take the least heed of me. You lay hold instead of some cousin Pao or cousin Feng or other from here, there and everywhere and give them a place in your affections; while on the contrary you disregard me for three days at a stretch and decline to see anything of me for four! I have besides no brother or sister of the same

page 50

mother as myself. It's true there are a couple of them, but these, are you not forsooth aware, are by another mother! You and I are only children, so I

ventured to hope that you would have reciprocated my feelings. But, who'd have thought it, I've simply thrown away this heart of mine, and here I am with plenty of woes to bear, but with nowhere to go and utter them!"

While expressing these sentiments, tears, unexpectedly, trickled from his eyes.

When Lin Tai-yü caught, with her ears, his protestations, and noticed with her eyes his state of mind, she unconsciously experienced an inward pang, and, much against her will, tears too besprinkled her cheeks; so, drooping her head, she kept silent.

Her manner did not escape Pao-yü's notice. "I myself am aware," he speedily resumed, "that I'm worth nothing now; but, however imperfect I may be, I could on no account presume to become guilty of any shortcoming with you cousin. Were I to ever commit the slightest fault, your task should be either to tender me advice and warn me not to do it again, or to blow me up a little, or give me a few whacks; and all this reproof I wouldn't take amiss. But no one would have ever anticipated that you wouldn't bother your head in the least about me, and that you would be the means of driving me to my wits' ends, and so much out of my mind and off my head, as to be quite at a loss how to act for the best. In fact, were death to come upon me, I would be a spirit driven to my grave by grievances. However much exalted bonzes and eminent Taoist priests might do penance, they wouldn't succeed in releasing my soul from suffering; for it would still be needful for you to clearly explain the facts, so that I might at last be able to come to life."

After lending him a patient ear, Tai-yü suddenly banished from her memory all recollection of the occurrences of the previous night. "Well, in that case," she said, "why did you not let a servant-girl open the door when I came over?"

This question took Pao-yü by surprise. "What prompts you to say this?" he exclaimed. "If I have done anything of the kind, may I die at once."

"Psha!" cried Tai-yü, "it's not right that you-should recklessly broach the subject of living or dying at this early morn! If you say yea, it's yea; and nay, it's nay; what use is there to utter such oaths!"

"I didn't really see you come over," protested Pao-yü. "Cousin Pao-ch'ai it was, who came and sat for a while and then left."

After some reflection, Lin Tai-yü smiled. "Yes," she observed, "your servant-girls must, I fancy, have been too lazy to budge, grumpy and in a cross-grained mood; this is probable enough."

page 51

"This is, I feel sure, the reason," answered Pao-yü, "so when I go back, I'll find out who it was, call them to task and put things right."

"Those girls of yours;" continued Tai-yü, "should be given a lesson, but properly speaking it isn't for me to mention anything about it. Their present insult to me is a mere trifle; but were to-morrow some Miss Pao (precious) or some Miss Pei (jewel) or other to come, and were she to be subjected to insult, won't it be a grave matter?"

While she taunted him, she pressed her lips, and laughed sarcastically.

Pao-yü heard her remarks and felt both disposed to gnash his teeth with rage, and to treat them as a joke; but in the midst of their colloquy, they perceived a waiting-maid approach and invite them to have their meal.

Presently, the whole body of inmates crossed over to the front.

"Miss," inquired Madame Wang at the sight of Tai-yü, "have you taken any of Dr. Pao's medicines? Do you feel any better?"

"I simply feel so-so," replied Lin Tai-yü, "but grandmother Chia recommended me to go on taking Dr. Wang's medicines."

"Mother," Pao-yü interposed, "you've no idea that cousin Lin's is an internal derangement; it's because she was born with a delicate physique that she can't stand the slightest cold. All she need do is to take a couple of closes of some decoction to dispel the chill; yet it's preferable that she should have medicine in pills."

"The other day," said Madame Wang, "the doctor mentioned the name of some pills, but I've forgotten what it is."

"I know something about pills," put in Pao-yü; "he merely told her to take some

pills or other called 'ginseng as-a-restorative-of-the-system.'“

“That isn't it,” Madame Wang demurred.

“The 'Eight-precious-wholesome-to-mother' pills,” Pao-yü proceeded, “or the 'Left-angelica' or 'Right-angelica;' if these also aren't the ones, they must be the 'Eight-flavour Rehmannia-glutinosa' pills.”

“None of these,” rejoined Madame Wang, “for I remember well that there were the two words chin kang (guardians in Buddhistic temples).”

“I've never before,” observed Pao-yü, clapping his hands, “heard of the existence of chin kang pills; but in the event of there being any chin kang pills, there must, for a certainty, be such a thing as P'u Sa (Buddha) powder.”

At this joke, every one in the whole room burst out laughing. Pao-ch'ai compressed her lips and gave a smile. “It must, I'm inclined to think,” she suggested, “be the 'lord-of-heaven-strengthen-the-heart' pills!”

“Yes, that's the name,” Madame Wang laughed, “why, now, I too have become muddle-headed.”

page 52

“You're not muddle-headed, mother,” said Pao-yü, “it's the mention of Chin kangs and Buddhas which confused you.”

“Stuff and nonsense!” ejaculated Madame Wang. “What you want again is your father to whip you!”

“My father,” Pao-yü laughed, “wouldn't whip me for a thing like this.”

“Well, this being their name,” resumed Madame Wang, “you had better tell some one to-morrow to buy you a few.”

“All these drugs,” expostulated Pao-yü, “are of no earthly use. Were you, mother, to give me three hundred and sixty taels, I'll concoct a supply of pills for my cousin, which I can certify will make her feel quite herself again before she has finished a single supply.”

“What trash!” cried Madame Wang. “What kind of medicine is there so costly!”

“It's a positive fact,” smiled Pao-yü. “This prescription of mine is unlike all others. Besides, the very names of those drugs are quaint, and couldn't be enumerated in a moment; suffice it to mention the placenta of the first child; three hundred and sixty ginseng roots, shaped like human beings and studded with leaves; four fat tortoises; full-grown polygonum multiflorum; the core of the *Pachyma cocos*, found on the roots of a fir tree of a thousand years old; and other such species of medicines. They're not, I admit, out-of-the-way things; but they are the most excellent among that whole crowd of medicines; and were I to begin to give you a list of them, why, they'd take you all quite aback. The year before last, I at length let Hsüeh P'an have this recipe, after he had made ever so many entreaties during one or two years. When, however, he got the prescription, he had to search for another two or three years and to spend over and above a thousand taels before he succeeded in having it prepared. If you don't believe me, mother, you are at liberty to ask cousin Pao-ch'ai about it.”

At the mention of her name, Pao-ch'ai laughingly waved her hand. “I know nothing about it,” she observed. “Nor have I heard anything about it, so don't tell your mother to ask me any questions.”

“Really,” said Madame Wang smiling, “Pao-ch'ai is a good girl; she does not tell lies.”

Pao-yü was standing in the centre of the room. Upon hearing these words, he turned round sharply and clapped his hands. “What I stated just now,” he explained, “was the truth; yet you maintain that it was all lies.”

As he defended himself, he casually looked round, and caught sight of Lin Tai-yü at the back of Pao-ch'ai laughing with tight-set lips, and applying her fingers to her face to put him to shame.

But Lady Feng, who had been in the inner rooms overseeing the servants

page 53

laying the table, came out at once, as soon as she overheard the conversation. “Brother Pao tells no lies,” she smilingly chimed in, “this is really a fact. Some time ago cousin Hsüeh P'an came over in person and asked me for pearls, and

when I inquired of him what he wanted them for, he explained that they were intended to compound some medicine with; adding, in an aggrieved way, that it would have been better hadn't he taken it in hand for he never had any idea that it would involve such a lot of trouble! When I questioned him what the medicine was, he returned for answer that it was a prescription of brother Pao's; and he mentioned ever so many ingredients, which I don't even remember. 'Under other circumstances,' he went on to say, 'I would have purchased a few pearls, but what are absolutely wanted are such pearls as have been worn on the head; and that's why I come to ask you, cousin, for some. If, cousin, you've got no broken ornaments at hand, in the shape of flowers, why, those that you have on your head will do as well; and by and bye I'll choose a few good ones and give them to you, to wear.' I had no other course therefore than to snap a couple of twigs from some flowers I have, made of pearls, and to let him take them away. One also requires a piece of deep red gauze, three feet in length of the best quality; and the pearls must be triturated to powder in a mortar."

After each sentence expressed by lady Feng, Pao-yü muttered an invocation to Buddha. "The thing is as clear as sunlight now," he remarked.

The moment lady Feng had done speaking, Pao-yü put in his word. "Mother," he added, "you should know that this is a mere makeshift, for really, according to the letter of the prescription, these pearls and precious stones should, properly speaking, consist of such as had been obtained from, some old grave and been worn as head-ornaments by some wealthy and honourable person of bygone days. But how could one go now on this account and dig up graves, and open tombs! Hence it is that such as are simply in use among living persons can equally well be substituted."

"O-mi-to-fu!" exclaimed Madame Wang, after listening to him throughout. "That will never do, and what an arduous job to uselessly saddle one's self with; for even though there be interred in some graves people, who've been dead for several hundreds of years, it wouldn't be a propitious thing were their corpses turned topsy-turvey now and the bones abstracted; just for the sake of preparing some medicine or other."

Pao-yü thereupon addressed himself to Tai-yü. "Have you heard what was said or not?" he asked. "And is there, pray, any likelihood that cousin Secunda would also follow in my lead and tell lies?"

While saying this, his eyes were, albeit his face was turned towards Lin Tai-yü, fixed upon Pao-ch'ai.

page 54

Lin Tai-yü pulled Madame Wang. "You just listen to him, aunt," she observed. "All because cousin Pao-ch'ai would not accommodate him by lying, he appeals to me."

"Pao-yü has a great knack," Madame Wang said, "of dealing contemptuously with you, his cousin."

"Mother," Pao-yü smilingly protested, "you are not aware how the case stands. When cousin Pao-ch'ai lived at home, she knew nothing whatever about my elder cousin Hsüeh P'an's affairs, and how much less now that she has taken up her quarters inside the garden? She, of course, knows less than ever about them! Yet, cousin Lin just now stealthily treated my statements as lies, and put me to the blush."

These words were still on his lips, when they perceived a waiting-maid, from dowager lady Chia's apartments, come in quest of Pao-yü and Lin Tai-yü to go and have their meal. Lin Tai-yü, however, did not even call Pao-yü, but forthwith rising to her feet, she went along, dragging the waiting-maid by the hand.

"Let's wait for master Secundus, Mr. Pao, to go along with us," demurred the girl.

"He doesn't want anything to eat," Lin Tai-yü replied; "he won't come with us, so I'll go ahead." So saying she promptly left the room.

"I'll have my repast with my mother to-day," Pao-yü said.

"Not at all," Madame Wang remarked, "not at all. I'm going to fast to-day, so it's only right and proper that you should go and have your own."

"I'll also fast with you then," Pao-yü retorted.

As he spoke, he called out to the servant to go back, and rushing up to the table, he took a seat.

Madame Wang faced Pao-ch'ai and her companions. "You, girls," she observed,

“had better have your meal, and let him have his own way!”

“It's only right that you should go,” Pao-ch'ai smiled. “Whether you have anything to eat or not, you should go over for a while to keep company to cousin Lin, as she will be quite distressed and out of spirits.”

“Who cares about her!” Pao-yü rejoined, “she'll get all right again after a time.”

Shortly, they finished their repast. But Pao-yü apprehended, in the first place, that his grandmother Chia, would be solicitous on his account, and longed, in the second, to be with Lin Tai-yü, so he hurriedly asked for some tea to rinse his mouth with.

“Cousin Secundus,” T'an Ch'un and Hsi Ch'un interposed with an ironic laugh, “what's the use of the hurry-scurry you're in the whole day long!

page 55

Even when you're having your meals, or your tea, you're in this sort of fussy helter-skelter!”

“Make him hurry up and have his tea,” Pao-ch'ai chimed in smiling, “so that he may go and look up his cousin Lin. He'll be up to all kinds of mischief if you keep him here!”

Pao-yü drank his tea. Then hastily leaving the apartment, he proceeded straightway towards the eastern court. As luck would have it, the moment he got near lady Feng's court, he descried lady Feng standing at the gateway. While standing on the step, and picking her teeth with an ear-cleaner, she superintended about ten young servant-boys removing the flower-pots from place to place. As soon as she caught sight of Pao-yü approaching, she put on a smiling face. “You come quite opportunely,” she said; “walk in, walk in, and write a few characters for me.”

Pao-yü had no option but to follow her in. When they reached the interior of her rooms, lady Feng gave orders to a servant to fetch a pen, inkslab and paper.

“Forty rolls of deep red ornamented satin,” she began, addressing herself to Pao-yü, “forty rolls of satin with dragons; a hundred rolls of gauzes of every colour,

of the finest quality; four gold necklaces....”

“What's this?” Pao-yü shouted, “it is neither a bill; nor is it a list of presents, and in what style shall I write it?”

Lady Feng remonstrated with him. “Just you go on writing,” she said, “for, in fact, as long as I can make out what it means, it's all that is needed.”

Pao-yü at this response felt constrained to proceed with the writing.

This over lady Feng put the paper by. As she did so, “I've still something more to tell you,” she smilingly pursued, “but I wonder whether you will accede to it or not. There is in your rooms a servant-maid, Hsiao Hung by name, whom I would like to bring over into my service, and I'll select several girls to-morrow to wait on you; will this do?”

“The servants in my quarters,” answered Pao-yü, “muster a large crowd, so that, cousin, you are at perfect liberty to send for any one of them, who might take your fancy; what's the need therefore of asking me about it?”

“If that be so,” continued lady Feng laughingly, “I'll tell some one at once to go and bring her over.”

“Yes, she can go and fetch her,” acquiesced Pao-yü.

While replying, he made an attempt to take his leave. “Come back,” shouted lady Feng, “I've got something more to tell you.”

“Our venerable senior has sent for me,” Pao-yü rejoined; “if you have anything to tell me you must wait till my return.”

page 56

After this explanation, he there and then came over to his grandmother Chia's on this side, where he found that they had already got through their meal.

“Have you had anything nice to eat with your mother?” old lady Chia asked.

“There was really nothing nice,” Pao-yü smiled. “Yet I managed to have a bowl of rice more than usual.”

“Where's cousin Lin?” he then inquired.

“She's in the inner rooms,” answered his grandmother.

Pao-yü stepped in. He caught sight of a waiting-maid, standing below, blowing into an iron, and two servant-girls seated on the stove-couch making a chalk line. Tai-yü with stooping head was cutting out something or other with a pair of scissors she held in her hand.

Pao-yü advanced further in. “O! what's this that you are up to!” he smiled. “You have just had your rice and do you bob your head down in this way! Why, in a short while you'll be having a headache again!”

Tai-yü, however, did not heed him in the least, but busied herself cutting out what she had to do.

“The corner of that piece of satin is not yet right,” a servant-girl put in. “You had better iron it again!”

Tai-yü threw down the scissors. “Why worry yourself about it?” she said; “it will get quite right after a time.”

But while Pao-yü was listening to what was being said, and was inwardly feeling in low spirits, he became aware that Pao-ch'ai, T'an Ch'un and the other girls had also arrived. After a short chat with dowager lady Chia, Pao-ch'ai likewise entered the apartment to find out what her cousin Lin was up to. The moment she espied Lin Tai-yü engaged in cutting out something: “You have,” she cried, “attained more skill than ever; for there you can even cut out clothes!”

“This too,” laughed Tai-yü sarcastically, “is a mere falsehood, to hoodwink people with, nothing more.”

“I'll tell you a joke,” replied Pao-ch'ai smiling, “when I just now said that I did not know anything about that medicine, cousin Pao-yü felt displeased.” “Who cares!” shouted Lin Tai-yü. “He'll get all right shortly.”

“Our worthy grandmother wishes to play at dominoes,” Pao-yü thereupon interposed directing his remarks to Pao-ch'ai; “and there's no one there at present to have a game with her; so you'd better go and play with her.”

“Have I come over now to play dominoes!” promptly smiled Pao-ch'ai

page 57

when she heard his suggestion. With this remark, she nevertheless at once quitted the room.

“It would be well for you to go,” urged Lin Tai-yü, “for there's a tiger in here; and, look out, he might eat you up.”

As she spoke, she went on with her cutting.

Pao-yü perceived how both she was to give him any of her attention, and he had no alternative but to force a smile and to observe: “You should also go for a stroll! It will be time enough by and bye to continue your cutting.”

But Tai-yü would pay no heed whatever to him. Pao-yü addressed himself therefore to the servant-girls. “Who has taught her how to cut out these things?” he asked.

“What does it matter who taught me how to cut?” Tai-yü vehemently exclaimed, when she realised that he was speaking to the maids. “It's no business of yours, Mr. Secundus.”

Pao-yü was then about to say something in his defence when he saw a servant come in and report that there was some one outside who wished to see him. At this announcement, Pao-yü betook himself with alacrity out of the room.

“O-mi-to-fu!” observed Tai-yü, turning outwards, “it wouldn't matter to you if you found me dead on your return!”

On his arrival outside, Pao-yü discovered Pei Ming. “You are invited,” he said, “to go to Mr. Feng's house.”

Upon hearing this message, Pao-yü knew well enough that it was about the project mooted the previous day, and accordingly he told him to go and ask for his clothes, while he himself wended his steps into the library.

Pei Ming came forthwith to the second gate and waited for some one to appear. Seeing an old woman walk out, Pei Ming went up to her. “Our Master Secundus, Mr. Pao,” he told her, “is in the study waiting for his out-door clothes; so do go

in, worthy dame, and deliver the message.”

“It would be better,” replied the old woman, “if you did not echo your mother's absurdities! Our Master Secundus, Mr. Pao, now lives in the garden, and all the servants, who attend on him, stay in the garden; and do you again come and bring the message here?”

At these words, Pei Ming smiled. “You're quite right,” he rejoined, “in reproving me, for I've become quite idiotic.”

So saying, he repaired with quick step to the second gate on the east side, where, by a lucky hit, the young servant-boys on duty, were kicking marbles on the raised road. Pei Ming explained to them the object of his coming. A young boy thereupon ran in. After a long interval, he, at length, made his appearance, holding, enfolded in his arms, a bundle of clothes, which

page 58

he handed to Pei Ming, who then returned to the library. Pao-yü effected a change in his costume, and giving directions to saddle his horse, he only took along with him the four servant-boys, Pei Ming, Chu Lo, Shuang Jui and Shou Erh, and started on his way. He reached Feng Tzu-ying's doorway by a short cut. A servant announced his arrival, and Feng Tzu-ying came out and ushered him in. Here he discovered Hsüeh P'an, who had already been waiting a long time, and several singing-boys besides; as well as Chiang Yü-han, who played female roles, and Yün Erh, a courtesan in the Chin Hsiang court. The whole company exchanged salutations. They next had tea. “What you said the other day,” smiled Pao-yü, raising his cup, “about good fortune coming out of evil fortune has preyed so much upon my mind, both by day and night, that the moment I received your summons I hurried to come immediately.”

“My worthy cousins,” rejoined Feng Tzu-ying smiling. “You're all far too credulous! It's a mere hoax that I made use of the other day. For so much did I fear that you would be sure to refuse if I openly asked you to a drinking bout, that I thought it fit to say what I did. But your attendance to-day, so soon after my invitation, makes it clear, little though one would have thought it, that you've all taken it as pure gospel truth.”

This admission evoked laughter from the whole company. The wines were

afterwards placed on the table, and they took the seats consistent with their grades. Feng Tzu-ying first and foremost called the singing-boys and offered them a drink. Next he told Yün Erh to also approach and have a cup of wine.

By the time, however, that Hsüeh P'an had had his third cup, he of a sudden lost control over his feelings, and clasping Yün Erh's hand in his: "Do sing me," he smiled, "that novel ballad of your own composition; and I'll drink a whole jar full. Eh, will you?"

This appeal compelled Yün Erh to take up the guitar. She then sang:

*Lovers have I two.
To set aside either I cannot bear.
When my heart longs for thee to come,
It also yearns for him.
Both are in form handsome and fair.
Their beauty to describe it would be hard.
Just think, last night, when at a silent hour, we met in secret, by
the trellis
frame laden with roses white,
One to his feelings stealthily was giving vent,
When lo, the other caught us in the act,
And laying hands on us; there we three stood like litigants before the
bar.
And I had, verily, no word in answer for myself to give.*

At the close of her song, she laughed. "Well now," she cried, "down with that whole jar!"

page 59

"Why, it isn't worth a jarful," smiled Hsüeh P'an at these words. "Favour us with some other good song!"

"Listen to what I have to suggest," Pao-yü interposed, a smile on his lips. "If you go on drinking in this reckless manner, we will easily get drunk and there will be no fun in it. I'll take the lead and swallow a large cupful and put in force a new penalty; and any one of you who doesn't comply with it, will be mulcted in ten large cupfuls, in quick succession!"

Speedily rising from the banquet, he poured the wine for the company. Feng Tzu-ying and the rest meanwhile exclaimed with one voice: "Quite right! quite right!"

Pao-yü then lifted a large cup and drained it with one draught. "We will now," he proposed, "dilute on the four characters, 'sad, wounded, glad and joyful.' But while discoursing about young ladies, we'll have to illustrate the four states as well. At the end of this recitation, we'll have to drink the 'door cup' over the wine, to sing an original and seasonable ballad, while over the heel taps, to make allusion to some object on the table, and devise something with some old poetical lines or ancient scrolls, from the Four Books or the Five Classics, or with some set phrases."

Hsüeh P'an gave him no time to finish. He was the first to stand up and prevent him from proceeding. "I won't join you, so don't count me; this is, in fact, done in order to play tricks upon me."

Yün Erh, however, also rose to her feet and shoved him down into his seat.

"What are you in such a funk for?" she laughed. "You're fortunate enough to be able to drink wine daily, and can't you, forsooth, even come up to me? Yet I mean to recite, by and bye, my own share. If you say what's right, well and good; if you don't, you will simply have to swallow several cups of wine as a forfeit, and is it likely you'll die from drunkenness? Are you, pray, going now to disregard this rule and to drink, instead, ten large cups; besides going down to pour the wine?"

One and all clapped in applause. "Well said!" they shouted.

After this, Hsüeh P'an had no way out of it and felt compelled to resume his seat.

They then heard Pao-yü recite:

A girl is sad,

*When her spring-time of life is far advanced and she still occupies a
vacant inner-room.*

A girl feels wounded in her heart,

When she regrets having allowed her better half to go abroad and win a

*marquidom.
A girl is glad,*

page 60

*When looking in the mirror, at the time of her morning toilette, she
finds her colour fair.
A girl is joyful,
What time she sits on the frame of a gallows-swing, clad in a thin
spring gown.*

Having listened to him, “Capital!” one and all cried out in a chorus. Hsüeh P'an alone raised his face, shook his head and remarked: “It isn't good, he must be fined.”

“Why should he be fined?” demurred the party.

“Because,” retorted Hsüeh P'an, “what he says is entirely unintelligible to me. So how can he not be fined?”

Yün Erh gave him a pinch.—“Just you quietly think of yours,” she laughed; “for if by and bye you are not ready you'll also have to bear a fine.”

In due course Pao-yü took up the guitar. He was heard to sing:

*“When mutual thoughts arise, tears, blood-stained, endless drop, like
lentils sown broadcast.
In spring, in ceaseless bloom nourish willows and flowers around the
painted tower.
Inside the gauze-lattice peaceful sleep flies, when, after dark, come
wind and rain.
Both new-born sorrows and long-standing griefs cannot from memory ever
die!
E'en jade-fine rice, and gold-like drinks they make hard to go down;
they choke the throat.
The lass has not the heart to desist gazing in the glass at her wan
face.
Nothing can from that knitted brow of hers those frowns dispel;
For hard she finds it patient to abide till the clepsydra will have*

*run its course.
Alas! how fitly like the faint outline of a green hill which nought
can screen;
Or like a green-tinged stream, which ever ceaseless floweth onward far
and wide!”*

When the song drew to an end, his companions with one voice cried out:
“Excellent!”

Hsüeh P'an was the only one to find fault. “There's no metre in them,” he said.

Pao-yü quaffed the “opening cup,” then seizing a pear, he added:

“While the rain strikes the pear-blossom I firmly close the door,”

and thus accomplished the requirements of the rule.

Feng Tzu-ying's turn came next.

“A maid is glad.”

he commenced:

*When at her first confinement she gives birth to twins, both sons.
A maid is joyful,
When on the sly she to the garden creeps crickets to catch.
A maid is sad,
When her husband some sickness gets and lies in a bad state.
A maiden is wounded at heart,
When a fierce wind blows down the tower, where she makes her toilette.*

page 61

Concluding this recitation, he raised the cup and sang:

*“Thou art what one could aptly call a man.
But thou'rt endowed with somewhat too much heart!
How queer thou art, cross-grained and impish shrewd!
A spirit too, thou couldst not be more shrewd.*

*If all I say thou dost not think is true,
In secret just a minute search pursue;
For then thou'lt know if I love thee or not."*

His song over, he drank the "opening cup" and then observed:

"The cock crows when the moon's rays shine upon the thatched inn."

After his observance of the rule followed Yün Erh's turn.

A girl is sad,

Yün Erh began,

*When she tries to divine on whom she will depend towards the end of
life.*

"My dear child!" laughingly exclaimed Hsüeh P'an, "your worthy Mr. Hsüeh still lives, and why do you give way to fears?"

"Don't confuse her!" remonstrated every one of the party, "don't muddle her!"

"A maiden is wounded at heart."

Yün Erh proceeded:

*"When her mother beats and scolds her and never for an instant doth
desist."*

"It was only the other day," interposed Hsüeh P'an, "that I saw your mother and that I told her that I would not have her beat you."

"If you still go on babbling," put in the company with one consent, "you'll be fined ten cups."

Hsüeh P'an promptly administered himself a slap on the mouth. "How you lack the faculty of hearing!" he exclaimed. "You are not to say a word more!"

"A girl is glad,"

Yün Erh then resumed:

When her lover cannot brook to leave her and return home.

*A maiden is joyful,
When hushing the pan-pipe and double pipe, a stringed instrument she
thrums.*

At the end of her effusion, she at once began to sing:

*“T’is the third day of the third moon, the nutmegs bloom;
A maggot, lo, works hard to pierce into a flower;
But though it ceaseless bores it cannot penetrate.
So crouching on the buds, it swing-like rocks itself.
My precious pet, my own dear little darling,
If I don’t choose to open how can you steal in?”*

Finishing her song, she drank the “opening cup,” after which she added: “the delicate peach-blossom,” and thus complied with the exigencies of the rule.

page 62

Next came Hsüeh P'an. “Is it for me to speak now?” Hsüeh P'an asked.

“A maiden is sad...”

But a long time elapsed after these words were uttered and yet nothing further was heard.

“Sad for what?” Feng Tzu-ying laughingly asked. “Go on and tell us at once!”

Hsüeh P'an was much perplexed. His eyes rolled about like a bell.

“A girl is sad...”

he hastily repeated. But here again he coughed twice before he proceeded.

“A girl is sad.”

he said:

“When she marries a spouse who is a libertine.”

This sentence so tickled the fancy of the company that they burst out into a loud fit of laughter.

“What amuses you so?” shouted Hsüeh P'an, “is it likely that what I say is not correct? If a girl marries a man, who chooses to forget all virtue, how can she not feel sore at heart?”

But so heartily did they all laugh that their bodies were bent in two. “What you say is quite right,” they eagerly replied. “So proceed at once with the rest.”

Hsüeh P'an thereupon stared with vacant gaze.

“A girl is grieved....”

he added:

But after these few words he once more could find nothing to say.

“What is she grieved about?” they asked.

“When a huge monkey finds its way into the inner room.”

Hsüeh P'an retorted.

This reply set every one laughing. “He must be mulcted,” they cried, “he must be mulcted. The first one could anyhow be overlooked; but this line is more unintelligible.”

As they said this, they were about to pour the wine, when Pao-yü smilingly interfered. “The rhyme is all right,” he observed.

“The master of the rules,” Hsüeh P'an remarked, “approves it in every way, so what are you people fussing about?”

Hearing this, the company eventually let the matter drop.

“The two lines, that follow, are still more difficult,” suggested Yün Erh with a smile, “so you had better let me recite for you.”

“Fiddlesticks!” exclaimed Hsüeh P'an, “do you really fancy that I have no good ones! Just you listen to what I shall say.

*“A girl is glad,
When in the bridal room she lies, with flowery candles burning, and
she is loth to rise at morn.”*

page 63

This sentiment filled one and all with amazement. “How supremely excellent this line is!” they ejaculated.

“A girl is joyful,”

Hsüeh P'an resumed

,

“During the consummation of wedlock.”

Upon catching this remark, the party turned their heads away, and shouted: “Dreadful! Dreadful! But quick sing your song and have done.”

Forthwith Hsüeh P'an sang:

“A mosquito buzzes heng, heng, heng!”

Every one was taken by surprise. “What kind of song is this?” they inquired.

But Hsüeh P'an went on singing:

“Two flies buzz weng, weng, weng.”

“Enough,” shouted his companions, “that will do, that will do!”

“Do you want to hear it or not?” asked Hsüeh P'an, “this is a new kind of song, called the 'Heng, heng air,' but if you people are not disposed to listen, let me off also from saying what I have to say over the heel-taps and I won't then sing.”

“We'll let you off! We'll let you off,” answered one and all, “so don't be hindering others.”

“A maiden is sad,”

Chiang Yü-han at once began,

*When her husband leaves home and never does return.
A maiden is disconsolate,
When she has no money to go and buy some olea fragrans oil.
A maiden is glad,
When the wick of the lantern forms two heads like twin flowers on one
stem.
A maiden is joyful,
When true conjugal peace prevails between her and her mate.*

His recital over, he went on to sing:

*“How I love thee with those seductive charms of thine, heaven-born!
In truth thou’rt like a living fairy from the azure skies!
The spring of life we now enjoy; we are yet young in years.
Our union is, indeed, a happy match!
But. lo! the milky way doth at its zenith soar;
Hark to the drums which beat around in the watch towers;
So raise the silver lamp and let us soft under the nuptial curtain
steal.”*

Finishing the song, he drank the “opening cup.” “I know,” he smiled, “few poetical quotations bearing on this sort of thing. By a stroke of good fortune, however, I yesterday conned a pair of antithetical scrolls; of these I can only remember just one line, but lucky enough for me the object it refers to figures as well on this festive board.”

This said he forthwith drained the wine, and, picking up a bud of a diminutive variety of olea fragrans, he recited:

page 64

*“When the perfume of flowers wafts (hsi jen) itself into a man, he
knows the day is warm.”*

The company unanimously conceded that the rule had been adhered to. But Hsüeh P’an once again jumped up. “It’s awful, awful!” he bawled out boisterously; “he should be fined, he should be made to pay a forfeit;

there's no precious article whatever on this table; how is it then that you introduce precious things?"

"There was nothing about precious things!" Chiang Yü-han vehemently explained.

"What I are you still prevaricating?" Hsüeh P'an cried, "Well, repeat it again!"

Chiang Yü-han had no other course but to recite the line a second time. "Now is not Hsi Jen a precious thing?" Hsüeh P'an asked. "If she isn't, what is she? And if you don't believe me, you ask him about it," pointing, at the conclusion of this remark, at Pao-yü.

Pao-yü felt very uncomfortable. Rising to his feet, "Cousin," he observed, "you should be fined heavily."

"I should be! I should be!" Hsüeh P'an shouted, and saying this, he took up the wine and poured it down his throat with one gulp.

Feng Tzu-ying, Chiang Yü-han and their companions thereupon asked him to explain the allusion. Yün Erh readily told them, and Chiang Yü-han hastily got up and pleaded guilty.

"Ignorance," the party said with one consent, "does not amount to guilt."

But presently Pao-yü quitted the banquet to go and satisfy a natural want and Chiang Yü-han followed him out. The two young fellows halted under the eaves of the verandah, and Chiang Yü-han then recommenced to make ample apologies. Pao-yü, however, was so attracted by his handsome and genial appearance, that he took quite a violent fancy to him; and squeezing his hand in a firm grip. "If you have nothing to do," he urged, "do let us go over to our place. I've got something more to ask you. It's this, there's in your worthy company some one called Ch'i Kuan, with a reputation extending at present throughout the world; but, unfortunately, I alone have not had the good luck of seeing him even once."

"This is really," rejoined Chiang Yü-han with a smile, "my own infant o

name.”

This disclosure at once made Pao-yü quite exuberant, and stamping his feet he smiled. “How lucky! I'm in luck's way!” he exclaimed. “In very truth your reputation is no idle report. But to-day is our first meeting, and what shall I do?”

page 65

After some thought, he produced a fan from his sleeve, and, unloosening one of the jade pendants, he handed it to Ch'i Kuan. “This is a mere trifle,” he said. “It does not deserve your acceptance, yet it will be a small souvenir of our acquaintance to-day.”

Ch'i Kuan received it with a smile. “I do not deserve,” he replied, “such a present. How am I worthy of such an honour! But never mind, I've also got about me here a strange thing, which I put on this morning; it is brand-new yet, and will, I hope, suffice to prove to you a little of the feeling of esteem which I entertain for you.”

With these protestations, he raised his garment, and, untying a deep red sash, with which his nether clothes were fastened, he presented it to Pao-yü. “This sash,” he remarked, “is an article brought as tribute from the Queen of the Hsi Hsiang Kingdom. If you attach this round you in summer, your person will emit a fragrant perfume, and it will not perspire. It was given to me yesterday by the Prince of Pei Ching, and it is only to-day that I put it on. To any one else, I would certainly not be willing to present it. But, Mr. Secundus, please do unfasten the one you have on and give it to me to bind round me.”

This proposal extremely delighted Pao-yü. With precipitate haste, he accepted his gift, and, undoing the dark brown sash he wore, he surrendered it to Ch'i Kuan. But both had just had time to adjust their respective sashes when they heard a loud voice say: “Oh! I've caught you!” And they perceived Hsüeh P'an come out by leaps and bounds. Clutching the two young fellows, “What do you,” he exclaimed, “leave your wine for and withdraw from the banquet. Be quick and produce those things, and let me see them!”

“There's nothing to see!” rejoined the two young fellows with one voice.

Hsüeh P'an, however, would by no means fall in with their views. And it was only Feng Tzu-ying, who made his appearance on the scene, who succeeded in dissuading him. So resuming their seats, they drank until dark, when the company broke up.

Pao-yü, on his return into the garden, loosened his clothes, and had tea. But Hsi Jen noticed that the pendant had disappeared from his fan and she inquired of him what had become of it.

“I must have lost it this very moment,” Pao-yü replied.

At bedtime, however, descrying a deep red sash, with spots like specks of blood, attached round his waist, Hsi Jen guessed more or less the truth of what must have transpired. “As you have such a nice sash to fasten your trousers with,” Hsi Jen consequently said, “you'd better return that one of mine.”

page 66

This reminder made the fact dawn upon Pao-yü that the sash had originally been the property of Hsi Jen, and that he should by rights not have parted with it; but however much he felt his conscience smitten by remorse, he failed to see how he could very well disclose the truth to her. He could therefore only put on a smiling expression and add, “I'll give you another one instead.”

Hsi Jen was prompted by his rejoinder to nod her head and sigh. “I felt sure;” she observed; “that you'd go again and do these things! Yet you shouldn't take my belongings and bestow them on that low-bred sort of people. Can it be that no consideration finds a place in your heart?”

She then felt disposed to tender him a few more words of admonition, but dreading, on the other hand, lest she should, by irritating him, bring the fumes of the wine to his head, she thought it best to also retire to bed.

Nothing worth noticing occurred during that night. The next day, when she woke up at the break of day, she heard Pao-yü call out laughingly:

“Robbers have been here in the night; are you not aware of it? Just you look at my trousers.”

Hsi Jen lowered her head and looked. She saw at a glance that the sash, which Pao-yü had worn the previous day, was bound round her own waist, and she at once realised that Pao-yü must have effected the change during the night; but promptly unbinding it, “I don’t care for such things!” she cried, “quick, take it away!”

At the sight of her manner, Pao-yü had to coax her with gentle terms. This so disarmed Hsi Jen, that she felt under the necessity of putting on the sash; but, subsequently when Pao-yü stepped out of the apartment, she at last pulled it off, and, throwing it away in an empty box, she found one of hers and fastened it round her waist.

Pao-yü, however, did not in the least notice what she did, but inquired whether anything had happened the day before

“Lady Secunda,” Hsi Jen explained, “dispatched some one and fetched Hsiao Hung away. Her wish was to have waited for your return; but as I thought that it was of no consequence, I took upon myself to decide, and sent her off.”

“That’s all right!” rejoined Pao-yü. “I knew all about it, there was no need for her to wait.”

“Yesterday,” resumed Hsi Jen, “the Imperial Consort deputed the Eunuch Hsia to bring a hundred and twenty ounces of silver and to convey her commands that from the first to the third, there should be offered, in the Ch’ing Hsu temple, thanksgiving services to last for three days and that theatrical performances should be given, and oblations presented: and to tell

page 67

our senior master, Mr. Chia Chen, to take all the gentlemen, and go and burn incense and worship Buddha. Besides this, she also sent presents for the dragon festival.”

Continuing, she bade a young servant-maid produce the presents, which had been received the previous day. Then he saw two palace fans of the best quality, two strings of musk-scented beads, two rolls of silk, as fine as the phoenix tail, and a superior mat worked with hibiscus. At the sight of these things, Pao-yü was filled with immeasurable pleasure, and he asked whether the articles brought to all the others were similar to his.

“The only things in excess of yours that our venerable mistress has,” Hsi Jen explained, “consist of a scented jade sceptre and a pillow made of agate. Those of your worthy father and mother, our master and mistress, and of your aunt exceed yours by a scented sceptre of jade. Yours are the same as Miss Pao's. Miss Lin's are like those of Misses Secunda, Tertia and Quarta, who received nothing beyond a fan and several pearls and none of all the other things. As for our senior lady, Mrs. Chia Chu, and lady Secunda, these two got each two rolls of gauze, two rolls of silk, two scented bags, and two sticks of medicine.”

After listening to her enumeration, “What's the reason of this?” he smiled. “How is it that Miss Lin's are not the same as mine, but that Miss Pao's instead are like my own? May not the message have been wrongly delivered?”

“When they were brought out of the palace yesterday,” Hsi Jen rejoined, “they were already divided in respective shares, and slips were also placed on them, so that how could any mistake have been made? Yours were among those for our dowager lady's apartments. When I went and fetched them, her venerable ladyship said that I should tell you to go there to-morrow at the fifth watch to return thanks.

“Of course, it's my duty to go over,” Pao-yü cried at these words, but forthwith calling Tzu Chüan: “Take these to your Miss Lin,” he told her, “and say that I got them, yesterday, and that she is at liberty to keep out of them any that take her fancy.”

Tzu Chüan expressed her obedience and took the things away. After a short time she returned. “Miss Lin says,” she explained, “that she also got some yesterday, and that you, Master Secundus, should keep yours.”

Hearing this reply, Pao-yü quickly directed a servant to put them away. But when he had washed his face and stepped out of doors, bent upon going to his grandmother's on the other side, in order to pay his

obeisance, he caught sight of Lin Tai-yü coming along towards him, from the opposite direction. Pao-yü hurriedly walked up to her, "I told you," he smiled, "to select those you liked from my things; how is it you didn't choose any?"

page 68

Lin Tai-yü had long before banished from her recollection the incident of the previous day, which had made her angry with Pao-yü, and was only exercised about the occurrence of this present occasion. "I'm not gifted with such extreme good fortune," she consequently answered, "as to be able to accept them. I can't compete with Miss Pao, in connection with whom something or other about gold or about jade is mentioned. We are simply beings connected with the vegetable kingdom."

The allusion to the two words "gold and jade," aroused, of a sudden, much emotion in the heart of Pao-yü. "If beyond what people say about gold or jade," he protested, "the idea of any such things ever crosses my mind, may the heavens annihilate me, and may the earth extinguish me, and may I for ten thousand generations never assume human form!"

These protestations convinced Lin Tai-yü that suspicion had been aroused in him. With all promptitude, she smiled and observed, "They're all to no use! Why utter such oaths, when there's no rhyme or reason! Who cares about any gold or any jade of yours!"

"It would be difficult for me to tell you, to your face, all the secrets of my heart," Pao-yü resumed, "but by and bye you'll surely come to know all about them! After the three—my old grandmother, my father and my mother—you, my cousin, hold the fourth place; and, if there be a fifth, I'm ready to swear another oath."

"You needn't swear any more," Lin Tai-yü replied, "I'm well aware that I, your younger cousin, have a place in your heart; but the thing is that at the sight of your elder cousin, you at once forget all about your younger cousin."

"This comes again from over-suspicion!" ejaculated Pao; "for I'm not at all disposed that way."

“Well,” resumed Lin Tai-yü, “why did you yesterday appeal to me when that hussey Pao-ch'ai would not help you by telling a story? Had it been I, who had been guilty of any such thing, I don't know what you wouldn't have done again.”

But during their tete-a-tete, they espied Pao-ch'ai approach from the opposite direction, so readily they beat a retreat. Pao-ch'ai had distinctly caught sight of them, but pretending she had not seen them, she trudged on her way, with lowered head, and repaired into Madame Wang's apartments. After a short stay, she came to this side to pay dowager lady Chia a visit. With her she also found Pao-yü.

Pao-ch'ai ever made it a point to hold Pao-yü aloof as her mother had in days gone by mentioned to Madame Wang and her other relatives that the gold locket had been the gift of a bonze, that she had

page 69

to wait until such time as some suitor with jade turned up before she could be given in marriage, and other similar confidences. But on discovery the previous day that Yüan Ch'un's presents to her alone resembled those of Pao-yü, she began to feel all the more embarrassed. Luckily, however, Pao-yü was so entangled in Lin Tai-yü's meshes and so absorbed in heart and mind with fond thoughts of his Lin Tai-yü that he did not pay the least attention to this circumstance. But she unawares now heard Pao-yü remark with a smile: “Cousin Pao, let me see that string of scented beads of yours!”

By a strange coincidence, Pao-ch'ai wore the string of beads round her left wrist so she had no alternative, when Pao-yü asked her for it, than to take it off. Pao-ch'ai, however, was naturally inclined to embonpoint, and it proved therefore no easy matter for her to get the beads off; and while Pao-yü stood by watching her snow-white arm, feelings of admiration were quickly stirred up in his heart. “Were this arm attached to Miss Lin's person,” he secretly pondered, “I might, possibly have been able to caress it! But it is, as it happens, part and parcel of her body; how I really do deplore this lack of good fortune.”

Suddenly he bethought himself of the secret of gold and jade, and he again scanned Pao-ch'ai's appearance. At the sight of her countenance, resembling a silver bowl, her eyes limpid like water and almond-like in shape, her lips crimson, though not rouged, her eyebrows jet-black, though not pencilled, also of that fascination and grace which presented such a contrast to Lin Tai-yü's style of beauty, he could not refrain from falling into such a stupid reverie, that though Pao-ch'ai had got the string of beads off her wrist, and was handing them to him, he forgot all about them and made no effort to take them. Pao-ch'ai realised that he was plunged in abstraction, and conscious of the awkward position in which she was placed, she put down the string of beads, and turning round was on the point of betaking herself away, when she perceived Lin Tai-yü, standing on the door-step, laughing significantly while biting a handkerchief she held in her mouth. "You can't resist," Pao-ch'ai said, "a single puff of wind; and why do you stand there and expose yourself to the very teeth of it?"

"Wasn't I inside the room?" rejoined Lin Tai-yü, with a cynical smile. "But I came out to have a look as I heard a shriek in the heavens; it turned out, in fact, to be a stupid wild goose!"

"A stupid wild goose!" repeated Pao-ch'ai. "Where is it, let me also see it!"

"As soon as I got out," answered Lin Tai-yü, "it flew away with a 't'e-rh' sort of noise."

While replying, she threw the handkerchief, she was holding, straight into Pao-yü's face. Pao-yü was quite taken by surprise. He was hit on the eye. "Ai-yah!" he exclaimed.

But, reader, do you want to hear the sequel? In that case, listen to the circumstances, which will be disclosed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXIX.

*A happy man enjoys a full measure of happiness, but still prays
for happiness.*

A beloved girl is very much loved, but yet craves for more love.

Pao Yü, so our story runs, was gazing vacantly, when Tai-yü, at a moment least expected, flung her handkerchief at him, which just hit him on the eyes, and frightened him out of his wits. "Who was it?" he cried.

Lin Tai-yü nodded her head and smiled. "I would not venture to do such a thing," she said, "it was a mere slip of my hand. As cousin Pao-ch'ai wished to see the silly wild goose, I was pointing it out to her, when the handkerchief inadvertently flew out of my grip."

Pao Yü kept on rubbing his eyes. The idea suggested itself to him to make some remonstrance, but he could not again very well open his lips.

Presently, lady Feng arrived. She then alluded, in the course of conversation, to the thanksgiving service, which was to be offered on the first, in the Ch'ing Hsü temple, and invited Pao-ch'ai, Pao Yü, Tai-yü and the other inmates with them to be present at the theatricals.

"Never mind," smiled Pao-ch'ai, "it's too hot; besides, what plays haven't I seen? I don't mean to come."

"It's cool enough over at their place," answered lady Feng. "There are also two-storied buildings on either side; so we must all go! I'll send servants a few days before to drive all that herd of Taoist priests out, to sweep the upper stories, hang up curtains, and to keep out every single loafer from the interior of the temple; so it will be all right like that. I've already told our Madame Wang that if you people don't go, I mean to go all alone, as I've been again in very low spirits these last few days, and as when theatricals come off at home, it's out of the question for me to look on with any peace and quiet."

When dowager lady Chia heard what she said, she smiled. "Well, in that case,"

she remarked, "I'll go along with you."

Lady Feng, at these words, gave a smile. "Venerable ancestor," she replied, "were you also to go, it would be ever so much better; yet I won't feel quite at my ease!"

page 71

"To-morrow," dowager lady Chia continued, "I can stay in the two-storied building, situated on the principal site, while you can go to the one on the side. You can then likewise dispense with coming over to where I shall be to stand on any ceremonies. Will this suit you or not?"

"This is indeed," lady Feng smiled, "a proof of your regard for me, my worthy senior."

Old lady Chia at this stage faced Pao-ch'ai. "You too should go," she said, "so should your mother; for if you remain the whole day long at home, you will again sleep your head off."

Pao-ch'ai felt constrained to signify her assent. Dowager lady Chia then also despatched domestics to invite Mrs. Hsüeh; and, on their way, they notified Madame Wang that she was to take the young ladies along with her. But Madame Wang felt, in the first place, in a poor state of health, and was, in the second, engaged in making preparations for the reception of any arrivals from Yüan Ch'un, so that she, at an early hour, sent word that it was impossible for her to leave the house. Yet when she received old lady Chia's behest, she smiled and exclaimed: "Are her spirits still so buoyant!" and transmitted the message into the garden that any, who had any wish to avail themselves of the opportunity, were at liberty to go on the first, with their venerable senior as their chaperonne.

As soon as these tidings were spread abroad, every one else was indifferent as to whether they went or not; but of those girls who, day after day, never put their foot outside the doorstep, which of them was not keen upon going, the moment they heard the permission conceded to them? Even if any of their respective mistresses were too lazy to move, they employed every expedient to induce them to go. Hence it was that Li Kung-ts'ai and the other inmates signified their unanimous intention to be present. Dowager lady Chia, at this, grew more exultant than ever, and she issued immediate directions for servants to go and

sweep and put things in proper order. But to all these preparations, there is no necessity of making detailed reference; sufficient to relate that on the first day of the moon, carriages stood in a thick maze, and men and horses in close concourse, at the entrance of the Jung Kuo mansion.

When the servants, the various managers and other domestics came to learn that the Imperial Consort was to perform good deeds and that dowager lady Chia was to go in person and offer incense, they arranged, as it happened that the first of the moon, which was the principal day of the ceremonies, was, in addition, the season of the dragon-boat festival, all the necessary articles in perfect readiness and with unusual splendour. Shortly, old lady Chia and the other inmates started on their way. The old lady sat in an official chair, carried by eight bearers: widow Li, lady Feng and Mrs. Hsüeh, each in a four-bearer

page 72

chair. Pao-ch'ai and Tai-yü mounted together a curricle with green cover and pearl tassels, bearing the eight precious things. The three sisters, Ying Ch'un, T'an Ch'un, and Hsi Ch'un got in a carriage with red wheels and ornamented hood. Next in order, followed dowager lady Chia's waiting-maids, Yüan Yang, Ying Wu, Hu Po, Chen Chu; Lin Tai-yü's waiting-maids Tzu Chüan, Hsüeh Yen, and Ch'un Ch'ien; Pao-ch'ai's waiting-maids Ying Erh and Wen Hsing; Ying Ch'un's servant-girls Ssu Ch'i and Hsiu Chü; T'an Ch'un's waiting-maids Shih Shu and Ts'ui Mo; Hsi Ch'un's servant-girls Ju Hua and Ts'ai P'ing; and Mrs. Hsüeh's waiting-maids T'ung Hsi, and T'ung Kuei. Besides these, were joined to their retinue: Hsiang Ling and Hsiang Ling's servant-girl Ch'in Erh; Mrs. Li's waiting-maids Su Yün and Pi Yüeh; lady Feng's servant-girls P'ing Erh, Feng Erh and Hsiao Hung, as well as Madame Wang's two waiting-maids Chin Ch'uan and Ts'ai Yün. Along with lady Feng, came a nurse carrying Ta Chieh Erh. She drove in a separate carriage, together with a couple of servant-girls. Added also to the number of the suite were matrons and nurses, attached to the various establishments, and the wives of the servants of the household, who were in attendance out of doors. Their carriages, forming one black solid mass, therefore, crammed the whole extent of the street.

Dowager lady Chia and other members of the party had already proceeded a considerable distance in their chairs, and yet the inmates at the gate had not finished mounting their vehicles. This one shouted: "I won't sit with you." That one cried: "You've crushed our mistress' bundle." In the carriages yonder, one

screamed: "You've pulled my flowers off." Another one nearer exclaimed: "You've broken my fan." And they chatted and chatted, and talked and laughed with such incessant volubility, that Chou Jui's wife had to go backward and forward calling them to task. "Girls," she said, "this is the street. The on-lookers will laugh at you!" But it was only after she had expostulated with them several times that any sign of improvement became at last visible.

The van of the procession had long ago reached the entrance of the Ch'ing Hsü Temple. Pao Yü rode on horseback. He preceded the chair occupied by his grandmother Chia. The throngs that filled the streets ranged themselves on either side.

On their arrival at the temple, the sound of bells and the rattle of drums struck their ear. Forthwith appeared the head-bonze Chang, a stick of incense in hand; his cloak thrown over his shoulders. He took his stand by the wayside at the head of a company of Taoist priests to present his greetings. The moment dowager lady Chia reached, in her chair, the interior of the main gate, she descried the lares and penates, the lord presiding over that particular

page 73

district, and the clay images of the various gods, and she at once gave orders to halt. Chia Chen advanced to receive her acting as leader to the male members of the family. Lady Feng was well aware that Yüan Yang and the other attendants were at the back and could not overtake their old mistress, so she herself alighted from her chair to volunteer her services. She was about to hastily press forward and support her, when, by a strange accident, a young Taoist neophyte, of twelve or thirteen years of age, who held a case containing scissors, with which he had been snuffing the candles burning in the various places, just seized the opportunity to run out and hide himself, when he unawares rushed, head foremost, into lady Feng's arms. Lady Feng speedily raised her hand and gave him such a slap on the face that she made the young fellow reel over and perform a somersault. "You boorish young bastard!" she shouted, "where are you running to?"

The young Taoist did not even give a thought to picking up the scissors, but crawling up on to his feet again, he tried to scamper outside. But just at that very moment Pao-ch'ai and the rest of the young ladies were dismounting from their vehicles, and the matrons and women-servants were closing them in so

thoroughly on all sides that not a puff of wind or a drop of rain could penetrate, and when they perceived a Taoist neophyte come rushing headlong out of the place, they, with one voice, exclaimed: "Catch him, catch him! Beat him, beat him!"

Old lady Chia overheard their cries. She asked with alacrity what the fuss was all about. Chia Chen immediately stepped outside to make inquiries. Lady Feng then advanced and, propping up her old senior, she went on to explain to her that a young Taoist priest, whose duties were to snuff the candles, had not previously retired out of the compound, and that he was now endeavouring to recklessly force his way out."

"Be quick and bring the lad here," shouted dowager lady Chia, as soon as she heard her explanation, "but, mind, don't frighten him. Children of mean families invariably get into the way of being spoilt by over-indulgence. How ever could he have set eyes before upon such display as this! Were you to frighten him, he will really be much to be pitied; and won't his father and mother be exceedingly cut up?"

As she spoke, she asked Chia Chen to go and do his best to bring him round. Chia Chen felt under the necessity of going, and he managed to drag the lad into her presence. With the scissors still clasped in his hand, the lad fell on his knees, and trembled violently.

Dowager lady Chia bade Chia Chen raise him up. "There's nothing to fear!" she said reassuringly. Then she asked him how old he was.

page 74

The boy, however, could on no account give vent to speech.

"Poor boy!" once more exclaimed the old lady. And continuing: "Brother Chen," she added, addressing herself to Chia Chen, "take him away, and give him a few cash to buy himself fruit with; and do impress upon every one that they are not to bully him."

Chia Chen signified his assent and led him off.

During this time, old lady Chia, taking along with her the whole family party,

paid her devotions in storey after storey, and visited every place.

The young pages, who stood outside, watched their old mistress and the other inmates enter the second row of gates. But of a sudden they espied Chia Chen wend his way outwards, leading a young Taoist priest, and calling the servants to come, say; "Take him and give him several hundreds of cash and abstain from ill-treating him." At these orders, the domestics approached with hurried step and led him off.

Chia Chen then inquired from the terrace-steps where the majordomo was. At this inquiry, the pages standing below, called out in chorus, "Majordomo!"

Lin Chih-hsiao ran over at once, while adjusting his hat with one hand, and appeared in the presence of Chia Chen.

"Albeit this is a spacious place," Chia Chen began, "we muster a good concourse to-day, so you'd better bring into this court those servants, who'll be of any use to you, and send over into that one those who won't. And choose a few from among those young pages to remain on duty, at the second gate and at the two side entrances, so as to ask for things and deliver messages. Do you understand me, yes or no? The young ladies and ladies have all come out of town to-day, and not a single outsider must be permitted to put his foot in here."

"I understand," replied Lin Chih-hsiao hurriedly signifying his obedience. Next he uttered several yes's.

"Now," proceeded Chia Chen; "you can go on your way. But how is it, I don't see anything of Jung Erh?" he went on to ask.

This question was barely out of his lips, when he caught sight of Jung Erh running out of the belfry. "Look at him," shouted Chia Chen. "Look at him! I don't feel hot in here, and yet he must go in search of a cool place. Spit at him!" he cried to the family servants.

The young pages were fully aware that Chia Chen's ordinary disposition was such that he could not brook contradiction, and one of the lads speedily came forward and sputtered in Chia Jung's face. But Chia Chen still kept his gaze fixed on him, so the young page had to inquire of Chia

Jung: "Master doesn't feel hot here, and how is it that you, Sir, have been the first to go and get cool?"

Chia Jung however dropped his arms, and did not venture to utter a single sound. Chia Yün, Chia P'ing, Chia Ch'in and the other young people overheard what was going on and not only were they scared out of their wits, but even Chia Lien, Chia Pin, Chia Ch'ung and their companions were stricken with intense fright and one by one they quietly slipped down along the foot of the wall.

"What are you standing there for?" Chia Chen shouted to Chia Jung. "Don't you yet get on your horse and gallop home and tell your mother that our venerable senior is here with all the young ladies, and bid them come at once and wait upon them?"

As soon as Chia Jung heard these words, he ran out with hurried stride and called out repeatedly for his horse. Now he felt resentment, arguing within himself: "Who knows what he has been up to the whole morning, that he now finds fault with me!" Now he went on to abuse the young servants, crying: "Are your hands made fast, that you can't lead the horse round?" And he felt inclined to bid a servant-boy go on the errand, but fearing again lest he should subsequently be found out, and be at a loss how to account for his conduct he felt compelled to proceed in person; so mounting his steed, he started on his way.

But to return to Chia Chen. Just as he was about to be take himself inside, he noticed the Taoist Chang, who stood next to him, force a smile. "I'm not properly speaking," he remarked, "on the same footing as the others and should be in attendance inside, but as on account of the intense heat, the young ladies have come out of doors, I couldn't presume to take upon myself to intrude and ask what your orders, Sir, are. But the dowager lady may possibly inquire about me, or may like to visit any part of the temple, so I shall wait in here."

Chia Chen was fully cognisant that this Taoist priest, Chang, had, it is true, in past days, stood as a substitute for the Duke of the Jung Kuo mansion, but that the former Emperor had, with his own lips, conferred upon him the appellation of the 'Immortal being of the Great Unreal,' that he held at present the seal of

'Taoist Superior,' that the reigning Emperor had raised him to the rank of the 'Pure man,' that the princes, now-a-days, dukes, and high officials styled him the "Supernatural being," and he did not therefore venture to treat him with any disrespect. In the second place, (he knew that) he had paid frequent visits to the mansions, and that he had made the acquaintance of the ladies and young ladies, so when he heard his present remark he smilingly rejoined. "Do you again make use of such language amongst

page 76

ourselves? One word more, and I'll take that beard of yours, and outroot it! Don't you yet come along with me inside?"

"Hah, hah," laughed the Taoist Chang aloud, as he followed Chia Chen in. Chia Chen approached dowager lady Chia. Bending his body he strained a laugh. "Grandfather Chang," he said, "has come in to pay his respects."

"Raise him up!" old lady Chia vehemently called out.

Chia Chen lost no time in pulling him to his feet and bringing him over.

The Taoist Chang first indulged in loud laughter. "Oh Buddha of unlimited years!" he then observed. "Have you kept all right and in good health, throughout, venerable Senior? Have all the ladies and young ladies continued well? I haven't been for some time to your mansion to pay my obeisance, but you, my dowager lady, have improved more and more."

"Venerable Immortal Being!" smiled old lady Chia, "how are you; quite well?"

"Thanks to the ten thousand blessings he has enjoyed from your hands," rejoined Chang the Taoist, "your servant too continues pretty strong and hale. In every other respect, I've, after all, been all right; but I have felt much concern about Mr. Pao Yü. Has he been all right all the time? The other day, on the 26th of the fourth moon, I celebrated the birthday of the 'Heaven-Pervading-Mighty-King;' few people came and everything went off right and proper. I told them to invite Mr. Pao to come for a stroll; but how was it they said that he wasn't at home?"

"It was indeed true that he was away from home," remarked dowager lady Chia. As she spoke, she turned her head round and called Pao Yü.

Pao Yü had, as it happened, just returned from outside where he had been to make himself comfortable, and with speedy step, he came forward. "My respects to you, grandfather Chang," he said.

The Taoist Chang eagerly clasped him in his arms and inquired how he was getting on. Turning towards old lady Chia, "Mr. Pao," he observed, "has grown fatter than ever."

"Outwardly, his looks," replied dowager lady Chia, "may be all right, but, inwardly, he is weak. In addition to this, his father presses him so much to study that he has again and again managed, all through this bullying, to make his child fall sick."

"The other day," continued Chang the Taoist, "I went to several places on a visit, and saw characters written by Mr. Pao and verses composed by him, all of which were exceedingly good; so how is it that his worthy father still feels displeased with him, and maintains that Mr. Pao is not very fond of his books? According to my humble idea, he knows quite enough. As I consider Mr. Pao's face, his bearing, his speech and his deportment," he

page 77

proceeded, heaving a sigh, "what a striking resemblance I find in him to the former duke of the Jung mansion!" As he uttered these words, tears rolled down his cheeks.

At these words, old lady Chia herself found it hard to control her feelings. Her face became covered with the traces of tears. "Quite so," she assented, "I've had ever so many sons and grandsons, and not one of them betrayed the slightest resemblance to his grandfather; and this Pao Yü turns out to be the very image of him!"

"What the former duke of Jung Kuo was like in appearance," Chang, the Taoist went on to remark, addressing himself to Chia Chen, "you gentlemen, and your generation, were, of course, needless to say, not in time to see for yourselves; but I fancy that even our Senior master and our Master Secundus have but a faint recollection of it."

This said, he burst into another loud fit of laughter. "The other day," he resumed, "I was at some one's house and there I met a young girl, who is this year in her fifteenth year, and verily gifted with a beautiful face, and I bethought myself that Mr. Pao must also have a wife found for him. As far as looks, intelligence and mental talents, extraction and family standing go, this maiden is a suitable match for him. But as I didn't know what your venerable ladyship would have to say about it, your servant did not presume to act recklessly, but waited until I could ascertain your wishes before I took upon myself to open my mouth with the parties concerned."

"Some time ago," responded dowager lady Chia, "a bonze explained that it was ordained by destiny that this child shouldn't be married at an early age, and that we should put things off until he grew somewhat in years before anything was settled. But mark my words now. Pay no regard as to whether she be of wealthy and honourable stock or not, the essential thing is to find one whose looks make her a fit match for him and then come at once and tell me. For even admitting that the girl is poor, all I shall have to do will be to bestow on her a few ounces of silver; but fine looks and a sweet temperament are not easy things to come across."

When she had done speaking, lady Feng was heard to smilingly interpose: "Grandfather Chang, aren't you going to change the talisman of 'Recorded Name' of our daughter? The other day, lucky enough for you, you had again the great cheek to send some one to ask me for some satin of gosling-yellow colour. I gave it to you, for had I not, I was afraid lest your old face should have been made to feel uneasy."

"Hah, hah," roared the Taoist Chang, "just see how my eyes must have grown dim! I didn't notice that you, my lady, were in here; nor did I express one word of thanks to you! The talisman of 'Recorded Name' is ready long ago."

page 78

I meant to have sent it over the day before yesterday, but the unforeseen visit of the Empress to perform meritorious deeds upset my equilibrium, and made me quite forget it. But it's still placed before the gods, and if you will wait I'll go and fetch it."

Saying this, he rushed into the main hall. Presently, he returned with a tea-tray in

hand, on which was spread a deep red satin cover, brocaded with dragons. In this, he presented the charm. Ta Chieh-erh's nurse took it from him.

But just as the Taoist was on the point of taking Ta Chieh-erh in his embrace, lady Feng remarked with a smile: "It would have been sufficient if you'd carried it in your hand! And why use a tray to lay it on?"

"My hands aren't clean," replied the Taoist Chang, "so how could I very well have taken hold of it? A tray therefore made things much cleaner!"

"When you produced that tray just now," laughed lady Feng, "you gave me quite a start; I didn't imagine that it was for the purpose of bringing the charm in. It really looked as if you were disposed to beg donations of us."

This observation sent the whole company into a violent fit of laughter. Even Chia Chen could not suppress a smile.

"What a monkey!" dowager lady Chia exclaimed, turning her head round. "What a monkey you are! Aren't you afraid of going down to that Hell, where tongues are cut off?"

"I've got nothing to do with any men whatever," rejoined lady Feng laughing, "and why does he time and again tell me that it's my bounden duty to lay up a store of meritorious deeds; and that if I'm remiss, my life will be short?"

Chang, the Taoist, indulged in further laughter. "I brought out," he explained, "the tray so as to kill two birds with one stone. It wasn't, however, to beg for donations. On the contrary, it was in order to put in it the jade, which I meant to ask Mr. Pao to take off, so as to carry it outside and let all those Taoist friends of mine, who come from far away, as well as my neophytes and the young apprentices, see what it's like."

"Well, since that be the case," added old lady Chia, "why do you, at your age, try your strength by running about the whole day long? Take him at once along and let them see it! But were you to have called him in there, wouldn't it have saved a lot of trouble?"

"Your venerable ladyship," resumed Chang, the Taoist, "isn't aware that though I be, to look at, a man of eighty, I, after all, continue, thanks to your protection, my dowager lady, quite hale and strong. In the second place, there are crowds of

people in the outer rooms; and the smells are not agreeable.

page 79

Besides it's a very hot day and Mr. Pao couldn't stand the heat as he is not accustomed to it. So were he to catch any disease from the filthy odours, it would be a grave thing!"

After these forebodings old lady Chia accordingly desired Pao Yü to unclasp the jade of Spiritual Perception, and to deposit it in the tray. The Taoist, Chang, carefully ensconced it in the folds of the wrapper, embroidered with dragons, and left the room, supporting the tray with both his hands.

During this while, dowager lady Chia and the other inmates devoted more of their time in visiting the various places. But just as they were on the point of going up the two-storied building, they heard Chia Chen shout: "Grandfather Chang has brought back the jade."

As he spoke, the Taoist Chang was seen advancing up to them, the tray in hand. "The whole company," he smiled, "were much obliged to me. They think Mr. Pao's jade really lovely! None of them have, however, any suitable gifts to bestow. These are religious articles, used by each of them in propagating the doctrines of Reason, but they're all only too ready to give them as congratulatory presents. If, Mr. Pao, you don't fancy them for anything else, just keep them to play with or to give away to others."

Dowager lady Chia, at these words, looked into the tray. She discovered that its contents consisted of gold signets, and jade rings, or sceptres, implying: "may you have your wishes accomplished in everything," or "may you enjoy peace and health from year to year;" that the various articles were strung with pearls or inlaid with precious stones, worked in jade or mounted in gold; and that they were in all from thirty to fifty.

"What nonsense you're talking!" she then exclaimed. "Those people are all divines, and where could they have rummaged up these things? But what need is there for any such presents? He may, on no account, accept them."

"These are intended as a small token of their esteem," responded Chang, the Taoist, smiling, "your servant cannot therefore venture to interfere with them. If

your venerable ladyship will not keep them, won't you make it patent to them that I'm treated contemptuously, and unlike what one should be, who has joined the order through your household?"

Only when old lady Chia heard these arguments did she direct a servant to receive the presents.

"Venerable senior," Pao Yü smilingly chimed in. "After the reasons advanced by grandfather Chang, we cannot possibly refuse them. But albeit I feel disposed to keep these things, they are of no avail to me; so would it not be well were a servant told to carry the tray and to follow me out of doors, that I may distribute them to the poor?"

"You are perfectly right in what you say!" smiled dowager lady Chia.

page 80

The Taoist Chang, however, went on speedily to use various arguments to dissuade him. "Mr. Pao," he observed, "your intention is, it is true, to perform charitable acts; but though you may aver that these things are of little value, you'll nevertheless find among them several articles you might turn to some account. Were you to let the beggars have them, why they will, first of all, be none the better for them; and, next, it will contrariwise be tantamount to throwing them away! If you want to distribute anything among the poor, why don't you dole out cash to them?"

"Put them by!" promptly shouted Pao Yü, after this rejoinder, "and when evening comes, take a few cash and distribute them."

These directions given, Chang, the Taoist, retired out of the place.

Dowager lady Chia and her companions thereupon walked upstairs and sat in the main part of the building. Lady Feng and her friends adjourned into the eastern part, while the waiting-maids and servants remained in the western portion, and took their turns in waiting on their mistresses.

Before long, Chia Chen came back. "The plays," he announced, "have been chosen by means of slips picked out before the god. The first one on the list is the 'Record of the White Snake.'"

“Of what kind of old story does 'the record of the white snake,' treat?” old lady Chia inquired.

“The story about Han Kao-tsu,” replied Chia Chen, “killing a snake and then ascending the throne. The second play is, 'the Bed covered with ivory tablets.’”

“Has this been assigned the second place?” asked dowager lady Chia. “Yet never mind; for as the gods will it thus, there is no help than not to demur. But what about the third play?” she went on to inquire.

“The Nan Ko dream is the third,” Chia Chen answered.

This response elicited no comment from dowager lady Chia. Chia Chen therefore withdrew downstairs, and betook himself outside to make arrangements for the offerings to the gods, for the paper money and eatables that had to be burnt, and for the theatricals about to begin. So we will leave him without any further allusion, and take up our narrative with Pao Yü.

Seating himself upstairs next to old lady Chia, he called to a servant-girl to fetch the tray of presents given to him a short while back, and putting on his own trinket of jade, he fumbled about with the things for a bit, and picking up one by one, he handed them to his grandmother to admire. But old lady Chia espied among them a unicorn, made of purplish gold, with kingfisher feathers inserted, and eagerly extending her arm, she took it up. “This object,” she smiled, “seems to me to resemble very much one I've seen worn also by the young lady of some household or other of ours.”

page 81

“Senior cousin, Shih Hsiang-yün,” chimed in Pao-ch'ai, a smile playing on her lips, “has one, but it's a trifle smaller than this.”

“Is it indeed Yün-erh who has it?” exclaimed old lady Chia.

“Now that she lives in our house,” remarked Pao Yü, “how is it that even I haven't seen anything of it?”

“Cousin Pao-ch'ai,” rejoined T'an Ch'un laughingly, “has the power of observation; no matter what she sees, she remembers.”

Lin Tai-yü gave a sardonic smile. “As far as other matters are concerned,” she insinuated, “her observation isn't worth speaking of; where she's extra-observant is in articles people may wear about their persons.”

Pao-chai, upon catching this sneering remark, at once turned her head round, and pretended she had not heard. But as soon as Pao Yü learnt that Shih Hsiang-yün possessed a similar trinket, he speedily picked up the unicorn, and hid it in his breast, indulging, at the same time, in further reflection. Yet, fearing lest people might have noticed that he kept back that particular thing the moment he discovered that Shih Hsiang-yün had one identical with it, he fixed his eyes intently upon all around while clutching it. He found however that not one of them was paying any heed to his movements except Lin Tai-yü, who, while gazing at him was, nodding her head, as if with the idea of expressing her admiration. Pao Yü, therefore, at once felt inwardly ill at ease, and pulling out his hand, he observed, addressing himself to Tai-yü with an assumed smile, “This is really a fine thing to play with; I'll keep it for you, and when we get back home, I'll pass a ribbon through it for you to wear.” “I don't care about it,” said Lin Tai-yü, giving her head a sudden twist.

“Well,” continued Pao Yü laughingly, “if you don't like it, I can't do otherwise than keep it myself.”

Saying this, he once again thrust it away. But just as he was about to open his lips to make some other observation, he saw Mrs. Yu, the spouse of Chia Chen, arrive along with the second wife recently married by Chia Jung, that is, his mother and her daughter-in-law, to pay their obeisance to dowager lady Chia.

“What do you people rush over here for again?” old lady Chia inquired.

“I came here for a turn, simply because I had nothing to do.”

But no sooner was this inquiry concluded than they heard a messenger announce: “that some one had come from the house of general Feng.”

The family of Feng Tzu-ying had, it must be explained, come to learn the news that the inmates of the Chia mansion were offering a thanksgiving service in the

temple, and, without loss of time, they got together presents of pigs, sheep, candles, tea and eatables and sent them over. The moment lady Feng heard about it she hastily crossed to the main part of the two-storied

page 82

building. "Ai-ya;" she ejaculated, clapping her hands and laughing. "I never expected anything of the sort; we merely said that we ladies were coming for a leisurely stroll and people imagined that we were spreading a sumptuous altar with lenten viands and came to bring us offerings! But it's all our old lady's fault for bruiting it about! Why, we haven't even got any slips of paper with tips ready."

She had just finished speaking, when she perceived two matrons, who acted as house-keepers in the Feng family, walk upstairs. But before the Feng servants could take their leave, presents likewise arrived, in quick succession, from Chao, the Vice-President of the Board. In due course, one lot of visitors followed another. For as every one got wind of the fact that the Chia family was having thanksgiving services, and that the ladies were in the temple, distant and close relatives, friends, old friends and acquaintances all came to present their contributions. So much so, that dowager lady Chia began at this juncture to feel sorry that she had ever let the cat out of the bag. "This is no regular fasting," she said, "we simply have come for a little change; and we should not have put any one to any inconvenience!" Although therefore she was to have remained present all day at the theatrical performance, she promptly returned home soon after noon, and the next day she felt very loth to go out of doors again.

"By striking the wall, we've also stirred up dust," lady Feng argued. "Why we've already put those people to the trouble so we should only be too glad to-day to have another outing."

But as when dowager lady Chia interviewed the Taoist Chang, the previous day, he made allusion to Pao Yü and canvassed his engagement, Pao Yü experienced, little as one would have thought it, much secret displeasure during the whole of that day, and on his return home he flew into a rage and abused Chang, the rationalistic priest, for harbouring designs to try and settle a match for him. At every breath and at every word he resolved that henceforward he would not set eyes again upon the Taoist Chang. But no one but himself had any idea of the reason that actuated him to absent himself. In the next place, Lin Tai-yü began

also, on her return the day before, to ail from a touch of the sun, so their grandmother was induced by these two considerations to remain firm in her decision not to go. When lady Feng, however, found that she would not join them, she herself took charge of the family party and set out on the excursion.

But without descending to particulars, let us advert to Pao Yü. Seeing that Lin Tai-yü had fallen ill, he was so full of solicitude on her account that he even had little thought for any of his meals, and not long elapsed before he came to inquire how she was.

Tai-yü, on her part, gave way to fear lest anything should happen to him, (and she tried to re-assure him). "Just go and look at the plays," she therefore replied, "what's the use of boxing yourself up at home?"

page 83

Pao Yü was, however, not in a very happy frame of mind on account of the reference to his marriage made by Chang, the Taoist, the day before, so when he heard Lin Tai-yü's utterances: "If others don't understand me;" he mused, "it's anyhow excusable; but has she too begun to make fun of me?" His heart smarted in consequence under the sting of a mortification a hundred times keener than he had experienced up to that occasion. Had he been with any one else, it would have been utterly impossible for her to have brought into play feelings of such resentment, but as it was no other than Tai-yü who spoke the words, the impression produced upon him was indeed different from that left in days gone by, when others employed similar language. Unable to curb his feelings, he instantaneously lowered his face. "My friendship with you has been of no avail" he rejoined. "But, never mind, patience!"

This insinuation induced Lin Tai-yü to smile a couple of sarcastic smiles. "Yes, your friendship with me has been of no avail," she repeated; "for how can I compare with those whose manifold qualities make them fit matches for you?"

As soon as this sneer fell on Pao Yü's ear he drew near to her. "Are you by telling me this," he asked straight to her face, "deliberately bent upon invoking imprecations upon me that I should be annihilated by heaven and extinguished by earth?"

Lin Tai-yü could not for a time fathom the import of his remarks. "It was," Pao

Yü then resumed, “on account of this very conversation that I yesterday swore several oaths, and now would you really make me repeat another one? But were the heavens to annihilate me and the earth to extinguish me, what benefit would you derive?”

This rejoinder reminded Tai-yü of the drift of their conversation on the previous day. And as indeed she had on this occasion framed in words those sentiments, which should not have dropped from her lips, she experienced both annoyance and shame, and she tremulously observed: “If I entertain any deliberate intention to bring any harm upon you, may I too be destroyed by heaven and exterminated by earth! But what's the use of all this! I know very well that the allusion to marriage made yesterday by Chang, the Taoist, fills you with dread lest he might interfere with your choice. You are inwardly so irate that you come and treat me as your malignant influence.”

Pao Yü, the fact is, had ever since his youth developed a peculiar kind of mean and silly propensity. Having moreover from tender infancy grown up

page 84

side by side with Tai-yü, their hearts and their feelings were in perfect harmony. More, he had recently come to know to a great extent what was what, and had also filled his head with the contents of a number of corrupt books and licentious stories. Of all the eminent and beautiful girls that he had met too in the families of either distant or close relatives or of friends, not one could reach the standard of Lin Tai-yü. Hence it was that he commenced, from an early period of his life, to foster sentiments of love for her; but as he could not very well give utterance to them, he felt time and again sometimes elated, sometimes vexed, and went to exhaust every means to secretly subject her heart to a test.

Lin Tai-yü happened, on the other hand, to possess in like manner a somewhat silly disposition; and she too frequently had recourse to feigned sentiments to feel her way. And as she began to conceal her true feelings and inclinations and to simply dissimulate, and he to conceal his true sentiments and wishes and to dissemble, the two unrealities thus blending together constituted eventually one reality. But it was hardly to be expected that trifles would not be the cause of tiffs between them. Thus it was that in Pao Yü's mind at this time prevailed the reflection: “that were others unable to read my feelings, it would anyhow be excusable; but is it likely that you cannot realise that in my heart and in my eyes

there is no one else besides yourself. But as you were not able to do anything to dispel my annoyance, but made use, instead, of the language you did to laugh at me, and to gag my mouth, it's evident that though you hold, at every second and at every moment, a place in my heart, I don't, in fact, occupy a place in yours.” Such was the construction attached to her conduct by Pao Yü, yet he did not have the courage to tax her with it.

“If, really, I hold a place in your heart,” Lin Tai-yü again reflected, “why do you, albeit what's said about gold and jade being a fit match, attach more importance to this perverse report and think nothing of what I say? Did you, when I so often broach the subject of this gold and jade, behave as if you, verily, had never heard anything about it, I would then have seen that you treat me with preference and that you don't harbour the least particle of a secret design. But how is it that the moment I allude to the topic of gold and jade, you at once lose all patience? This is proof enough that you are continuously pondering over that gold and jade, and that as soon as you hear me speak to you about them, you apprehend that I shall once more give way to conjectures, and intentionally pretend to be quite out of temper, with the deliberate idea of cajoling me!”

These two cousins had, to all appearances, once been of one and the same mind, but the many issues, which had sprung up between them, brought about

page 85

a contrary result and made them of two distinct minds.

“I don't care what you do, everything is well,” Pao Yü further argued, “so long as you act up to your feelings; and if you do, I shall be ever only too willing to even suffer immediate death for your sake. Whether you know this or not, doesn't matter; it's all the same. Yet were you to just do as my heart would have you, you'll afford me a clear proof that you and I are united by close ties and that you are no stranger to me!”

“Just you mind your own business,” Lin Tai-yü on her side cogitated. “If you will treat me well, I'll treat you well. And what need is there to put an end to yourself for my sake? Are you not aware that if you kill yourself, I'll also kill myself? But this demonstrates that you don't wish me to be near to you, and that you really want that I should be distant to you.”

It will thus be seen that the desire, by which they were both actuated, to strive and draw each other close and ever closer became contrariwise transformed into a wish to become more distant. But as it is no easy task to frame into words the manifold secret thoughts entertained by either, we will now confine ourselves to a consideration of their external manner.

The three words "a fine match," which Pao Yü heard again Lin Tai-yü pronounce proved so revolting to him that his heart got full of disgust and he was unable to give utterance to a single syllable. Losing all control over his temper, he snatched from his neck the jade of Spiritual Perception and, clenching his teeth, he spitefully dashed it down on the floor. "What rubbishy trash!" he cried. "I'll smash you to atoms and put an end to the whole question!"

The jade, however, happened to be of extraordinary hardness, and did not, after all, sustain the slightest injury from this single fall. When Pao Yü realised that it had not broken, he forthwith turned himself round to get the trinket with the idea of carrying out his design of smashing it, but Tai-yü divined his intention, and soon started crying. "What's the use of all this!" she demurred, "and why, pray, do you batter that dumb thing about? Instead of smashing it, wouldn't it be better for you to come and smash me!"

But in the middle of their dispute, Tzu Chüan, Hsüeh Yen and the other maids promptly interfered and quieted them. Subsequently, however, they saw how deliberately bent Pao Yü was upon breaking the jade, and they vehemently rushed up to him to snatch it from his hands. But they failed in their endeavours, and perceiving that he was getting more troublesome than he had ever been before, they had no alternative but to go and call Hsi Jen. Hsi Jen lost no time in running over and succeeded, at length, in getting hold of the trinket.

page 86

"I'm smashing what belongs to me," remarked Pao Yü with a cynical smile, "and what has that to do with you people?"

Hsi Jen noticed that his face had grown quite sallow from anger, that his eyes had assumed a totally unusual expression, and that he had never hitherto had such a fit of ill-temper and she hastened to take his hand in hers and to smilingly expostulate with him. "If you've had a tiff with your cousin," she said, "it isn't worth while flinging this down! Had you broken it, how would her heart and

face have been able to bear the mortification?"

Lin Tai-yü shed tears and listened the while to her remonstrances. Yet these words, which so corresponded with her own feelings, made it clear to her that Pao Yü could not even compare with Hsi Jen and wounded her heart so much more to the quick that she began to weep aloud. But the moment she got so vexed she found it hard to keep down the potion of boletus and the decoction, for counter-acting the effects of the sun, she had taken only a few minutes back, and with a retch she brought everything up. Tzu Chüan immediately pressed to her side and used her handkerchief to stop her mouth with. But mouthful succeeded mouthful, and in no time the handkerchief was soaked through and through.

Hsüeh Yen then approached in a hurry and tapped her on the back.

"You may, of course, give way to displeasure," Tzu Chüan argued; "but you should, after all, take good care of yourself Miss. You had just taken the medicines and felt the better for them; and here you now begin vomiting again; and all because you've had a few words with our master Secundus. But should your complaint break out afresh how will Mr. Pao bear the blow?"

The moment Pao Yü caught this advice, which accorded so thoroughly with his own ideas, he found how little Tai-yü could hold her own with Tzu Chüan. And perceiving how flushed Tai-yü's face was, how her temples were swollen, how, while sobbing, she panted; and how, while crying, she was suffused with perspiration, and betrayed signs of extreme weakness, he began, at the sight of her condition, to reproach himself. "I shouldn't," he reflected, "have bandied words with her; for now that she's got into this frame of mind, I mayn't even suffer in her stead!"

The self-reproaches, however, which gnawed his heart made it impossible for him to refrain from tears, much as he fought against them. Hsi Jen saw them both crying, and while attending to Pao Yü, she too unavoidably experienced much soreness of heart. She nevertheless went on rubbing Pao Yü's hands, which were icy cold. She felt inclined to advise Pao Yü not to weep, but fearing again lest, in the first place, Pao Yü might be inwardly aggrieved, and nervous, in the next, lest she should not be dealing rightly by Tai-yü, she

thought it advisable that they should all have a good cry, as they might then be able to leave off. She herself therefore also melted into tears.

As for Tzu-Chüan, at one time, she cleaned the expectorated medicine; at another, she took up a fan and gently fanned Tai-yü. But at the sight of the trio plunged in perfect silence, and of one and all sobbing for reasons of their own, grief, much though she did to struggle against it, mastered her feelings too, and producing a handkerchief, she dried the tears that came to her eyes. So there stood four inmates, face to face, uttering not a word and indulging in weeping.

Shortly, Hsi Jen made a supreme effort, and smilingly said to Pao Yü: "If you don't care for anything else, you should at least have shown some regard for those tassels, strung on the jade, and not have wrangled with Miss Lin."

Tai-yü heard these words, and, mindless of her indisposition, she rushed over, and snatching the trinket, she picked up a pair of scissors, lying close at hand, bent upon cutting the tassels. Hsi Jen and Tzu Chüan were on the point of wresting it from her, but she had already managed to mangle them into several pieces.

"I have," sobbed Tai-yü, "wasted my energies on them for nothing; for he doesn't prize them. He's certain to find others to string some more fine tassels for him."

Hsi Jen promptly took the jade. "Is it worth while going on in this way!" she cried. "But this is all my fault for having blabbered just now what should have been left unsaid."

"Cut it, if you like!" chimed in Pao Yü, addressing himself to Tai-yü. "I will on no account wear it, so it doesn't matter a rap."

But while all they minded inside was to create this commotion, they little dreamt that the old matrons had descried Tai-yü weep bitterly and vomit copiously, and Pao Yü again dash his jade on the ground, and that not knowing how far the excitement might not go, and whether they themselves might not become involved, they had repaired in a body to the front, and reported the occurrence to dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang, their object being to try and avoid being themselves implicated in the matter. Their old mistress and Madame Wang, seeing them make so much of the occurrence as to rush with precipitate haste to bring it to their notice, could not in the least imagine what great disaster might

not have befallen them, and without loss of time they betook themselves together into the garden and came to see what the two cousins were up to.

Hsi Jen felt irritated and harboured resentment against Tzu Chüan, unable to conceive what business she had to go and disturb their old mistress

page 88]

and Madame Wang. But Tzu Chüan, on the other hand, presumed that it was Hsi Jen, who had gone and reported the matter to them, and she too cherished angry feelings towards Hsi Jen.

Dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang walked into the apartment. They found Pao Yü on one side saying not a word. Lin Tai-yü on the other uttering not a sound. "What's up again?" they asked. But throwing the whole blame upon the shoulders of Hsi Jen and Tzu Chüan, "why is it," they inquired, "that you were not diligent in your attendance on them. They now start a quarrel, and don't you exert yourselves in the least to restrain them?"

Therefore with obloquy and hard words they rated the two girls for a time in such a way that neither of them could put in a word by way of reply, but felt compelled to listen patiently. And it was only after dowager lady Chia had taken Pao Yü away with her that things quieted down again.

One day passed. Then came the third of the moon. This was Hsüeh Pan's birthday, so in their house a banquet was spread and preparations made for a performance; and to these the various inmates of the Chia mansion went. But as Pao Yü had so hurt Tai-yü's feelings, the two cousins saw nothing whatever of each other, and conscience-stricken, despondent and unhappy, as he was at this time could he have had any inclination to be present at the plays? Hence it was that he refused to go on the pretext of indisposition.

Lin Tai-yü had got, a couple of days back, but a slight touch of the sun and naturally there was nothing much the matter with her. When the news however reached her that he did not intend to join the party, "If with his weakness for wine and for theatricals," she pondered within herself, "he now chooses to stay away, instead of going, why, that quarrel with me yesterday must be at the bottom of it all. If this isn't the reason, well then it must be that he has no wish to attend, as he sees that I'm not going either. But I should on no account have cut

the tassels from that jade, for I feel sure he won't wear it again. I shall therefore have to string some more on to it, before he puts it on.”

On this account the keenest remorse gnawed her heart.

Dowager lady Chia saw well enough that they were both under the influence of temper. “We should avail ourselves of this occasion,” she said to herself, “to go over and look at the plays, and as soon as the two young people come face to face, everything will be squared.” Contrary to her expectations neither of them would volunteer to go. This so exasperated their old grandmother that she felt vexed with them. “In what part of my previous existence could an old sufferer like myself,” she exclaimed, “have incurred such

page 89

retribution that my destiny is to come across these two troublesome new-fledged foes! Why, not a single day goes by without their being instrumental in worrying my mind! The proverb is indeed correct which says: 'that people who are not enemies are not brought together!' But shortly my eyes shall be closed, this breath of mine shall be snapped, and those two enemies will be free to cause trouble even up to the very skies; for as my eyes will then lose their power of vision, and my heart will be void of concern, it will really be nothing to me. But I couldn't very well stifle this breath of life of mine!”

While inwardly a prey to resentment, she also melted into tears.

These words were brought to the ears of Pao Yü and Tai-yü. Neither of them had hitherto heard the adage: “people who are not enemies are not brought together,” so when they suddenly got to know the line, it seemed as if they had apprehended abstraction. Both lowered their heads and meditated on the subtle sense of the saying. But unconsciously a stream of tears rolled down their cheeks. They could not, it is true, get a glimpse of each other; yet as the one was in the Hsiao Hsiang lodge, standing in the breeze, bedewed with tears, and the other in the I Hung court, facing the moon and heaving deep sighs, was it not, in fact, a case of two persons living in two distinct places, yet with feelings emanating from one and the same heart?

Hsi Jen consequently tendered advice to Pao Yü. “You're a million times to blame,” she said, “it's you who are entirely at fault! For when some time ago the

pages in the establishment, wrangled with their sisters, or when husband and wife fell out, and you came to hear anything about it, you blew up the lads, and called them fools for not having the heart to show some regard to girls; and now here you go and follow their lead. But to-morrow is the fifth day of the moon, a great festival, and will you two still continue like this, as if you were very enemies? If so, our venerable mistress will be the more angry, and she certainly will be driven sick! I advise you therefore to do what's right by suppressing your spite and confessing your fault, so that we should all be on the same terms as hitherto. You here will then be all right, and so will she over there.”

Pao Yü listened to what she had to say; but whether he fell in with her views or not is not yet ascertained; yet if you, reader, choose to know, we will explain in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXX.

Pao-ch'ai avails herself of the excuse afforded her by a fan to administer a couple of raps.

While Ch'un Ling traces, in a absent frame of mind, the outlines of the character Ch'iang, a looker-on appears on the scene.

Lin Tai-yü herself, for we will now resume our narrative, was also, ever since her tiff with Pao Yü, full of self-condemnation, yet as she did not see why she should run after him, she continued, day and night, as despondent as she would have been had she lost some thing or other belonging to her.

Tzu Chüan surmised her sentiments. "As regards what happened the other day," she advised her, "you were, after all, Miss, a little too hasty; for if others don't understand that temperament of Pao Yü's, have you and I, surely, also no idea about it? Besides, haven't there been already one or two rows on account of that very jade?"

"Ts'ui!" exclaimed Tai-yü. "Have you come, on behalf of others, to find fault with me? But how ever was I hasty?"

"Why did you," smiled Tzu Chüan, "take the scissors and cut that tassel when there was no good reason for it? So isn't Pao Yü less to blame than yourself, Miss? I've always found his behaviour towards you, Miss, without a fault. It's all that touchy disposition of yours, which makes you so often perverse, that induces him to act as he does."

Lin Tai-yü had every wish to make some suitable reply, when she heard some one calling at the door. Tzu Chüan discerned the tone of voice. "This sounds like Pao Yü's voice," she smiled. "I expect he's come to make his apologies."

"I won't have any one open the door," Tai-yü cried at these words.

"Here you are in the wrong again, Miss," Tzu Chüan observed. "How will it ever do to let him get a sunstroke and come to some harm on a day like this, and under such a scorching sun?"

Saying this, she speedily walked out and opened the door. It was indeed Pao Yü. While ushering him in, she gave him a smile. "I imagined," she said, "that you would never again put your foot inside our door, Master Secundus. But here you are once more and quite unexpectedly!"

"You have by dint of talking," Pao Yü laughed, "made much ado of nothing; and why shouldn't I come, when there's no reason for me to keep away? Were I even to die, my spirit too will come a hundred times a day! But is cousin quite well?"

"She is," replied Tzu Chüan, "physically all right; but, mentally, her resentment is not quite over."

"I understand," continued Pao Yü with a smile. "But resentment, for what?"

With this inquiry, he wended his steps inside the apartment. He then caught sight of Lin Tai-yü reclining on the bed in the act of crying. Tai-yü

page 91

had not in fact shed a tear, but hearing Pao Yü break in upon her, she could not help feeling upset. She found it impossible therefore to prevent her tears from rolling down her cheeks.

Pao Yü assumed a smiling expression and drew near the bed. "Cousin, are you quite well again?" he inquired.

Tai-yü simply went on drying her tears, and made no reply of any kind.

Pao Yü approached the bed, and sat on the edge of it. "I know," he smiled, "that you're not vexed with me. But had I not come, third parties would have been allowed to notice my absence, and it would have appeared to them as if we had had another quarrel. And had I to wait until they came to reconcile us, would we not by that time become perfect strangers? It would be better, supposing you wish to beat me or blow me up, that you should please yourself and do so now; but whatever you do, don't give me the cold shoulder!"

Continuing, he proceeded to call her "my dear cousin" for several tens of times.

Tai-yü had resolved not to pay any more heed to Pao Yü. When she, however,

now heard Pao Yü urge: “don't let us allow others to know anything about our having had a quarrel, as it will look as if we had become thorough strangers,” it once more became evident to her, from this single remark, that she was really dearer and nearer to him than any of the other girls, so she could not refrain from saying sobbingly: “You needn't have come to chaff me! I couldn't presume henceforward to be on friendly terms with you, Master Secundus! You should treat me as if I were gone!”

At these words, Pao Yü gave way to laughter. “Where are you off to?” he inquired.

“I'm going back home,” answered Tai-yü.

“I'll go along with you then,” smiled Pao Yü.

“But if I die?” asked Tai-yü.

“Well, if you die,” rejoined Pao Yü, “I'll become a bonze.”

The moment Tai-yü caught this reply, she hung down her head. “You must, I presume, be bent upon dying?” she cried. “But what stuff and nonsense is this you're talking? You've got so many beloved elder and younger cousins in your family, and how many bodies will you have to go and become bonzes, when by and bye they all pass away! But to-morrow I'll tell them about this to judge for themselves what your motives are!”

Pao Yü was himself aware of the fact that this rejoinder had been recklessly spoken, and he was seized with regret. His face immediately became suffused with blushes. He lowered his head and had not the courage to utter one word more. Fortunately, however, there was no one present in the room.

page 92

Tai-yü stared at him for ever so long with eyes fixed straight on him, but losing control over her temper, “Ai!” she shouted, “can't you speak?” Then when she perceived Pao Yü reduced to such straits as to turn purple, she clenched her teeth and spitefully gave him, on the forehead, a fillip with her finger. “Heug!” she cried gnashing her teeth, “you, this.....” But just as she had pronounced these two words, she heaved another sigh, and picking up her handkerchief, she wiped

her tears.

Pao Yü treasured at one time numberless tender things in his mind, which he meant to tell her, but feeling also, while he smarted under the sting of self-reproach (for the indiscretion he had committed), Tai-yü give him a rap, he was utterly powerless to open his lips, much though he may have liked to speak, so he kept on sighing and snivelling to himself. With all these things therefore to work upon his feelings, he unwillingly melted into tears. He tried to find his handkerchief to dry his face with, but unexpectedly discovering that he had again forgotten to bring one with him, he was about to make his coat-sleeve answer the purpose, when Tai-yü, albeit her eyes were watery, noticed at a glance that he was going to use the brand-new coat of grey coloured gauze he wore, and while wiping her own, she turned herself round, and seized a silk kerchief thrown over the pillow, and thrust it into Pao Yü's lap. But without saying a word, she screened her face and continued sobbing.

Pao Yü saw the handkerchief she threw, and hastily snatching it, he wiped his tears. Then drawing nearer to her, he put out his hand and clasped her hand in his, and smilingly said to her: "You've completely lacerated my heart, and do you still cry? But let's go; I'll come along with you and see our venerable grandmother."

Tai-yü thrust his hand aside. "Who wants to go hand in hand with you?" she cried. "Here we grow older day after day, but we're still so full of brazen-faced effrontery that we don't even know what right means?"

But scarcely had she concluded before she heard a voice say aloud: "They're all right!"

Pao Yü and Tai-yü were little prepared for this surprise, and they were startled out of their senses. Turning round to see who it was, they caught sight of lady Feng running in, laughing and shouting. "Our old lady," she said, "is over there, giving way to anger against heaven and earth. She would insist upon my coming to find out whether you were reconciled or not. 'There's no need for me to go and see,' I told her, 'they will before the expiry of three days, be friends again of their own accord.' Our venerable ancestor, however, called me to account, and maintained that I was lazy; so here I come! But my words have in very deed turned out true. I don't see why you two should always be wrangling! For three days you're on good

terms and for two on bad. You become more and more like children. And here you are now hand in hand blubbing! But why did you again yesterday become like black-eyed fighting cocks? Don't you yet come with me to see your grandmother and make an old lady like her set her mind at ease a bit?"

While reproaching them, she clutched Tai-yü's hand and was trudging away, when Tai-yü turned her head round and called out for her servant-girls. But not one of them was in attendance.

"What do you want them for again?" lady Feng asked. "I am here to wait on you!"

Still speaking, she pulled her along on their way, with Pao Yü following in their footsteps. Then making their exit out of the garden gate, they entered dowager lady Chia's suite of rooms. "I said that it was superfluous for any one to trouble," lady Feng smiled, "as they were sure of themselves to become reconciled; but you, dear ancestor, so little believed it that you insisted upon my going to act the part of mediator. Yet when I got there, with the intention of inducing them to make it up, I found them, though one did not expect it, in each other's company, confessing their faults, and laughing and chatting. Just like a yellow eagle clutching the feet of a kite were those two hanging on to each other. So where was the necessity for any one to go?"

These words evoked laughter from every one in the room. Pao-ch'ai, however, was present at the time so Lin Tai-yü did not retort, but went and ensconced herself in a seat near her grandmother.

When Pao Yü noticed that no one had anything to say, he smilingly addressed himself to Pao-ch'ai. "On cousin Hsüeh P'an's birth-day," he remarked, "I happened again to be unwell, so not only did I not send him any presents, but I failed to go and knock my head before him. Yet cousin knows nothing about my having been ill, and it will seem to him that I had no wish to go, and that I brought forward excuses so as to avoid paying him a visit. If to-morrow you find any leisure, cousin, do therefore explain matters for me to him."

"This is too much punctiliousness!" smiled Pao-ch'ai. "Even had you insisted

upon going, we wouldn't have been so arrogant as to let you put yourself to the trouble, and how much less when you were not feeling well? You two are cousins and are always to be found together the whole day; if you encourage such ideas, some estrangement will, after all, arise between you.”

“Cousin,” continued Pao Yü smilingly, “you know what to say; and so long as you're lenient with me all will be all right. But how is it,” he went on to ask, “that you haven't gone over to see the theatricals?”

page 94

“I couldn't stand the heat” rejoined Pao-ch'ai. “I looked on while two plays were being sung, but I found it so intensely hot, that I felt anxious to retire. But the visitors not having dispersed, I had to give as an excuse that I wasn't feeling up to the mark, and so came away at once.”

Pao Yü, at these words, could not but feel ill at ease. All he could do was to feign another smile. “It's no wonder,” he observed, “that they compare you, cousin, to Yang Kuei-fei; for she too was fat and afraid of hot weather.”

Hearing this, Pao-ch'ai involuntarily flew into a violent rage. Yet when about to call him to task, she found that it would not be nice for her to do so. After some reflection, the colour rushed to her cheeks. Smiling ironically twice, “I may resemble,” she said, “Yang Kuei-fei, but there's not one of you young men, whether senior or junior, good enough to play the part of Yang Kuo-chung.”

While they were bandying words, a servant-girl Ch'ing Erh, lost sight of her fan and laughingly remarked to Pao-ch'ai: “It must be you, Miss Pao, who have put my fan away somewhere or other; dear mistress, do let me have it!”

“You'd better be mindful!” rejoined Pao-ch'ai, shaking her finger at her. “With whom have I ever been up to jokes, that you come and suspect me? Have I hitherto laughed and smirked with you? There's that whole lot of girls, go and ask them about it!”

At this suggestion, Ch'ing Erh made her escape.

The consciousness then burst upon Pao Yü, that he had again been inconsiderate in his speech, in the presence of so many persons, and he was overcome by a

greater sense of shame than when, a short while back, he had been speaking with Lin Tai-yü. Precipitately turning himself round, he went, therefore, and talked to the others as well.

The sight of Pao Yü poking fun at Pao-ch'ai gratified Tai-yü immensely. She was just about to put in her word and also seize the opportunity of chaffing her, but as Ch'ing Erh unawares asked for her fan and Pao-ch'ai added a few more remarks, she at once changed her purpose. "Cousin Pao-ch'ai," she inquired, "what two plays did you hear?"

Pao-ch'ai caught the expression of gratification in Tai-yü's countenance, and concluded that she had for a certainty heard the raillery recently indulged in by Pao Yü and that it had fallen in with her own wishes; and hearing her also suddenly ask the question she did, she answered with a significant laugh: "What I saw was: 'Li Kuei blows up Sung Chiang and subsequently again tenders his apologies'."

Pao Yü smiled. "How is it," he said, "that with such wide knowledge of things new as well as old; and such general information as you possess, you aren't even up to the name of

page 95

a play, and that you've come out with such a whole string of words. Why, the real name of the play is: 'Carrying a birch and begging for punishment'".

"Is it truly called: 'Carrying a birch and begging for punishment'?" Pao-ch'ai asked with laugh. "But you people know all things new and old so are able to understand the import of 'carrying a birch and begging for punishment.' As for me I've no idea whatever what 'carrying a birch and begging for punishment' implies."

One sentence was scarcely ended when Pao Yü and Tai-yü felt guilty in their consciences; and by the time they heard all she said, they were quite flushed from shame. Lady Feng did not, it is true, fathom the gist of what had been said, but at the sight of the expression betrayed on the faces of the three cousins, she readily got an inkling of it. "On this broiling hot day," she inquired laughing also; "who still eats raw ginger?"

None of the party could make out the import of her insinuation. "There's no one

eating raw ginger," they said.

Lady Feng intentionally then brought her hands to her cheeks, and rubbing them, she remarked with an air of utter astonishment, "Since there's no one eating raw ginger, how is it that you are all so fiery in the face?"

Hearing this, Pao Yü and Tai-yü waxed more uncomfortable than ever. So much so, that Pao-ch'ai, who meant to continue the conversation, did not think it nice to say anything more when she saw how utterly abashed Pao Yü was and how changed his manner. Her only course was therefore to smile and hold her peace. And as the rest of the inmates had not the faintest notion of the drift of the remarks exchanged between the four of them, they consequently followed her lead and put on a smile.

In a short while, however, Pao-ch'ai and lady Feng took their leave.

"You've also tried your strength with them," Tai-yü said to Pao Yü laughingly. "But they're far worse than I. Is every one as simple in mind and dull of tongue as I am as to allow people to say whatever they like."

Pao Yü was inwardly giving way to that unhappiness, which had been occasioned by Pao-ch'ai's touchiness, so when he also saw Tai-yü approach him and taunt him, displeasure keener than ever was aroused in him. A desire then asserted itself to speak out his mind to her, but dreading lest Tai-yü should he in one of her sensitive moods, he, needless to say, stifled his anger and straightway left the apartment in a state of mental depression.

It happened to be the season of the greatest heat. Breakfast time too was already past, and masters as well as servants were, for the most part, under the influence of the lassitude felt on lengthy days. As Pao Yü therefore strolled,

page 96

from place to place, his hands behind his back he heard not so much as the caw of a crow. Issuing out of his grandmother's compound on the near side, he wended his steps westwards, and crossed the passage, on which lady Feng's quarters gave. As soon as he reached the entrance of her court, he perceived the door ajar. But aware of lady Feng's habit of taking, during the hot weather, a couple of hours' siesta at noon, he did not feel it a convenient moment to intrude.

Walking accordingly through the corner door, he stepped into Madame Wang's apartment. Here he discovered several waiting-maids, dosing with their needlework clasped in their hands. Madame Wang was asleep on the cool couch in the inner rooms. Chin Ch'uan-erh was sitting next to her massaging her legs. But she too was quite drowsy, and her eyes wore all awry. Pao Yü drew up to her with gentle tread. The moment, however, that he unfastened the pendants from the earrings she wore, Chin Ch'uan opened her eyes, and realised that it was no one than Pao Yü.

“Are you feeling so worn out!” he smilingly remarked in a low tone of voice.

Chin Ch'uan pursed up her lips and gave him a smile. Then waving her hand so as to bid him quit the room, she again closed her eyes.

Pao Yü, at the sight of her, felt considerable affection for her and unable to tear himself away, so quietly stretching his head forward, and noticing that Madame Wang's eyes were shut, he extracted from a purse, suspended about his person, one of the 'scented-snow-for-moistening-mouth pills,' with which it was full, and placed it on Chin Ch'uan-erh's lips. Chin Ch'uan-erh, however, did not open her eyes, but simply held (the pill) in her mouth. Pao Yü then approached her and took her hand in his. “I'll ask you of your mistress,” he gently observed smiling, “and you and I will live together.”

To this Chin Ch'uan-erh said not a word.

“If that won't do,” Pao Yü continued, “I'll wait for your mistress to wake and appeal to her at once.”

Chin Ch'uan-erh distended her eyes wide, and pushed Pao Yü off. “What's the hurry?” she laughed. “A gold hair-pin may fall into the well; but if it's yours it will remain yours only.' Is it possible that you don't even see the spirit of this proverb? But I'll tell you a smart thing. Just you go into the small court, on the east side, and you'll find for yourself what Mr. Chia Huau and Ts'ai Yun are up to!”

“Let them be up to whatever they like,” smiled Pao Yü, “I shall simply stick to your side!”

But he then saw Madame Wang twist herself round, get up, and give a slap to

Chin Ch'uan-erh on her mouth. "You mean wench!" she exclaimed,

page 97

abusing her, while she pointed her finger at her, "it's you, and the like of you, who corrupt these fine young fellows with all the nice things you teach them!"

The moment Pao Yü perceived Madame Wang rise, he bolted like a streak of smoke. Chin Ch'uan-erh, meanwhile, felt half of her face as hot as fire, yet she did not dare utter one word of complaint. The various waiting-maids soon came to hear that Madame Wang had awoke and they rushed in in a body.

"Go and tell your mother," Madame Wang thereupon said to Yü Ch'uan-erh, "to fetch your elder sister away."

Chin Ch'uan-erh, at these words, speedily fell on her knees. With tears in her eyes: "I won't venture to do it again," she pleaded. "If you, Madame, wish to flog me, or to scold me do so at once, and as much as you like but don't send me away. You will thus accomplish an act of heavenly grace! I've been in attendance on your ladyship for about ten years, and if you now drive me away, will I be able to look at any one in the face?"

Though Madame Wang was a generous, tender-hearted person, and had at no time raised her hand to give a single blow to any servant-girl, she, however, when she accidentally discovered Chin Ch'uan-erh behave on this occasion in this barefaced manner, a manner which had all her lifetime been most reprehensible to her, was so overcome by passion that she gave Chin Ch'uan-erh just one slap and spoke to her a few sharp words. And albeit Chin Ch'uan-erh indulged in solicitous entreaties, she would not on any account keep her in her service. At length, Chin Ch'uan-erh's mother, Dame Pao, was sent for to take her away. Chin Ch'uan-erh therefore had to conceal her disgrace, suppress her resentment, and quit the mansion.

But without any further reference to her, we will now take up our story with Pao Yü. As soon as he saw Madame Wang awake, his spirits were crushed. All alone he hastily made his way into the Ta Kuan garden. Here his attention was attracted by the ruddy sun, shining in the zenith, the shade of the trees extending far and wide, the song of the cicadas, filling the ear; and by a perfect stillness, not even broken by the echo of a human voice. But the instant he got near the

trellis, with the cinnamon roses, the sound of sobs fell on his ear. Doubts and surmises crept into Pao Yü's mind, so halting at once, he listened with intentness. Then actually he discerned some one on the off-side of the trellis. This was the fifth moon, the season when the flowers and foliage of the cinnamon roses were in full bloom. Furtively peeping through an aperture in the fence, Pao Yü saw a young girl squatting under the flowers and digging the ground with a hair-pin she held in her hand. As she dug, she silently gave way to tears.

“Can it be possible,” mused Pao Yü, “that this girl too is stupid? Can she

page 98

also be following P'in Erh's example and come to inter flowers? Why if she's likewise really burying flowers,” he afterwards went on to smilingly reflect, “this can aptly be termed: 'Tung Shih tries to imitate a frown.' But not only is what she does not original, but it is despicable to boot. You needn't,” he meant to shout out to the girl, at the conclusion of this train of thought, “try and copy Miss Lin's example.” But before the words had issued from his mouth, he luckily scrutinised her a second time, and found that the girl's features were quite unfamiliar to him, that she was no menial, and that she looked like one of the twelve singing maids, who were getting up the plays. He could not, however, make out what roles she filled: scholars, girls, old men, women, or buffoons. Pao Yü quickly put out his tongue and stopped his mouth with his hand. “How fortunate,” he inwardly soliloquised, “that I didn't make any reckless remark! It was all because of my inconsiderate talk on the last two occasions, that P'in Erh got angry with me, and that Pao-ch'ai felt hurt. And had I now given them offence also, I would have been in a still more awkward fix!”

While wrapt in these thoughts, he felt much annoyance at not being able to recognise who she was. But on further minute inspection, he noticed that this maiden, with contracted eyebrows, as beautiful as the hills in spring, frowning eyes as clear as the streams in autumn, a face, with transparent skin, and a slim waist, was elegant and beautiful and almost the very image of Lin Tai-yü. Pao Yü could not, from the very first, make up his mind to wrench himself away. But as he stood gazing at her in a doltish mood, he realised that, although she was tracing on the ground with the gold hair-pin, she was not digging a hole to bury flowers in, but was merely delineating characters on the surface of the soil. Pao Yü's eyes followed the hair-pin from first to last, as it went up and as it came down. He watched each dash, each dot and each hook. He counted the strokes.

They numbered eighteen. He himself then set to work and sketched with his finger on the palm of his hand, the lines, in their various directions, and in the order they had been traced a few minutes back, so as to endeavour to guess what the character was. On completing the sketch, he discovered, the moment he came to reflect, that it was the character "Ch'iang," in the combination, 'Ch'iang Wei,' representing cinnamon roses.

"She too," pondered Pao Yü, "must have been bent upon writing verses, or supplying some line or other, and at the sight now of the flowers, the idea must have suggested itself to her mind. Or it may very likely be that having spontaneously devised a couplet, she got suddenly elated and began, for fear it should slip from her memory, to trace it on the ground so as to tone the rhythm. Yet there's no saying. Let me see, however, what she's going to

page 99

write next."

While cogitating, he looked once more. Lo, the girl was still tracing. But tracing up or tracing down, it was ever the character "Ch'iang." When he gazed again, it was still the self-same Ch'iang.

The one inside the fence fell, in fact, from an early stage, into a foolish mood, and no sooner was one 'Ch'iang,' finished than she started with another; so that she had already written several tens of them. The one outside gazed and gazed, until he unwittingly also got into the same foolish mood. Intent with his eyes upon following the movements of the pin, in his mind, he communed thus with his own thoughts: "This girl must, for a certainty, have something to say, or some unspeakable momentous secret that she goes on like this. But if outwardly she behaves in this wise, who knows what anguish she mayn't suffer at heart? And yet, with a frame to all appearances so very delicate, how could she ever resist much inward anxiety! Woe is me that I'm unable to transfer some part of her burden on to my own shoulders!"

In midsummer, cloudy and bright weather are uncertain. A few specks of clouds suffice to bring about rain. Of a sudden, a cold blast swept by, and tossed about by the wind fell a shower of rain. Pao Yü perceived that the water trickling down the girl's head saturated her gauze attire in no time. "It's pouring," Pao Yü debated within himself, "and how can a frame like hers resist the brunt of such a

squall.” Unable therefore to restrain himself, he vehemently shouted: “Leave off writing! See, it's pouring; you're wet through!”

The girl caught these words, and was frightened out of her wits. Raising her head, she at once descried some one or other standing beyond the flowers and calling out to her: “Leave off writing. It's pouring!” But as Pao Yü was, firstly, of handsome appearance, and as secondly the luxuriant abundance of flowers and foliage screened with their boughs, thick-laden with leaves, the upper and lower part of his person, just leaving half of his countenance exposed to view, the maiden simply jumped at the conclusion that he must be a servant girl, and never for a moment dreamt that it might be Pao Yü. “Many thanks, sister, for recalling me to my senses,” she consequently smiled. “Yet is there forsooth anything outside there to protect you from the rain?”

This single remark proved sufficient to recall Pao Yü to himself. With an exclamation of “Ai-yah,” he at length became conscious that his whole body was cold as ice. Then drooping his head, he realised that his own person too was drenched. “This will never do,” he cried, and with one breath he had to run back into the I Hung court. His mind, however, continued much exercised about the girl as she had nothing to shelter her from the rain.

As the next day was the dragon-boat festival, Wen Kuan and the

page 100

other singing girls, twelve in all, were given a holiday, so they came into the garden and amused themselves by roaming everywhere and anywhere. As luck would have it, the two girls Pao-Kuan, who filled the role of young men and Yü Kuan, who represented young women, were in the I Hung court enjoying themselves with Hsi Jen, when rain set in and they were prevented from going back, so in a body they stopped up the drain to allow the water to accumulate in the yard. Then catching those that could be caught, and driving those that had to be driven, they laid hold of a few of the green-headed ducks, variegated marsh-birds and coloured mandarin-ducks, and tying their wings they let them loose in the court to disport themselves. Closing the court Hsi Jen and her playmates stood together under the verandah and enjoyed the fun. Pao Yü therefore found the entrance shut. He gave a rap at the door. But as every one inside was bent upon laughing, they naturally did not catch the sound; and it was only after he had called and called, and made a noise by thumping at the door, that they at last

heard. Imagining, however, that Pao Yü could not be coming back at that hour, Hsi Jen shouted laughing: "who's it now knocking at the door? There's no one to go and open."

"It's I," rejoined Pao Yü.

"It's Miss Pao-ch'ai's tone of voice," added She Yüeh.

"Nonsense!" cried Ch'ing Wen. "What would Miss Pao-ch'ai come over to do at such an hour?"

"Let me go," chimed in Hsi Jen, "and see through the fissure in the door, and if we can open, we'll open; for we mustn't let her go back, wet through."

With these words, she came along the passage to the doorway. On looking out, she espied Pao Yü dripping like a chicken drenched with rain.

Seeing him in this plight, Hsi Jen felt solicitous as well as amused. With alacrity, she flung the door wide open, laughing so heartily that she was doubled in two. "How could I ever have known," she said, clapping her hands, "that you had returned, Sir! Yet how is it that you've run back in this heavy rain?"

Pao Yü had, however, been feeling in no happy frame of mind. He had fully resolved within himself to administer a few kicks to the person, who came to open the door, so as soon as it was unbarred, he did not try to make sure who it was, but under the presumption that it was one of the servant-girls, he raised his leg and give her a kick on the side.

"Ai-yah!" ejaculated Hsi Jen.

Pao Yü nevertheless went on to abuse. "You mean things!" he shouted. "It's because I've always treated you so considerately that you don't respect

page 101

me in the least! And you now go to the length of making a laughing-stock of me!"

As he spoke, he lowered his head. Then catching sight of Hsi Jen, in tears, he

realised that he had kicked the wrong person. "Hallo!" he said, promptly smiling, "is it you who've come? Where did I kick you?"

Hsi Jen had never, previous to this, received even a harsh word from him. When therefore she on this occasion unexpectedly saw Pao Yü gave her a kick in a fit of anger and, what made it worse, in the presence of so many people, shame, resentment, and bodily pain overpowered her and she did not, in fact, for a time know where to go and hide herself. She was then about to give rein to her displeasure, but the reflection that Pao Yü could not have kicked her intentionally obliged her to suppress her indignation. "Instead of kicking," she remarked, "don't you yet go and change your clothes?"

Pao Yü walked into the room. As he did so, he smiled. "Up to the age I've reached," he observed, "this is the first instance on which I've ever so thoroughly lost control over my temper as to strike any one; and, contrary to all my thoughts, it's you that happened to come in my way?"

Hsi Jen, while patiently enduring the pain, effected the necessary change in his attire. "I've been here from the very first," she simultaneously added, smilingly, "so in all things, whether large or small, good or bad, it has naturally fallen to my share to bear the brunt. But not to say another word about your assault on me, why, to-morrow you'll indulge your hand and star-beating others!"

"I did not strike you intentionally just now," retorted Pao Yü.

"Who ever said," rejoined Hsi Jen, "that you did it intentionally! It has ever been the duty of that tribe of servant-girls to open and shut the doors, yet they've got into the way of being obstinate, and have long ago become such an abomination that people's teeth itch to revenge themselves on them. They don't know, besides, what fear means. So had you first assured yourself that it was they and given them a kick, a little intimidating would have done them good. But I'm at the bottom of the mischief that happened just now, for not calling those, upon whom it devolves, to come and open for you."

During the course of their conversation, the rain ceased, and Pao Kuan and Yü Kuan had been able to take their leave. Hsi Jen, however, experienced such intense pain in her side, and felt such inward vexation, that at supper she could not put a morsel of anything in her mouth. When in the evening, the time came for her to have her bath, she discovered, on divesting herself of her clothes, a bluish bruise on her side of the size of a saucer and she was very much

frightened. But as she could not very well say anything

page 102

about it to any one, she presently retired to rest. But twitches of pain made her involuntarily moan in her dreams and groan in her sleep.

Pao Yü did, it is true, not hurt her with any malice, but when he saw Hsi Jen so listless and restless, and suddenly heard her groan in the course of the night, he realised how severely he must have kicked her. So getting out of bed, he gently seized the lantern and came over to look at her. But as soon as he reached the side of her bed, he perceived Hsi Jen expectorate, with a retch, a whole mouthful of phlegm. "Oh me!" she gasped, as she opened her eyes. The presence of Pao Yü startled her out of her wits. "What are you up to?" she asked.

"You groaned in your dreams," answered Pao Yü, "so I must have kicked you hard. Do let me see!"

"My head feels giddy," said Hsi Jen. "My throat foul and sweet; throw the light on the floor!"

At these words, Pao Yü actually raised the lantern. The moment he cast the light below, he discerned a quantity of fresh blood on the floor.

Pao Yü was seized with consternation. "Dreadful!" was all he could say. At the sight of the blood, Hsi Jen's heart too partly waxed cold.

But, reader, the next chapter will reveal the sequel, if you really have any wish to know more about them.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Pao Yü allows the girl Ch'ing Wen to tear his fan so as to afford her amusement.

A wedding proves to be the result of the descent of a unicorn.

But to proceed. When she saw on the floor the blood, she had brought up, Hsi Jen immediately grew partly cold. What she had often heard people mention in past days 'that the lives of young people, who expectorate blood, are uncertain, and that although they may live long, they are, after all, mere wrecks,' flashed through her mind. The remembrance of this saying at once completely scattered to the winds the wish, she had all along cherished, of striving for honour and of being able to boast of glory; and from her eyes unwittingly ran down streams of tears.

When Pao Yü saw her crying, his heart was seized with anguish. "What's it that preys on your mind?" he consequently asked her.

Hsi Jen strained every nerve to smile. "There's no rhyme or reason for anything," she replied, "so what can it be?"

Pao Yü's intention was to there and then give orders to the servant to

page 103

warm some white wine and to ask them for a few 'Li-T'ung' pills compounded with goat's blood, but Hsi Jen clasped his hand tight. "My troubling you is of no matter," she smiled, "but were I to put ever so many people to inconvenience, they'll bear me a grudge for my impudence. Not a soul, it's clear enough, knows anything about it now, but were you to make such a bustle as to bring it to people's notice, you'll be in an awkward fix, and so will I. The proper thing, therefore, is for you to send a page to-morrow to request Dr. Wang to prepare some medicine for me. When I take this I shall be all right. And as neither any human being nor spirit will thus get wind of it, won't it be better?"

Pao Yü found her suggestion so full of reason that he thought himself obliged to abandon his purpose; so approaching the table, he poured a cup of tea, and came

over and gave it to Hsi Jen to rinse her mouth with. Aware, however, as Hsi Jen was that Pao Yü himself was not feeling at ease in his mind, she was on the point of bidding him not wait upon her; but convinced that he would once more be certain not to accede to her wishes, and that the others would, in the second place, have to be disturbed, she deemed it expedient to humour him. Leaning on the couch, she consequently allowed Pao Yü to come and attend to her.

As soon as the fifth watch struck, Pao Yü, unmindful of combing or washing, hastily put on his clothes and left the room; and sending for Wang Chi-jen, he personally questioned him with all minuteness about her ailment.

Wang Chi-jen asked how it had come about. "It's simply a bruise; nothing more," (he said), and forthwith he gave him the names of some pills and medicines, and told him how they were to be taken, and how they were to be applied.

Pao Yü committed every detail to memory, and on his return into the garden, the treatment was, needless for us to explain, taken in hand in strict compliance with the directions.

This was the day of the dragon-boat festival. Cat-tail and artemisia were put over the doors. Tiger charms were suspended on every back. At noon, Madame Wang got a banquet ready, and to this midday feast, she invited the mother, daughter and the rest of the members of the Hsüeh household.

Pao Yü noticed that Pao-ch'ai was in such low spirits that she would not even speak to him, and concluded that the reason was to be sought in the incident of the previous day. Madame Wang seeing Pao Yü in a sullen humour jumped at the surmise that it must be due to Chin Ch'uan's affair of the day before; and so ill at ease did she feel that she heeded him less than ever. Lin Tai-yü, detected Pao Yü's apathy, and presumed that he was out of sorts for having given umbrage to Pao-ch'ai, and her manner likewise

page 104

assumed a listless air. Lady Feng had, in the course of the previous evening, been told by Madame Wang what had taken place between Pao Yü and Chin Ch'uan, and when she came to know that Madame Wang was in an unhappy frame of mind she herself did not venture to chat or laugh, but at once regulated

her behaviour to suit Madame Wang's mood. So the lack of animation became more than ever perceptible; for the good cheer of Ying Ch'un and her sisters was also damped by the sight of all of them down in the mouth. The natural consequence therefore was that they all left after a very short stay.

Lin Tai-yü had a natural predilection for retirement. She did not care for social gatherings. Her notions, however, were not entirely devoid of reason. She maintained that people who gathered together must soon part; that when they came together, they were full of rejoicing, but did they not feel lonely when they broke up? That since this sense of loneliness gave rise to chagrin, it was consequently preferable not to have any gatherings. That flowers afforded an apt example. When they opened, they won people's admiration; but when they faded, they added to the feeling of vexation; so that better were it if they did not blossom at all! To this cause therefore must be assigned the fact that when other people were glad, she, on the contrary, felt unhappy.

Pao Yü's disposition was such that he simply yearned for frequent gatherings, and looked forward with sorrow to the breaking up which must too soon come round. As for flowers, he wished them to bloom repeatedly and was haunted with the dread of their dying in a little time. Yet albeit manifold anguish fell to his share when banquets drew to a close and flowers began to fade, he had no alternative but to practice resignation.

On this account was it that, when the company cheerlessly broke up from the present feast, Lin Tai-yü did not mind the separation; and that Pao Yü experienced such melancholy and depression, that, on his return to his apartments, he gave way to deep groans and frequent sighs.

Ch'ing Wen, as it happened, came to the upper quarters to change her costume. In an unguarded moment, she let her fan slip out of her hand and drop on the ground. As it fell, the bones were snapped. "You stupid thing!" Pao Yü exclaimed, sighing, "what a dunce! what next will you be up to by and bye? When, in a little time, you get married and have a home of your own, will you, forsooth, still go on in this happy-go-lucky careless sort of way?"

"Master Secundus," replied Ch'ing Wen with a sardonic smile, "your temper is of late dreadfully fiery, and time and again it leaks out on your very face! The other day you even beat Hsi Jen and here you are again now

finding fault with us! If you feel disposed to kick or strike us, you are at liberty, Sir, to do so at your pleasure; but for a fan to slip on the ground is an everyday occurrence! How many of those crystal jars and cornelian bowls were smashed the other time, I don't remember, and yet you were not seen to fly into a tantrum; and now, for a fan do you distress yourself so? What's the use of it? If you dislike us, well pack us off and select some good girls to serve you, and we will quietly go away. Won't this be better?"

This rejoinder so exasperated Pao Yü that his whole frame trembled violently. "You needn't be in a hurry!" he then shouted. "There will be a day of parting by and bye."

Hsi Jen was on the other side, and from an early period she listened to the conversation between them. Hurriedly crossing over, "what are you up to again?" she said to Pao Yü, "why, there's nothing to put your monkey up! I'm perfectly right in my assertion that when I'm away for any length of time, something is sure to happen."

Ch'ing Wen heard these remarks. "Sister," she interposed smiling ironically, "since you've got the gift of the gab, you should have come at once; you would then have spared your master his fit of anger. It's you who have from bygone days up to the present waited upon master; we've never had anything to do with attending on him; and it's because you've served him so faithfully that he repaid you yesterday with a kick on the stomach. But who knows what punishment mayn't be in store for us, who aren't fit to wait upon him decently!"

At these insinuations, Hsi Jen felt both incensed and ashamed. She was about to make some response but Pao Yü had worked himself into such another passion as to get quite yellow in the face, and she was obliged to rein in her temper. Pushing Ch'ing Wen, "Dear sister," she cried, "you had better be off for a stroll! it's really we, who are to blame!"

The very mention of the word "we" made it certain to Ch'ing Wen that she implied herself and Pao Yü, and thus unawares more fuel was added again to her jealous notions. Giving way to several loud smiles, full of irony: "I can't make out," she insinuated, "who you may mean. But don't make me blush on your account! Even those devilish pranks of yours can't hoodwink me! How and why

is it that you've started styling yourself as 'we?' Properly speaking, you haven't as yet so much as attained the designation of 'Miss!' You're simply no better than I am, and how is it then that you presume so high as to call yourself 'we.'“

Hsi Jen's face grew purple from shame. “The fact is,” she reflected, “that I've said more than I should.”

“As one and all of you are ever bearing her malice,” Pao Yü simultaneously

page 106

observed, “I'll actually raise her to-morrow to a higher status!”

Hsi Jen quickly snatched Pao Yü's hand. “She's a stupid girl,” she said, “what's the use of arguing with her? What's more, you've so far borne with them and overlooked ever, so many other things more grievous than this; and what are you up to to-day?”

“If I'm really a stupid girl,” repeated Ch'ing Wen, smiling sarcastically, “am I a fit person for you to hold converse with? Why, I'm purely and simply a slave-girl; that's all.”

“Are you, after all,” cried Hsi Jen, at these words, “bickering with me, or with Master Secundus? If you bear me a grudge, you'd better then address your remarks to me alone; albeit it isn't right that you should kick up such a hullabaloo in the presence of Mr. Secundus. But if you have a spite against Mr. Secundus, you shouldn't be shouting so boisterously as to make thousands of people know all about it! I came in, a few minutes back, merely for the purpose of setting matters right, and of urging you to make up your quarrels so that we should all be on the safe side; and here I have the unlucky fate of being set upon by you, Miss! Yet you neither seem to be angry with me, nor with Mr. Secundus! But armed cap-a-pie as you appear to be, what is your ultimate design? I won't utter another word, but let you have your say!”

While she spoke, she was hurriedly wending her way out.

“You needn't raise your dander.” Pao Yü remarked to Ch'ing Wen. “I've guessed the secret of your heart, so I'll go and tell mother that as you've also attained a certain age, she should send you away. Will this please you, yes or no?”

This allusion made Ch'ing Wen unwittingly feel again wounded at heart. She tried to conceal her tears. "Why should I go away?" she asked. "If even you be so prejudiced against me as to try and devise means to pack me off, you won't succeed."

"I never saw such brawling!" Pao Yü exclaimed. "You're certainly bent upon going! I might as well therefore let mother know so as to bundle you off!"

While addressing her, he rose to his feet and was intent upon trudging off at once. Hsi Jen lost no time in turning round and impeding his progress. "Where are you off to?" she cried.

"I'm going to tell mother," answered Pao Yü.

"It's no use whatever!" Hsi Jen smiled, "you may be in real earnest to go and tell her, but aren't you afraid of putting her to shame? If even she positively means to leave, you can very well wait until you two have got over this bad blood. And when everything is past and gone, it won't be any too

page 107

late for you to explain, in the course of conversation, the whole case to our lady, your mother. But if you now go in hot haste and tell her, as if the matter were an urgent one, won't you be the means of making our mistress give way to suspicion?"

"My mother," demurred Pao Yü, "is sure not to entertain any suspicions, as all I will explain to her is that she insists upon leaving."

"When did I ever insist upon going?" sobbed Ch'ing Wen. "You fly into a rage, and then you have recourse to threats to intimidate me. But you're at liberty to go and say anything you like; for as I'll knock my brains out against the wall, I won't get alive out of this door."

"This is, indeed, strange!" exclaimed Pao Yü. "If you won't go, what's the good of all this fuss? I can't stand this bawling, so it will be a riddance if you would get out of the way!"

Saying this, he was resolved upon going to report the matter. Hsi Jen found herself powerless to dissuade him. She had in consequence no other resource but to fall on her knees.

Pi Hen, Ch'iu Wen, She Yüeh and the rest of the waiting-maids had realised what a serious aspect the dispute had assumed, and not a sound was to be heard to fall from their lips. They remained standing outside listening to what was going on. When they now overheard Hsi Jen making solicitous entreaties on her knees, they rushed into the apartment in a body; and with one consent they prostrated themselves on the floor.

Pao Yü at once pulled Hsi Jen up. Then with a sigh, he took a seat on the bed. "Get up," he shouted to the body of girls, "and clear out! What would you have me do?" he asked, addressing himself to Hsi Jen. "This heart of mine has been rent to pieces, and no one has any idea about it!"

While speaking, tears of a sudden rolled down his cheek. At the sight of Pao Yü weeping, Hsi Jen also melted into a fit of crying. Ch'ing Wen was standing by them, with watery eyes. She was on the point of reasoning with them, when espying Lin Tai-yü step into the room, she speedily walked out.

"On a grand holiday like this," remonstrated Lin Tai-yü smiling, "how is it that you're snivelling away, and all for nothing? Is it likely that high words have resulted all through that 'dumpling' contest?"

Pao Yü and Lin Tai-yü blurted out laughing.

"You don't tell me, cousin Secundus," Lin Tai-yü put in, "but I know all about it, even though I have asked no questions."

Now she spoke, and now she patted Hsi Jen on the shoulder. "My dear sister-in-law," she smiled, "just you tell me! It must surely be that you two have had a quarrel. Confide in me, your cousin, so that I might reconcile you."

page 108

"Miss Lin," rejoined Hsi Jen, pushing her off, "what are you fussing about? I am simply one of our servant-girls; you're therefore rather erratic in your talk!"

“You say that you're only a servant-girl,” smilingly replied Tai-yü, “and yet I treat you like a sister-in-law.”

“Why do you,” Pao Yü chimed in, “give her this abusive epithet? But however much she may make allowance for this, can she, when there are so many others who tell idle tales on her account, put up with your coming and telling her all you've said?”

“Miss Lin,” smiled Hsi Jen, “you're not aware of the purpose of my heart. Unless my breath fails and I die, I shall continue in his service.”

“If you die,” remarked Lin Tai-yü smiling, “what will others do, I wonder? As for me, I shall be the first to die from crying.”

“Were you to die,” added Pao Yü laughingly, “I shall become a bonze.”

“You'd better be a little more sober-minded!” laughed Hsi Jen. “What's the good of coming out with all these things?”

Lin Tai-yü put out two of her fingers, and puckered up her lips. “Up to this,” she laughed, “he's become a bonze twice. Henceforward, I'll try and remember how many times you make up your mind to become a Buddhist priest!”

This reminded Pao Yü that she was referring to a remark he had made on a previous occasion, but smiling to himself, he allowed the matter to drop.

After a short interval, Lin Tai-yü went away. A servant then came to announce that Mr. Hsüeh wanted to see him, and Pao Yü had to go. The purpose of this visit was in fact to invite him to a banquet, and as he could not very well put forward any excuse to refuse, he had to remain till the end of the feast before he was able to take his leave. The result was that, on his return, in the evening, he was to a great extent under the effect of wine. With bustling step, he wended his way into his own court. Here he perceived that the cool couch with a back to it, had already been placed in the yard, and that there was some one asleep on it. Prompted by the conviction that it must be Hsi Jen, Pao Yü seated himself on the edge of the couch. As he did so, he gave her a push, and inquired whether her sore place was any better. But thereupon he saw the occupant turn herself round, and exclaim: “What do you come again to irritate me for?”

Pao Yü, at a glance, realised that it was not Hsi Jen, but Ch'ing Wen. Pao Yü then clutched her and compelled her to sit next to him. "Your disposition," he smiled, "has been more and more spoilt through indulgence. When you let the fan drop this morning, I simply made one or two remarks, and out you came with that long rigmarole. Had you gone for me

page 109

it wouldn't have mattered; but you also dragged in Hsi Jen, who only interfered with every good intention of inducing us to make it up again. But, ponder now, ought you to have done it; yes or no?"

"With this intense heat," remonstrated Ch'ing Wen, "why do you pull me and toss me about? Should any people see you, what will they think? But this person of mine isn't meet to be seated in here."

"Since you yourself know that it isn't meet," replied Pao Yü with a smile, "why then were you sleeping here?"

To this taunt Ch'ing Wen had nothing to say. But she spurted out into fresh laughter. "It was all right," she retorted, "during your absence; but the moment you come, it isn't meet for me to stay! Get up and let me go and have my bath. Hsi Jen and She Yüeh have both had theirs, so I'll call them here!"

"I've just had again a good deal of wine," remarked Pao Yü, laughingly; "so a wash will be good for me. And since you've not had your bath, you had better bring the water and let's both have it together."

"No, no!" smiled Ch'ing Wen, waving her hand, "I cannot presume to put you to any trouble, Sir. I still remember how when Pi Hen used to look after your bath you occupied fully two or three hours. What you were up to during that time we never knew. We could not very well walk in. When you had however done washing, and we entered your room, we found the floor so covered with water that the legs of the bed were soaking and the matting itself a regular pool. Nor could we make out what kind of washing you'd been having; and for days afterwards we had a laugh over it. But I've neither any time to get the water ready; nor do I see the need for you to have a wash along with me. Besides, to-day it's chilly, and as you've had a bath only a little while back, you can very well just now dispense with one. But I'll draw a basin of water for you to wash

your face, and to shampoo your head with. Not long ago, Yüan Yang sent you a few fruits; they were put in that crystal bowl, so you'd better tell them to bring them to you to taste."

"Well, in that case," laughed Pao Yü, "you needn't also have a bath. Just simply wash your hands, and bring the fruit and let's have some together."

"I'm so shaky," smiled Ch'ing Wen "that even fans slip out of my hands, and how could I fetch the fruit for you. Were I also to break the dish, it will be still more dreadful!"

"If you want to break it, break it!" smiled Pao Yü. "These things are only intended for general use. You like this thing; I fancy that; our respective tastes are not identical. The original use of that fan, for instance, was to fan one's self with; but if you chose to break it for fun, you were quite at

page 110

liberty to do so. The only thing is, when you get angry don't make it the means of giving vent to your temper! Just like those salvers. They are really meant for serving things in. But if you fancy that kind of sound, then deliberately smash them, that will be all right. But don't, when you are in high dudgeon avail yourself of them to air your resentment! That's what one would call having a fancy for a thing!"

Ch'ing Wen greeted his words with a smile.

"Since that be so," she said, "bring me your fan and let me tear it. What most takes my fancy is tearing!"

Upon hearing this Pao Yü smilingly handed it to her. Ch'ing Wen, in point of fact, took it over, and with a crash she rent it in two. Close upon this, the sound of crash upon crash became audible.

Pao Yü was standing next to her. "How nice the noise is!" he laughed. "Tear it again and make it sound a little more!"

But while he spoke, She Yüeh was seen to walk in. "Don't," she smiled, "be up to so much mischief!" Pao Yü, however, went up to her and snatching her fan also from her hand, he gave it to Ch'ing Wen. Ch'ing Wen took it and there and

then likewise broke it in two. Both he and she then had a hearty laugh.

“What do you call this?” She Yüeh expostulated. “Do you take my property and make it the means of distracting yourselves!”

“Open the fan-box,” shouted Pao Yü, “and choose one and take it away! What, are they such fine things!”

“In that case,” ventured She Yüeh, “fetch the fans and let her break as many as she can. Won't that be nice!”

“Go and bring them at once!” Pao Yü laughed.

“I won't be up to any such tomfoolery!” She Yüeh demurred. “She hasn't snapped her hands, so bid her go herself and fetch them!”

“I'm feeling tired,” interposed Ch'ing Wen, as she laughingly leant on the bed. “I'll therefore tear some more to-morrow again.”

“An old writer says,” added Pao Yü with a smile, “that a thousand ounces of gold cannot purchase a single laugh! What can a few fans cost?”

After moralising, he went on to call Hsi Jen. Hsi Jen had just finished the necessary change in her dress so she stepped in; and a young servant-girl, Chiao Hui, crossed over and picked up the broken fans. Then they all sat and enjoyed the cool breeze. But we can well dispense with launching into any minute details.

On the morrow, noon found Madame Wang, Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai, Lin Tai-yü, and the rest of the young ladies congregated in dowager lady Chia's suite of rooms. Some one then brought the news that: “Miss Shih had arrived.”

page 111

In a little time they perceived Shih Hsiang-yun make her appearance in the court, at the head of a bevy of waiting-maids and married women. Pao-ch'ai, Tai-yu and her other cousins, quickly ran down the steps to meet her and exchange greetings. But with what fervour girls of tender years re-unite some day after a separation of months need not, of course, be explained. Presently, she entered

the apartments, paid her respects and inquired how they all were. But after this conventional interchange of salutations, old lady Chia pressed her to take off her outer garments as the weather was so close. Shih Hsiang-yün lost no time in rising to her feet and loosening her clothes. "I don't see why," Madame Wang thereupon smiled, "you wear all these things!"

"It's entirely at aunt Secunda's bidding," retorted Shih Hsiang-yün, "that I put them on. Why, would any one of her own accord wear so many things!"

"Aunt," interposed Pao-ch'ai, who stood by, with a smile, "you're not aware that what most delights her in the matter of dress is to don other people's clothes! Yes, I remember how, during her stay here in the third and fourth moons of last year, she used to wear cousin Pao's pelisses. She even put on his shoes, and attached his frontlets as well round her head. At a casual glance, she looked the very image of cousin Pao; what was superfluous was that pair of earrings of hers. As she stood at the back of that chair she so thoroughly took in our venerable ancestor that she kept on shouting: 'Pao Yü, come over! Mind the tassels suspended on that lamp; for if you shake the dust off, it may get into your eyes!' But all she did was to laugh; she did not budge; and it was only after every one found it hard to keep their countenance that our worthy senior also started laughing. 'You do look well in male habiliments!' she said to her."

"What about that!" cried Lin Tai-yü, "why, she had scarcely been here with us a couple of days in the first moon of last year, when we sent and fetched her, that we had a fall of snow. You, venerable senior, and her maternal aunt had on that day, I remember so well, just returned from worshipping the images of our ancestors, and a brand-new deep red felt wrapper of yours, dear grandmother, had been lying over there, when suddenly it disappeared. But, lo, she it was who had put it on! Being, however, too large and too long for her, she took a couple of handkerchiefs, and fastened them round her waist. She was then trudging into the back court with the servant-girls to make snow men when she tripped and fell flat in front of the drain, and got covered all over with mud."

As she narrated this incident, every one recalled the circumstances to mind, and had a good laugh.

"Dame Chou," Pao-ch'ai smilingly inquired of nurse Chou, "is your

young lady always as fond of pranks as ever or not?"

Nurse Chou then also gave a laugh.

"Pranks are nothing," Ying Ch'un smiled. "What I do detest is her fondness for tittle-tattle! I've never seen any one who, even when asleep, goes on chatter-chatter; now laughing, and now talking, as she does. Nor can I make out where she gets all those idle yarns of hers."

"I think she's better of late," interposed Madame Wang. "The other day some party or other came and they met; so she's to have a mother-in-law very soon; and can she still be comporting herself like that!"

"Are you going to stay to-day," dowager lady Chia then asked, "or going back home?"

Nurse Chou smiled. "Your venerable ladyship has not seen what an amount of clothes we've brought," she replied. "We mean, of course, to stay a couple of days."

"Is cousin Pao Yü not at home?" inquired Hsiang-yün."

"There she's again! She doesn't think of others," remarked Pao-ch'ai smiling significantly. "She only thinks of her cousin Pao Yü. They're both so fond of larks! This proves that she hasn't yet got rid of that spirit of mischief."

"You're all now grown up," observed old lady Chia; "and you shouldn't allude to infant names."

But while she was chiding them, they noticed Pao Yü arrive.

"Cousin Yün, have you come?" he smiled. "How is it that you wouldn't come the other day when some one was despatched to fetch you?"

"It's only a few minutes," Madame Wang said, "since our venerable senior called that one to task, and now here he comes and refers to names and surnames!"

"Your cousin Pao," ventured Lin Tai-yü, "has something good, which he has

been waiting to give you.”

“What good thing is it?” asked Hsiang-yün.

“Do you believe what she says?” observed Pao Yü laughingly. “But how many days is it that I have not seen you, and you've grown so much taller!”

“Is cousin Hsi Jen all right?” inquired Hsiang-yün.

“She's all right,” answered Pao Yü. “Many thanks for your kind thought of her.”

“I've brought something nice for her,” resumed Hsiang-yün.

Saying this, she produced her handkerchief, tied into a knot.

“What's this something nice?” asked Pao Yü. “Wouldn't it have been

page 113

better if you'd brought her a couple of those rings with streaked stones of the kind you sent the other day?”

“Why, what's this?” exclaimed Hsiang-yün laughing, opening, as she spoke, the handkerchief.

On close scrutiny, they actually found four streaked rings, similar to those she had previously sent, tied up in the same packet.

“Look here!” Lin Tai-yü smiled, “what a girl she is! Had you, when sending that fellow the other day to bring ours, given him these also to bring along with him, wouldn't it have saved trouble? Instead of that, here you fussily bring them yourself to-day! I presumed that it was something out of the way again; but is it really only these things? In very truth, you're a mere dunce!”

“It's you who behave like a dunce now!” Shih Hsiang-yün smiled.

“I'll speak out here and let every one judge for themselves who is the dunce. The servant, deputed to bring the things to you, had no need to open his mouth and say anything; for, as soon as they were brought in, it was of course evident, at a

glance, that they were to be presented to you young ladies. But had he been the bearer of these things for them, I would have been under the necessity of explaining to him which was intended for this servant-girl, and which for that. Had the messenger had his wits about him, well and good; but had he been at all stupid he wouldn't have been able to remember so much as the names of the girls! He would have made an awful mess of it, and talked a lot of nonsense. So instead of being of any use he would have even muddled, hickledy-pickledy, your things. Had a female servant been despatched, it would have been all right. But as it happened, a servant-boy was again sent the other day, so how could he have mentioned the names of the waiting-girls? And by my bringing them in person to give them to them, doesn't it make things clearer?"

As she said this, she put down the four rings. "One is for sister Hsi Jen," she continued, "one is for sister Yüan Yang. One for sister Chin Ch'uan-erh, and one for sister P'ing Erh. They are only for these four girls; but would the servant-boys too forsooth have remembered them so clearly!"

At these words, the whole company smiled. "How really clear!" they cried.

"This is what it is to be able to speak!" Pao Yü put in. "She doesn't spare any one!"

Hearing this, Lin Tai-yü gave a sardonic smile. "If she didn't know how to use her tongue," she observed, "would she deserve to wear that unicorn of gold!"

While speaking, she rose and walked off.

page 114

Luckily, every one did not hear what she said. Only Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai pursed up her lips and laughed. Pao Yü, however, had overheard her remark, and he blamed himself for having once more talked in a heedless manner. Unawares his eye espied Pao-ch'ai much amused, and he too could not suppress a smile. But at the sight of Pao Yü in laughter, Pao-ch'ai hastily rose to her feet and withdrew. She went in search of Tai-yü, to have a chat and laugh with her.

"After you've had tea," old lady Chia thereupon said to Hsiang-yün, "you'd better rest a while and then go and see your sisters-in-law. Besides, it's cool in the garden, so you can walk about with your cousins."

Hsiang-yün expressed her assent, and, collecting the three rings, she wrapped them up, and went and lay down to rest. Presently, she got up with the idea of paying visits to lady Feng and her other relatives. Followed by a whole bevy of nurses and waiting-maids, she repaired into lady Feng's quarters on the off side. She bandied words with her for a while and then coming out she betook herself into the garden of Broad Vista, and called on Li Kung-ts'ai. But after a short visit, she turned her steps towards the I Hung court to look up Hsi Jen. "You people needn't," she said, turning her head round, "come along with me! You may go and see your friends and relatives. It will be quite enough if you simply leave Ts'ui Lü to wait upon me."

Hearing her wishes, each went her own way in quest of aunts, or sisters-in-law. There only remained but Hsiang-yün and Ts'ui Lü.

"How is it," inquired Ts'ui Lü, "that these lotus flowers have not yet opened?"

"The proper season hasn't yet arrived," rejoined Shih Hsiang-yün.

"They too," continued Ts'ui Lü, "resemble those in our pond; they are double flowers."

"These here," remarked Hsiang-yün, "are not however up to ours."

"They have over there," observed Ts'ui Lü, "a pomegranate tree, with four or five branches joined one to another, just like one storey raised above another storey. What trouble it must have cost them to rear!"

"Flowers and plants," suggested Shih Hsiang-yün, "are precisely like the human race. With sufficient vitality, they grow up in a healthy condition."

"I can't credit these words," replied Ts'ui Lü, twisting her face round. "If you maintain that they are like human beings, how is it that I haven't seen any person, with one head growing over another."

This rejoinder evoked a smile from Hsiang-yün. "I tell you not to talk," she cried, "but you will insist upon talking! How do you expect people to be able to answer every thing you say! All things, whether in heaven or on earth come into existence by the co-operation of the dual powers, the male and

female. So all things, whether good or bad, novel or strange, and all those manifold changes and transformations arise entirely from the favourable or adverse influence exercised by the male and female powers. And though some things seldom seen by mankind might come to life, the principle at work is, after all, the same.”

“In the face of these arguments,” laughed Ts'ui Lü, “everything, from old till now, from the very creation itself, embodies a certain proportion of the Yin and Yang principles.”

“You stupid thing!” exclaimed Hsiang-yüan smiling, “the more you talk, the more stuff and nonsense falls from your lips! What about everything embodying a certain proportion of the principles Yin and Yang! Besides, the two words Yin and Yang are really one word; for when the Yang principle is exhausted, it becomes the Yin; and when the Yin is exhausted, it becomes Yang. And it isn't that, at the exhaustion of the Yin, another Yang comes into existence; and that, at the exhaustion of the Yang, a second Yin arises.”

“This trash is sufficient to kill me!” ejaculated Ts'ui Lü. “What are the Yin and Yang? Why, they are without substance or form! But pray, Miss, tell me what sort of things these Yin and Yang can be!”

“The Yin and Yang,” explained Hsiang-yüan, “are no more than spirits, but anything affected by their influence at once assumes form. The heavens, for instance, are Yang, and the earth is Yin; water is Yin and fire is Yang; the sun is Yang and the moon Yin.”

“Quite so! quite so!” cried out Ts'ui Lü, much amused by these explanations, “I've at length attained perception! It isn't strange then that people invariably call the sun 'T'ai-yang.' While astrologers keep on speaking of the moon as 'T'ai-yin-hsing,' or something like it. It must be on account of this principle.”

“O-mi-to-fu!” laughed Hsiang-yüan, “you have at last understood!”

“All these things possess the Yin and Yang; that's all right.” Ts'ui Lü put in. “But is there any likelihood that all those mosquitoes, fleas and worms, flowers,

herbs, bricks and tiles have, in like manner, anything to do with the Yin and Yang?”

“How don't they!” exclaimed Hsiang-yüan. “For example, even the leaves of that tree are distinguished by Yin and Yang. The side, which looks up and faces the sun, is called Yang; while that in the shade and looking downwards, is called Yin.”

“Is it really so!” ejaculated T'sui Lü, upon hearing this; while she smiled and nodded her head. “Now I know all about it! But which is Yang and which Yin in these fans we're holding.”

page 116

“This side, the front, is Yang,” answered Hsiang-yüan; “and that, the reverse, is Yin.”

Ts'ui Lü went on to nod her head, and to laugh. She felt inclined to apply her questions to several other things, but as she could not fix her mind upon anything in particular, she, all of a sudden, drooped her head. Catching sight of the pendant in gold, representing a unicorn, which Hsiang-yüan had about her person, she forthwith made allusion to it. “This, Miss,” she said smiling, “cannot likely also have any Yin and Yang!”

“The beasts of the field and the birds of the air,” proceeded Hsiang-yüan, “are, the cock birds, Yang, and the hen birds, Yin. The females of beasts are Yin; and the males, Yang; so how is there none?”

“Is this male, or is this female?” inquired Ts'ui Lü.

“Ts'ui!” exclaimed Hsiang-yüan, “what about male and female! Here you are with your nonsense again.”

“Well, never mind about that,” added Ts'ui Lü, “But how is it that all things have Yin and Yang, and that we human beings have no Yin and no Yang?”

Hsiang-yüan then lowered her face. “You low-bred thing!” she exclaimed. “But it's better for us to proceed on our way, for the more questions you ask, the nicer they get.”

“What's there in this that you can't tell me?” asked Ts'ui Lü, “But I know all about it, so there's no need for you to keep me on pins and needles.”

Hsiang-yüan blurted out laughing. “What do you know?” she said.

“That you, Miss, are Yang, and that I'm Yin,” answered Ts'ui Lü.

Hsiang-yüan produced her handkerchief, and, while screening her mouth with it, burst out into a loud fit of laughter.

“What I say must be right for you to laugh in this way,” Ts'ui Lü observed.

“Perfectly right, perfectly right!” acquiesced Hsiang-yüan.

“People say,” continued Ts'ui Lü, “that masters are Yang, and that servant-girls are Yin; don't I even apprehend this primary principle?”

“You apprehend it thoroughly,” responded Hsiang-yüan laughingly. But while she was speaking, she espied, under the trellis with the cinnamon roses, something glistening like gold. “Do you see that? What is it?” Hsiang-yüan asked pointing at it.

Hearing this, Ts'ui Lü hastily went over and picked up the object. While scrutinising it, she observed with a smile, “Let us find out whether it's Yin or Yang!”

So saying, she first laid hold of the unicorn, belonging to Shih Hsiang-yüan,

page 117

and passed it under inspection.

Shih Hsiang-yüan longed to be shown what she had picked up, but Ts'ui Lü would not open her hand.

“It's a precious gem,” she smiled. “You mayn't see it, Miss. Where can it be from? How very strange it is! I've never seen any one in here with anything of the kind.”

“Give it to me and let me look at it,” retorted Hsiang-yüan.

Ts'ui Lü stretched out her hand with a dash. “Yes, Miss, please look at it!” she laughed.

Hsiang-yüan raised her eyes. She perceived, at a glance, that it was a golden unicorn, so beautiful and so bright; and so much larger and handsomer than the one she had on. Hsiang-yüan put out her arm and, taking the gem in the palm of her hand, she fell into a silent reverie and uttered not a word. She was quite absent-minded when suddenly Pao Yü appeared in the opposite direction.

“What are you two,” he asked smiling, “doing here in the sun? How is it you don't go and find Hsi Jen?”

Shih Hsiang-yüan precipitately concealed the unicorn. “We were just going,” she replied, “so let us all go together.”

Conversing, they, in a company, wended their steps into the I Hung court. Hsi Jen was leaning on the balustrade at the bottom of the steps, her face turned to the breeze. Upon unexpectedly seeing Hsiang-yüan arrive she with alacrity rushed down to greet her; and taking her hand in hers, they cheerfully canvassed the events that had transpired during their separation, while they entered the room and took a seat.

“You should have come earlier,” Pao Yü said. “I've got something nice and was only waiting for you.”

Saying this, he searched and searched about his person. After a long interval, “Ai-ya!” he ejaculated. “Have you perchance put that thing away?” he eagerly asked Hsi Jen.

“What thing?” inquired Hsi Jen.

“The unicorn,” explained Pao Yü, “I got the other day.”

“You've daily worn it about you, and how is it you ask me?” remarked Hsi Jen

As soon as her answer fell on his ear, Pao Yü clapped his hands. “I've lost it!” he

cried. "Where can I go and look for it!" There and then, he meant to go and search in person; but Shih Hsiang-yüan heard his inquiries, and concluded that it must be he who had lost the gem. "When did you too," she promptly smiled, "get a unicorn?"

"I got it the other day, after ever so much trouble;" rejoined Pao Yü,

page 118

"but I can't make out when I can have lost it! I've also become quite addle-headed."

"Fortunately," smiled Shih Hsiang-yüan, "it's only a sort of a toy! Still, are you so careless?" While speaking, she flung open her hand. "Just see," she laughed, "is it this or not?"

As soon as he saw it, Pao Yü was seized with unwonted delight. But, reader, if you care to know the cause of his delight, peruse the explanation contained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Hsi Jen and Hsiang-yün tell their secret thoughts.

Tai-yü is infatuated with the living Pao Yü.

While trying to conceal her sense of shame and injury Chin Ch'uan is driven by her impetuous feelings to seek death.

But to resume our narrative. At the sight of the unicorn, Pao Yü was filled with intense delight. So much so, that he forthwith put out his hand and made a grab for it. "Lucky enough it was you who picked it up!" he said, with a face beaming with smiles. "But when did you find it?"

"Fortunately it was only this!" rejoined Shih Hsiang-yüan laughing. "If you by and bye also lose your seal, will you likely banish it at once from your mind, and never make an effort to discover it?"

"After all," smiled Pao Yü, "the loss of a seal is an ordinary occurrence. But had I lost this, I would have deserved to die."

Hsi Jen then poured a cup of tea and handed it to Shih Hsiang-yüan. "Miss Senior," she remarked smilingly, "I heard that you had occasion the other day to be highly pleased."

Shih Hsiang-yüan flushed crimson. She went on drinking her tea and did not utter a single word.

"Here you are again full of shame!" Hsi Jen smiled. "But do you remember when we were living, about ten years back, in those warm rooms on the west side and you confided in me one evening, you didn't feel any shame then; and how is it you blush like this now?"

"Do you still speak about that!" exclaimed Shih Hsiang-yüan laughingly. "You and I were then great friends. But when our mother subsequently died and I went home for a while, how is it you were at once sent to be with my cousin Secundus, and that now that I've come back you don't treat me as you did once?"

“Are you yet harping on this!” retorted Hsi Jen, putting on a smile. “Why, at first, you used to coax me with a lot of endearing terms to comb your hair and to wash your face, to do this and that for you. But now that you've become a big girl, you assume the manner of a young mistress towards me, and as you put on these airs of a young mistress, how can I ever presume to be on a familiar footing with you?”

“O-mi-to-fu,” cried Shih Hsiang-yüan. “What a false accusation! If I be guilty of anything of the kind, may I at once die! Just see what a broiling hot day this is, and yet as soon as I arrived I felt bound to come and look you up first. If you don't believe me, well, ask Lü Erh! And while at home, when did I not at every instant say something about you?”

Scarcely had she concluded than Hsi Jen and Pao Yü tried to soothe her. “We were only joking,” they said, “but you've taken everything again as gospel. What! are you still so impetuous in your temperament!”

“You don't say,” argued Shih Hsiang-yüan, “that your words are hard things to swallow, but contrariwise, call people's temperaments impetuous!”

As she spoke, she unfolded her handkerchief and, producing a ring, she gave it to Hsi Jen.

Hsi Jen did not know how to thank her enough. “When;” she consequently smiled, “you sent those to your cousin the other day, I got one also; and here you yourself bring me another to-day! It's clear enough therefore that you haven't forgotten me. This alone has been quite enough to test you. As for the ring itself, what is its worth? but it's a token of the sincerity of your heart!”

“Who gave it to you?” inquired Shih Hsiang-yüan.

“Miss Pao let me have it.” replied Hsi Jen.

“I was under the impression,” remarked Hsiang-yüan with a sigh, “that it was a present from cousin Lin. But is it really cousin Pao, that gave it to you! When I was at home, I day after day found myself reflecting that among all these cousins of mine, there wasn't one able to compare with cousin Pao, so excellent is she. How I do regret that we are not the offspring of one mother! For could I boast of

such a sister of the same flesh and blood as myself, it wouldn't matter though I had lost both father and mother!"

While indulging in these regrets, her eyes got quite red.

"Never mind! never mind!" interposed Pao Yü. "Why need you speak of these things!"

"If I do allude to this," answered Shih Hsiang-yüan, "what does it matter? I know that weak point of yours. You're in fear and trembling lest your cousin Lin should come to hear what I say, and get angry with me again for eulogising cousin Pao! Now isn't it this, eh!"

page 120

"Ch'ih!" laughed Hsi Jen, who was standing by her. "Miss Yüan," she said, "now that you've grown up to be a big girl you've become more than ever openhearted and outspoken."

"When I contend;" smiled Pao Yü, "that it is difficult to say a word to any one of you I'm indeed perfectly correct!"

"My dear cousin," observed Shih Hsiang-yüan laughingly, "don't go on in that strain! You'll provoke me to displeasure. When you are with me all you are good for is to talk and talk away; but were you to catch a glimpse of cousin Lin, you would once more be quite at a loss to know what best to do!"

"Now, enough of your jokes!" urged Hsi Jen. "I have a favour to crave of you."

"What is it?" vehemently inquired Shih Hsiang-yüan.

"I've got a pair of shoes," answered Hsi Jen, "for which I've stuck the padding together; but I'm not feeling up to the mark these last few days, so I haven't been able to work at them. If you have any leisure, do finish them for me."

"This is indeed strange!" exclaimed Shih Hsiang-yüan. "Putting aside all the skilful workers engaged in your household, you have besides some people for doing needlework and others for tailoring and cutting; and how is it you appeal to me to take your shoes in hand? Were you to ask any one of those men to

execute your work, who could very well refuse to do it?"

"Here you are in another stupid mood!" laughed Hsi Jen. "Can it be that you don't know that our sewing in these quarters mayn't be done by these needleworkers."

At this reply, it at once dawned upon Shih Hsiang-yüan that the shoes must be intended for Pao Yü. "Since that be the case," she in consequence smiled; "I'll work them for you. There's however one thing. I'll readily attend to any of yours, but I will have nothing to do with any for other people."

"There you are again!" laughed Hsi Jen. "Who am I to venture to trouble you to make shoes for me? I'll tell you plainly, however, that they are not mine. But no matter whose they are, it is anyhow I who'll be the recipient of your favour; that is sufficient."

"To speak the truth," rejoined Shih Hsiang-yüan, "you've put me to the trouble of working, I don't know how many things for you. The reason why I refuse on this occasion should be quite evident to you!"

"I can't nevertheless make it out!" answered Hsi Jen.

"I heard the other day," continued Shih Hsiang-yüan, a sardonic smile on her lip, "that while the fan-case, I had worked, was being held and compared with that of some one else, it too was slashed away in a fit of high

page 121

dudgeon. This reached my ears long ago, and do you still try to dupe me by asking me again now to make something more for you? Have I really become a slave to you people?

"As to what occurred the other day," hastily explained Pao Yü smiling, "I positively had no idea that that thing was your handiwork."

"He never knew that you'd done it," Hsi Jen also laughed. "I deceived him by telling him that there had been of late some capital hands at needlework outside, who could execute any embroidery with surpassing beauty, and that I had asked them to bring a fan-case so as to try them and to see whether they could actually

work well or not. He at once believed what I said. But as he produced the case and gave it to this one and that one to look at, he somehow or other, I don't know how, managed again to put some one's back up, and she cut it into two. On his return, however, he bade me hurry the men to make another; and when at length I explained to him that it had been worked by you, he felt, I can't tell you, what keen regret!"

"This is getting stranger and stranger!" said Shih Hsiang-yüan. "It wasn't worth the while for Miss Lin to lose her temper about it. But as she plies the scissors so admirably, why, you might as well tell her to finish the shoes for you."

"She couldn't," replied Hsi Jen, "for besides other things our venerable lady is still in fear and trembling lest she should tire herself in any way. The doctor likewise says that she will continue to enjoy good health, so long as she is carefully looked after; so who would wish to ask her to take them in hand? Last year she managed to just get through a scented bag, after a whole year's work. But here we've already reached the middle of the present year, and she hasn't yet taken up any needle or thread!"

In the course of their conversation, a servant came and announced 'that the gentleman who lived in the Hsing Lung Street had come.' "Our master," he added, "bids you, Mr. Secundus, come out and greet him."

As soon as Pao Yü heard this announcement, he knew that Chia Yü-ts'un must have arrived. But he felt very unhappy at heart. Hsi Jen hurried to go and bring his clothes. Pao Yü, meanwhile, put on his boots, but as he did so, he gave way to resentment. "Why there's father," he soliloquised, "to sit with him; that should be enough; and must he, on every visit he pays, insist upon seeing me!"

"It is, of course, because you have such a knack for receiving and entertaining visitors that Mr. Chia Cheng will have you go out," laughingly interposed Shih Hsiang-yüan from one side, as she waved her fan.

"Is it father's doing?" Pao Yü rejoined. "Why, it's he himself who asks that I should be sent for to see him."

"When a host is courteous, visitors come often," smiled Hsiang-yüan, "so it's

surely because you possess certain qualities, which have won his regard, that he insists upon seeing you.”

“But I am not what one would call courteous,” demurred Pao Yü. “I am, of all coarse people, the coarsest. Besides, I do not choose to have any relations with such people as himself.”

“Here's again that unchangeable temperament of yours!” laughed Hsiang-yüan. “But you're a big fellow now, and you should at least, if you be loth to study and go and pass your examinations for a provincial graduate or a metropolitan graduate, have frequent intercourse with officers and ministers of state and discuss those varied attainments, which one acquires in an official career, so that you also may be able in time to have some idea about matters in general; and that when by and bye you've made friends, they may not see you spending the whole day long in doing nothing than loafing in our midst, up to every imaginable mischief.”

“Miss,” exclaimed Pao Yü, after this harangue, “pray go and sit in some other girl's room, for mind one like myself may contaminate a person who knows so much of attainments and experience as you do.”

“Miss,” ventured Hsi Jen, “drop this at once! Last time Miss Pao too tendered him this advice, but without troubling himself as to whether people would feel uneasy or not, he simply came out with an ejaculation of 'hai,' and rushed out of the place. Miss Pao hadn't meanwhile concluded her say, so when she saw him fly, she got so full of shame that, flushing scarlet, she could neither open her lips, nor hold her own counsel. But lucky for him it was only Miss Pao. Had it been Miss Lin, there's no saying what row there may not have been again, and what tears may not have been shed! Yet the very mention of all she had to tell him is enough to make people look up to Miss Pao with respect. But after a time, she also betook herself away. I then felt very unhappy as I imagined that she was angry; but contrary to all my expectations, she was by and bye just the same as ever. She is, in very truth, long-suffering and indulgent! This other party contrariwise became quite distant to her, little though one would have thought it of him; and as Miss Pao perceived that he had lost his temper, and didn't choose to heed her, she subsequently made I don't know how many apologies to him.”

“Did Miss Lin ever talk such trash!” exclaimed Pao Yü. “Had she ever talked such stuff and nonsense, I would have long ago become chilled towards her.”

“What you say is all trash!” Hsi Jen and Hsiang-yüan remarked with one voice, while they shook their heads to and fro and smiled.

Lin Tai-yü, the fact is, was well aware that now that Shih Hsiang-yüan

page 123

was staying in the mansion, Pao Yü too was certain to hasten to come and tell her all about the unicorn he had got, so she thought to herself: “In the foreign traditions and wild stories, introduced here of late by Pao Yü, literary persons and pretty girls are, for the most part, brought together in marriage, through the agency of some trifling but ingenious nick-nack. These people either have miniature ducks, or phoenixes, jade necklets or gold pendants, fine handkerchiefs or elegant sashes; and they have, through the instrumentality of such trivial objects, invariably succeeded in accomplishing the wishes they entertained throughout their lives.” When she recently discovered, by some unforeseen way, that Pao Yü had likewise a unicorn she began to apprehend lest he should make this circumstance a pretext to create an estrangement with her, and indulge with Shih Hsiang-yüan as well in various free and easy flirtations and fine doings. She therefore quietly crossed over to watch her opportunity and take such action as would enable her to get an insight into his and her sentiments. Contrary, however, to all her calculations, no sooner did she reach her destination, than she overheard Shih Hsiang-yüan dilate on the topic of experience, and Pao Yü go on to observe: “Cousin Lin has never indulged in such stuff and nonsense. Had she ever uttered any such trash, I would have become chilled even towards her!” This language suddenly produced, in Lin Tai-yü's mind, both surprise as well as delight; sadness as well as regret. Delight, at having indeed been so correct in her perception that he whom she had ever considered in the light of a true friend had actually turned out to be a true friend. Surprise, “because,” she said to herself: “he has, in the presence of so many witnesses, displayed such partiality as to speak in my praise, and has shown such affection and friendliness for me as to make no attempt whatever to shirk suspicion.” Regret, “for since,” (she pondered), “you are my intimate friend, you could certainly well look upon me too as your intimate friend; and if you and I be real friends, why need there be any more talk about gold and jade? But since there be that question of gold and jade, you and I should have such things in our possession. Yet, why should this Pao-ch'ai step in again between us?” Sad, “because,” (she reflected), “my father and mother departed life at an early

period; and because I have, in spite of the secret engraven on my heart and imprinted on my bones, not a soul to act as a mentor to me. Besides, of late, I continuously feel confusion creep over my mind, so my disease must already have gradually developed itself. The doctors further state that my breath is weak and my blood poor, and that they dread lest consumption should declare itself, so despite that sincere friendship I foster for you, I cannot, I fear, last for very long. You are, I admit, a true friend to me, but what can you do for my unfortunate destiny!”

page 124

Upon reaching this point in her reflections, she could not control her tears, and they rolled freely down her cheeks. So much so, that when about to enter and meet her cousins, she experienced such utter lack of zest, that, while drying her tears she turned round, and wended her steps back in the direction of her apartments.

Pao Yü, meanwhile, had hurriedly got into his new costume. Upon coming out of doors, he caught sight of Lin Tai-yü, walking quietly ahead of him engaged, to all appearances, in wiping tears from her eyes. With rapid stride, he overtook her.

“Cousin Lin,” he smiled, “where are you off to? How is it that you're crying again? Who has once more hurt your feelings?”

Lin Tai-yü turned her head round to look; and seeing that it was Pao Yü, she at once forced a smile. “Why should I be crying,” she replied, “when there is no reason to do so?”

“Look here!” observed Pao Yü smilingly. “The tears in your eyes are not dry yet and do you still tell me a fib?”

Saying this, he could not check an impulse to raise his arm and wipe her eyes, but Lin Tai-yü speedily withdrew several steps backwards. “Are you again bent,” she said, “upon compassing your own death! Then why do you knock your hands and kick your feet about in this wise?”

“While intent upon speaking, I forgot,” smiled Pao Yü, “all about propriety and gesticulated, yet quite inadvertently. But what care I whether I die or live!”

“To die would, after all” added Lin Tai-yü, “be for you of no matter; but you'll leave behind some gold or other, and a unicorn too or other; and what would they do?”

This insinuation was enough to plunge Pao Yü into a fresh fit of exasperation. Hastening up to her: “Do you still give vent to such language?” he asked. “Why, it's really tantamount to invoking imprecations on me! What, are you yet angry with me!”

This question recalled to Lin Tai-yü's mind the incidents of a few days back, and a pang of remorse immediately gnawed her heart for having been again so indiscreet in her speech. “Now don't you distress your mind!” she observed hastily, smiling. “I verily said what I shouldn't! Yet what is there in this to make your veins protrude, and to so provoke you as to bedew your whole face with perspiration?”

While reasoning with him, she felt unable to repress herself, and, approaching him, she extended her hand, and wiped the perspiration from his face.

Pao Yü gazed intently at her for a long time. “Do set your mind at ease!” he at length observed.

page 125

At this remark, Lin Tai-yü felt quite nervous. “What's there to make my mind uneasy?” she asked after a protracted interval. “I can't make out what you're driving at; tell me what's this about making me easy or uneasy?”

Pao Yü heaved a sigh. “Don't you truly fathom the depth of my words?” he inquired. “Why, do you mean to say that I've throughout made such poor use of my love for you as not to be able to even divine your feelings? Well, if so, it's no wonder that you daily lose your temper on my account!”

“I actually don't understand what you mean by easy or uneasy,” Lin Tai-yü replied.

“My dear girl,” urged Pao Yü, nodding and sighing. “Don't be making a fool of me! For if you can't make out these words, not only have I ever uselessly

lavished affection upon you, but the regard, with which you have always treated me, has likewise been entirely of no avail! And it's mostly because you won't set your mind at ease that your whole frame is riddled with disease. Had you taken things easier a bit, this ailment of yours too wouldn't have grown worse from day to day!"

These words made Lin Tai-yü feel as if she had been blasted by thunder, or struck by lightning. But after carefully weighing them within herself, they seemed to her far more fervent than any that might have emanated from the depths of her own heart, and thousands of sentiments, in fact, thronged together in her mind; but though she had every wish to frame them into language, she found it a hard task to pronounce so much as half a word. All she therefore did was to gaze at him with vacant stare.

Pao Yü fostered innumerable thoughts within himself, but unable in a moment to resolve from which particular one to begin, he too absently looked at Tai-yü. Thus it was that the two cousins remained for a long time under the spell of a deep reverie.

An ejaculation of "Hai!" was the only sound that issued from Lin Tai-yü's lips; and while tears streamed suddenly from her eyes, she turned herself round and started on her way homeward.

Pao Yü jumped forward, with alacrity, and dragged her back. "My dear cousin," he pleaded, "do stop a bit! Let me tell you just one thing; after that, you may go."

"What can you have to tell me?" exclaimed Lin Tai-yü, who while wiping her tears, extricated her hand from his grasp. "I know." she cried, "all you have to say."

As she spoke, she went away, without even turning her head to cast a glance behind her.

As Pao Yü gazed at her receding figure, he fell into abstraction.

He had, in fact, quitted his apartments a few moments back in such precipitate

hurry that he had omitted to take a fan with him: and Hsi Jen, fearing lest he might suffer from the heat, promptly seized one and ran to find him and give it to him. But upon casually raising her head, she espied Lin Tai-yü standing with him. After a time, Tai-yü walked away; and as he still remained where he was without budging, she approached him.

“You left,” she said, “without even taking a fan with you. Happily I noticed it, and so hurried to catch you up and bring it to you.”

But Pao Yü was so lost in thought that as soon as he caught Hsi Jen's voice, he made a dash and clasped her in his embrace, without so much as trying to make sure who she was.

“My dear cousin,” he cried, “I couldn't hitherto muster enough courage to disclose the secrets of my heart; but on this occasion I shall make bold and give utterance to them. For you I'm quite ready to even pay the penalty of death. I have too for your sake brought ailments upon my whole frame. It's in here! But I haven't ventured to breathe it to any one. My only alternative has been to bear it patiently, in the hope that when you got all right, I might then perchance also recover. But whether I sleep, or whether I dream, I never, never forget you.”

These declarations quite dumfounded Hsi Jen. She gave way to incessant apprehensions. All she could do was to shout out: “Oh spirits, oh heaven, oh Buddha, he's compassing my death!” Then pushing him away from her, “what is it you're saying?” she asked. “May it be that you are possessed by some evil spirit! Don't you quick get yourself off?”

This brought Pao Yü to his senses at once. He then became aware that it was Hsi Jen, and that she had come to bring him a fan. Pao Yü was overpowered with shame; his whole face was suffused with scarlet; and, snatching the fan out of her hands, he bolted away with rapid stride.

When Hsi Jen meanwhile saw Pao Yü effect his escape, “Lin Tai-yü,” she pondered, “must surely be at the bottom of all he said just now. But from what one can see, it will be difficult, in the future, to obviate the occurrence of some unpleasant mishap. It's sufficient to fill one with fear and trembling!”

At this point in her cogitations, she involuntarily melted into tears, so agitated was she; while she secretly exercised her mind how best to act so as to prevent

this dreadful calamity.

But while she was lost in this maze of surmises and doubts, Pao-ch'ai unexpectedly appeared from the off side. "What!" she smilingly exclaimed, "are you dreaming away in a hot broiling sun like this?"

Hsi Jen, at this question, hastily returned her smiles. "Those two birds," she answered, "were having a fight, and such fun was it that I stopped to

page 127

watch them."

"Where is cousin Pao off to now in such a hurry, got up in that fine attire?" asked Pao-ch'ai, "I just caught sight of him, as he went by. I meant to have called out and stopped him, but as he, of late, talks greater rubbish than ever, I didn't challenge him, but let him go past."

"Our master," rejoined Hsi Jen, "sent for him to go out."

"Ai-yah!" hastily exclaimed Pao-ch'ai, as soon as this remark reached her ears. "What does he want him for, on a scalding day like this? Might he not have thought of something and got so angry about it as to send for him to give him a lecture!"

"If it isn't this," added Hsi Jen laughing, "some visitor must, I presume, have come and he wishes him to meet him."

"With weather like this," smiled Pao-ch'ai, "even visitors afford no amusement! Why don't they, while this fiery temperature lasts, stay at home, where it's much cooler, instead of gadding about all over the place?"

"Could you tell them so?" smiled Hsi Jen.

"What was that girl Hsiang-yüan doing in your quarters?" Pao-ch'ai then asked.

"She only came to chat with us on irrelevant matters." Hsi Jen replied smiling. "But did you see the pair of shoes I was pasting the other day? Well, I meant to ask her to-morrow to finish them for me."

Pao-chai, at these words, turned her head round, first on this side, and then on the other. Seeing that there was no one coming or going: "How is it," she smiled, "that you, who have so much gumption, don't ever show any respect for people's feelings? I've been of late keeping an eye on Miss Yüan's manner, and, from what I can glean from the various rumours afloat, she can't be, in the slightest degree, her own mistress at home! In that family of theirs, so little can they stand the burden of any heavy expenses that they don't employ any needlework-people, and ordinary everyday things are mostly attended to by their ladies themselves. (If not), why is it that every time she has come to us on a visit, and she and I have had a chat, she at once broached the subject of their being in great difficulties at home, the moment she perceived that there was no one present? Yet, whenever I went on to ask her a few questions about their usual way of living, her very eyes grew red, while she made some indistinct reply; but as for speaking out, she wouldn't. But when I consider the circumstances in which she is placed, for she has certainly had the misfortune of being left, from her very infancy, without father and mother, the very sight of her is too much for me, and my heart begins to bleed within me."

"Quite so! Quite so!" observed Hsi Jen, clapping her hands, after

page 128

listening to her throughout. "It isn't strange then if she let me have the ten butterfly knots I asked her to tie for me only after ever so many days, and if she said that they were coarsely done, but that I should make the best of them and use them elsewhere, and that if I wanted any nice ones, I should wait until by and bye when she came to stay here, when she would work some neatly for me. What you've told me now reminds me that, as she had found it difficult to find an excuse when we appealed to her, she must have had to slave away, who knows how much, till the third watch in the middle of the night. What a stupid thing I was! Had I known this sooner, I would never have told her a word about it."

"Last time;" continued Pao-ch'ai, "she told me that when she was at home she had ample to do, that she kept busy as late as the third watch, and that, if she did the slightest stitch of work for any other people, the various ladies, belonging to her family, did not like it."

“But as it happens,” explained Hsi Jen, “that mulish-minded and perverse-tempered young master of ours won't allow the least bit of needlework, no matter whether small or large, to be made by those persons employed to do sewing in the household. And as for me, I have no time to turn my attention to all these things.”

“Why mind him?” laughed Pao-ch'ai. “Simply ask some one to do the work and finish.”

“How could one bamboozle him?” resumed Hsi Jen. “Why, he'll promptly find out everything. Such a thing can't even be suggested. The only thing I can do is to quietly slave away, that's all.”

“You shouldn't work so hard,” smiled Pao-ch'ai. “What do you say to my doing a few things for you?”

“Are you in real earnest!” ventured Hsi Jen smiling. “Well, in that case, it is indeed a piece of good fortune for me! I'll come over myself in the evening.”

But before she could conclude her reply, she of a sudden noticed an old matron come up to her with precipitate step. “Where does the report come from,” she interposed, “that Miss Chin Ch'uan-erh has gone, for no rhyme or reason, and committed suicide by jumping into the well?”

This bit of news startled Hsi Jen. “Which Chin Ch'uan-erh is it,” she speedily inquired.

“Where are two Chin Ch'uan-erhs to be found!” rejoined the old matron. “It's the one in our Mistress, Madame Wang's, apartments, who was the other day sent away for something or other, I don't know what. On her return home, she raised her groans to the skies and shed profuse tears, but none of them worried their minds about her, until, who'd have thought it, they could

page 129

see nothing of her. A servant, however, went just now to draw water and he says that 'while he was getting it from the well in the south-east corner, he caught sight of a dead body, that he hurriedly called men to his help, and that when they fished it out, they unexpectedly found that it was she, but that though they

bustled about trying to bring her round, everything proved of no avail“

“This is odd!” Pao-ch'ai exclaimed.

The moment Hsi Jen heard the tidings, she shook her head and moaned. At the remembrance of the friendship, which had ever existed between them, tears suddenly trickled down her cheeks. And as for Pao-ch'ai, she listened to the account of the accident and then hastened to Madame Wang's quarters to try and afford her consolation.

Hsi Jen, during this interval, returned to her room. But we will leave her without further notice, and explain that when Pao-ch'ai reached the interior of Madame Wang's home, she found everything plunged in perfect stillness. Madame Wang was seated all alone in the inner chamber indulging her sorrow. But such difficulties did Pao-ch'ai experience to allude to the occurrence, that her only alternative was to take a seat next to her.

“Where do you come from?” asked Madame Wang.

“I come from inside the garden,” answered Pao-ch'ai.

“As you come from the garden,” Madame Wang inquired, “did you see anything of your cousin Pao Yü?”

“I saw him just now,” Pao-ch'ai replied, “go out, dressed up in his fineries. But where he is gone to, I don't know.”

“Have you perchance heard of any strange occurrence?” asked Madame Wang, while she nodded her head and sighed. “Why, Chin Ch'uan Erh jumped into the well and committed suicide.”

“How is it that she jumped into the well when there was nothing to make her do so?” Pao-ch'ai inquired. “This is indeed a remarkable thing!”

“The fact is,” proceeded Madame Wang, “that she spoilt something the other day, and in a sudden fit of temper, I gave her a slap and sent her away, simply meaning to be angry with her for a few days and then bring her in again. But, who could have ever imagined that she had such a resentful temperament as to go and drown herself in a well! And is not this all my fault?”

“It's because you are such a kind-hearted person, aunt,” smiled Pao-ch'ai, “that such ideas cross your mind! But she didn't jump into the well when she was in a tantrum; so what must have made her do so was that she had to go and live in the lower quarters. Or, she might have been standing in front of the well, and her foot slipped, and she fell into it. While in the upper rooms, she used to be kept under restraint, so when this time she found herself

page 130

outside, she must, of course, have felt the wish to go strolling all over the place in search of fun. How could she have ever had such a fiery disposition? But even admitting that she had such a temper, she was, after all, a stupid girl to do as she did; and she doesn't deserve any pity.”

“In spite of what you say,” sighed Madame Wang, shaking her head to and fro, “I really feel unhappy at heart.”

“You shouldn't, aunt, distress your mind about it!” Pao-ch'ai smiled. “Yet, if you feel very much exercised, just give her a few more taels than you would otherwise have done, and let her be buried. You'll thus carry out to the full the feelings of a mistress towards her servant.”

“I just now gave them fifty taels for her,” pursued Madame Wang. “I also meant to let them have some of your cousin's new clothes to enshroud her in. But, who'd have thought it, none of the girls had, strange coincidence, any newly-made articles of clothing; and there were only that couple of birthday suits of your cousin Lin's. But as your cousin Lin has ever been such a sensitive child and has always too suffered and ailed, I thought it would be unpropitious for her, if her clothes were also now handed to people to wrap their dead in, after she had been told that they were given her for her birthday. So I ordered a tailor to get a suit for her as soon as possible. Had it been any other servant-girl, I could have given her a few taels and have finished. But Chin Ch'uan-erh was, albeit a servant-maid, nearly as dear to me as if she had been a daughter of mine.”

Saying this, tears unwittingly ran down from her eyes.

“Aunt!” vehemently exclaimed Pao-ch'ai. “What earthly use is it of hurrying a tailor just now to prepare clothes for her? I have a couple of suits I made the

other day and won't it save trouble were I to go and bring them for her? Besides, when she was alive, she used to wear my old clothes. And what's more our figures are much alike.”

“What you say is all very well,” rejoined Madame Wang; “but can it be that it isn't distasteful to you?”

“Compose your mind,” urged Pao-ch'ai with a smile. “I have never paid any heed to such things.”

As she spoke, she rose to her feet and walked away.

Madame Wang then promptly called two servants. “Go and accompany Miss Pao!” she said.

In a brief space of time, Pao-ch'ai came back with the clothes, and discovered Pao Yü seated next to Madame Wang, all melted in tears. Madame Wang was reasoning with him. At the sight of Pao-ch'ai, she, at once, desisted. When Pao-ch'ai saw them go on in this way, and came to weigh their conversation and to scan the expression on their countenances, she immediately got a pretty correct insight into their feelings. But presently she handed over the clothes, and Madame Wang sent for Chin Ch'uan-erh's mother, to take them away.

But, reader, you will have to peruse the next chapter for further details.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

*A brother is prompted by ill-feeling to wag his tongue a bit.
A depraved son receives heavy blows with a rattan cane.*

Madame Wang, for we shall now continue our story, sent for Chin Ch'uan-erh's mother. On her arrival, she gave her several hair-pins and rings, and then told her that she could invite several Buddhist priests as well to read the prayers necessary to release the spirit from purgatory. The mother prostrated herself and expressed her gratitude; after which, she took her leave.

Indeed, Pao Yü, on his return from entertaining Yü-ts'un, heard the tidings that Chin Ch'uan-erh had been instigated by a sense of shame to take her own life and he at once fell a prey to grief. So much so, that, when he came inside, and was again spoken to and admonished by Madame Wang, he could not utter a single word in his justification. But as soon as he perceived Pao-ch'ai make her appearance in the room, he seized the opportunity to scamper out in precipitate haste. Whither he was trudging, he himself had not the least idea. But throwing his hands behind his back and drooping his head against his chest, he gave way to sighs, while with slow and listless step he turned towards the hall. Scarcely, however, had he rounded the screen-wall, which stood in front of the door-way, when, by a strange coincidence, he ran straight into the arms of some one, who was unawares approaching from the opposite direction, and was just about to go towards the inner portion of the compound.

“Hallo!” that person was heard to cry out, as he stood still.

Pao Yü sustained a dreadful start. Raising his face to see, he discovered that it was no other than his father. At once, he unconsciously drew a long breath and adopted the only safe course of dropping his arms against his body and standing on one side.

“Why are you,” exclaimed Chia Cheng, “drooping your head in such a melancholy mood, and indulging in all these moans? When Yü-ts'un came just now and he asked to see you, you only put in your appearance after a long while. But though you did come, you were not in the least disposed to chat with

anything like cheerfulness and animation; you behaved, as you ever do, like a regular fool. I detected then in your countenance a certain

page 132

expression of some hidden hankering and sadness; and now again here you are groaning and sighing! Does all you have not suffice to please you? Are you still dissatisfied? You've no reason to be like this, so why is it that you go on in this way?"

Pao Yü had ever, it is true, shown a glib tongue, but on the present occasion he was so deeply affected by Chin Ch'uan-erh's fate, and vexed at not being able to die that very instant and follow in her footsteps that although he was now fully conscious that his father was speaking to him he could not, in fact, lend him an ear, but simply stood in a timid and nervous mood. Chia Cheng noticed that he was in a state of trembling and fear, not as ready with an answer as he usually was, and his sorry plight somewhat incensed him, much though he had not at first borne him any ill-feeling. But just as he was about to chide him, a messenger approached and announced to him: "Some one has come from the mansion of the imperial Prince Chung Shun, and wishes to see you, Sir." At this announcement, surmises sprung up in Chia Cheng's mind. "Hitherto," he secretly mused, "I've never had any dealings with the Chung Shun mansion, and why is it that some one is despatched here to-day?" As he gave way to these reflections. "Be quick," he shouted, "and ask him to take a seat in the pavilion," while he himself precipitately entered the inner room and changed his costume. When he came out to greet the visitor, he discovered that it was the senior officer of the Chung Shun mansion. After the exchange of the salutations prescribed by the rites, they sat down and tea was presented. But before (Chia Cheng) had had time to start a topic of conversation, the senior officer anticipated him, and speedily observed: "Your humble servant does not pay this visit to-day to your worthy mansion on his own authority, but entirely in compliance with instructions received, as there is a favour that I have to beg of you. I make bold to trouble you, esteemed Sir, on behalf of his highness, to take any steps you might deem suitable, and if you do, not only will his highness remember your kindness, but even I, your humble servant, and my colleagues will feel extremely grateful to you."

Chia Cheng listened to him, but he could not nevertheless get a clue of what he was driving at. Promptly returning his smile, he rose to his feet. "You come,

Sir," he inquired, "at the instance of his royal highness, but what, I wonder, are the commands you have to give me? I hope you will explain them to your humble servant, worthy Sir, in order to enable him to carry them out effectively."

The senior officer gave a sardonic smile.

"There's nothing to carry out," he said. "All you, venerable Sir, have to do is to utter one single word and the whole thing will be effected. There is in our mansion a certain Ch'i Kuan, who plays the part of young ladies.

page 133

He hitherto stayed quietly in the mansion; but for the last three or five days or so no one has seen him return home. Search has been instituted in every locality, yet his whereabouts cannot be discovered. But throughout these various inquiries, eight out of the ten tenths of the inhabitants of the city have, with one consent, asserted that he has of late been on very friendly terms with that honourable son of yours, who was born with the jade in his mouth. This report was told your servant and his colleagues, but as your worthy mansion is unlike such residences as we can take upon ourselves to enter and search with impunity, we felt under the necessity of laying the matter before our imperial master. 'Had it been any of the other actors,' his highness also says, 'I wouldn't have minded if even one hundred of them had disappeared; but this Ch'i Kuan has always been so ready with pat repartee, so respectful and trustworthy that he has thoroughly won my aged heart, and I could never do without him.' He entreats you, therefore, worthy Sir, to, in your turn, plead with your illustrious scion, and request him to let Ch'i Kuan go back, in order that the feelings, which prompt the Prince to make such earnest supplications, may, in the first place, be satisfied: and that, in the next, your mean servant and his associates may be spared the fatigue of toiling and searching."

At the conclusion of this appeal, he promptly made a low bow. As soon as Chia Cheng found out the object of his errand, he felt both astonishment and displeasure. With all promptitude, he issued directions that Pao Yü should be told to come out of the garden. Pao Yü had no notion whatever why he was wanted. So speedily he hurried to appear before his father.

"What a regular scoundrel you are!" Chia Cheng exclaimed. "It is enough that

you won't read your books at home; but will you also go in for all these lawless and wrongful acts? That Ch'i Kuan is a person whose present honourable duties are to act as an attendant on his highness the Prince of Chung Shun, and how extremely heedless of propriety must you be to have enticed him, without good cause, to come away, and thus have now brought calamity upon me?"

These reproaches plunged Pao Yü in a dreadful state of consternation. With alacrity he said by way of reply: "I really don't know anything about the matter! To what do, after all, the two words Ch'i Kuan refer, I wonder! Still less, besides, am I aware what entice can imply!"

As he spoke, he started crying.

But before Chia Cheng could open his mouth to pass any further remarks, "Young gentleman," he heard the senior officer interpose with a sardonic smile: "you shouldn't conceal anything! if he be either hidden in your home, or if you know his whereabouts, divulge the truth at once; so that less trouble

page 134

should fall to our lot than otherwise would. And will we not then bear in mind your virtue, worthy scion!"

"I positively don't know." Pao Yü time after time maintained. "There must, I fear, be some false rumour abroad; for I haven't so much as seen anything of him."

The senior officer gave two loud smiles, full of derision. "There's evidence at hand," he rejoined, "so if you compel me to speak out before your venerable father, won't you, young man, have to suffer the consequences? But as you assert that you don't know who this person is, how is it that that red sash has come to be attached to your waist?"

When Pao Yü caught this allusion, he suddenly felt quite out of his senses. He stared and gaped; while within himself, he argued: "How has he come to hear anything about this! But since he knows all these secret particulars, I cannot, I expect, put him off in other points; so wouldn't it be better for me to pack him off, in order to obviate his blubbing anything more?" "Sir," he consequently remarked aloud, "how is it that despite your acquaintance with all these minute

details, you have no inkling of his having purchased a house? Are you ignorant of an essential point like this? I've heard people say that he's, at present, staying in the eastern suburbs at a distance of twenty li from the city walls; at some place or other called Tzu T'an Pao, and that he has bought there several acres of land and a few houses. So I presume he's to be found in that locality; but of course there's no saying."

"According to your version," smiled the senior officer, as soon as he heard his explanation, "he must for a certainty be there. I shall therefore go and look for him. If he's there, well and good; but if not, I shall come again and request you to give me further directions."

These words were still on his lips, when he took his leave and walked off with hurried step.

Chia Cheng was by this time stirred up to such a pitch of indignation that his eyes stared aghast, and his mouth opened in bewilderment; and as he escorted the officer out, he turned his head and bade Pao Yü not budge. "I have," (he said), "to ask you something on my return." Straightway he then went to see the officer off. But just as he was turning back, he casually came across Chia Huan and several servant-boys running wildly about in a body. "Quick, bring him here to me!" shouted Chia Cheng to the young boys. "I want to beat him."

Chia Huan, at the sight of his father, was so terrified that his bones mollified and his tendons grew weak, and, promptly lowering his head, he stood still."

"What are you running about for?" Chia Cheng asked. "These

page 135

menials of yours do not mind you, but go who knows where, and let you roam about like a wild horse! Where are the attendants who wait on you at school?" he cried.

When Chia Huan saw his father in such a dreadful rage, he availed himself of the first opportunity to try and clear himself. "I wasn't running about just now" he said. "But as I was passing by the side of that well, I caught sight, for in that well a servant-girl was drowned, of a human head that large, a body that swollen, floating about in really a frightful way and I therefore hastily rushed past."

Chia Cheng was thunderstruck by this disclosure. "There's been nothing up, so who has gone and jumped into the well?" he inquired. "Never has there been anything of the kind in my house before! Ever since the time of our ancestors, servants have invariably been treated with clemency and consideration. But I expect that I must of late have become remiss in my domestic affairs, and that the managers must have arrogated to themselves the right of domineering and so been the cause of bringing about such calamities as violent deaths and disregard of life. Were these things to reach the ears of people outside, what will become of the reputation of our seniors? Call Chia Lien and Lai Ta here!" he shouted.

The servant-lads signified their obedience, with one voice. They were about to go and summon them, when Chia Huan hastened to press forward. Grasping the lapel of Chia Cheng's coat, and clinging to his knees, he knelt down. "Father, why need you be angry?" he said. "Excluding the people in Madame Wang's rooms, this occurrence is entirely unknown to any of the rest; and I have heard my mother mention...." At this point, he turned his head, and cast a glance in all four quarters.

Chia Cheng guessed his meaning, and made a sign with his eyes. The young boys grasped his purpose and drew far back on either side.

Chia Huan resumed his confidences in a low tone of voice. "My mother," he resumed, "told me that when brother Pao Yü was, the other day, in Madame Wang's apartments, he seized her servant-maid Chin Ch'uan-erh with the intent of dishonouring her. That as he failed to carry out his design, he gave her a thrashing, which so exasperated Chin Ch'uan-erh that she threw herself into the well and committed suicide...."

Before however he could conclude his account, Chia Cheng had been incensed to such a degree that his face assumed the colour of silver paper. "Bring Pao Yü here," he cried. While uttering these orders, he walked into the study. "If any one does again to-day come to dissuade me," he vociferated, "I shall take this official hat, and sash, my home and private property and surrender everything at once to him to go and bestow them upon Pao

Yü; for if I cannot escape blame (with a son like the one I have), I mean to shave

this scanty trouble-laden hair about my temples and go in search of some unsullied place where I can spend the rest of my days alone! I shall thus also avoid the crime of heaping, above, insult upon my predecessors, and, below, of having given birth to such a rebellious son.”

At the sight of Chia Cheng in this exasperation, the family companions and attendants speedily realised that Pao Yü must once more be the cause of it, and the whole posse hastened to withdraw from the study, biting their fingers and putting their tongues out.

Chia Cheng panted with excitement. He stretched his chest out and sat bolt upright on a chair. His whole face was covered with the traces of tears. “Bring Pao Yü! Bring Pao Yü!” he shouted consecutively. “Fetch a big stick; bring a rope and tie him up; close all the doors! If any one does communicate anything about it in the inner rooms, why, I’ll immediately beat him to death.”

The servant-boys felt compelled to express their obedience with one consent, and some of them came to look after Pao Yü.

As for Pao Yü, when he heard Chia Cheng enjoin him not to move, he forthwith became aware that the chances of an unpropitious issue outnumbered those of a propitious one, but how could he have had any idea that Chia Huan as well had put in his word? There he still stood in the pavilion, revolving in his mind how he could get some one to speed inside and deliver a message for him. But, as it happened, not a soul appeared. He was quite at a loss to know where even Pei Ming could be. His longing was at its height, when he perceived an old nurse come on the scene. The sight of her exulted Pao Yü, just as much as if he had obtained pearls or gems; and hurriedly approaching her, he dragged her and forced her to halt. “Go in,” he urged, “at once and tell them that my father wishes to beat me to death. Be quick, be quick, for it’s urgent, there’s no time to be lost.”

But, first and foremost, Pao Yü’s excitement was so intense that he spoke with indistinctness. In the second place, the old nurse was, as luck would have it, dull of hearing, so that she did not catch the drift of what he said, and she misconstrued the two words: “it’s urgent,” for the two representing jumped into the well. Readily smiling therefore: “If she wants to jump into the well, let her do so,” she said. “What’s there to make you fear, Master Secundus?”

“Go out,” pursued Pao Yü, in despair, on discovering that she was deaf, “and tell my page to come.”

“What's there left unsettled?” rejoined the old nurse. “Everything has been finished long ago! A tip has also been given them; so how is it things

page 137

are not settled?”

Pao Yü fidgetted with his hands and feet. He was just at his wits' ends, when he espied Chia Cheng's servant-boys come up and press him to go out.

As soon as Chia Cheng caught sight of him, his eyes got quite red. Without even allowing himself any time to question him about his gadding about with actors, and the presents he gave them on the sly, during his absence from home; or about his playing the truant from school and lewdly importuning his mother's maid, during his stay at home, he simply shouted: “Gag his mouth and positively beat him till he dies!”

The servant-boys did not have the boldness to disobey him. They were under the necessity of seizing Pao Yü, of stretching him on a bench, and of taking a heavy rattan and giving him about ten blows.

Pao Yü knew well enough that he could not plead for mercy, and all he could do was to whimper and cry.

Chia Cheng however found fault with the light blows they administered to him. With one kick he shoved the castigator aside, and snatching the rattan into his own hands, he spitefully let (Pao Yü) have ten blows and more.

Pao Yü had not, from his very birth, experienced such anguish. From the outset, he found the pain unbearable; yet he could shout and weep as boisterously as ever he pleased; but so weak subsequently did his breath, little by little, become, so hoarse his voice, and so choked his throat that he could not bring out any sound.

The family companions noticed that he was beaten in a way that might lead to an unpropitious end, and they drew near with all despatch and made earnest

entreaties and exhortations. But would Chia Cheng listen to them?

“You people,” he answered, “had better ask him whether the tricks he has been up to deserve to be overlooked or not! It's you who have all along so thoroughly spoilt him as to make him reach this degree of depravity! And do you yet come to advise me to spare him? When by and bye you've incited him to commit parricide or regicide, you will at length, then, give up trying to dissuade me, eh?”

This language jarred on the ears of the whole party; and knowing only too well that he was in an exasperated mood, they fussed about endeavouring to find some one to go in and convey the news.

But Madame Wang did not presume to be the first to inform dowager lady Chia about it. Seeing no other course open to her, she hastily dressed herself and issued out of the garden. Without so much as worrying her mind as to whether there were any male inmates about or not, she straightway leant on a waiting-maid and hurriedly betook herself into the library, to the intense consternation of the companions, pages and all the men present, who

page 138

could not manage to clear out of the way in time.

Chia Cheng was on the point of further belabouring his son, when at the sight of Madame Wang walking in, his temper flared up with such increased violence, just as fire on which oil is poured, that the rod fell with greater spite and celerity. The two servant-boys, who held Pao Yü down, precipitately loosened their grip and beat a retreat. Pao Yü had long ago lost all power of movement. Chia Cheng, however, was again preparing to assail him, when the rattan was immediately locked tightly by Madame Wang, in both her arms.

“Of course, of course,” Chia Cheng exclaimed, “what you want to do to-day is to make me succumb to anger!”

“Pao Yü does, I admit, merit to be beaten,” sobbed Madame Wang; “but you should also, my lord, take good care of yourself! The weather, besides, is extremely hot, and our old lady is not feeling quite up to the mark. Were you to knock Pao Yü about and kill him, it would not matter much; but were perchance our venerable senior to suddenly fall ill, wouldn't it be a grave thing?”

“Better not talk about such things!” observed Chia Cheng with a listless smile. “By my bringing up such a degenerate child of retribution I have myself become unfilial! Whenever I've had to call him to account, there has always been a whole crowd of you to screen him; so isn't it as well for me to avail myself of today to put an end to his cur-like existence and thus prevent future misfortune?”

As he spoke, he asked for a rope to strangle him; but Madame Wang lost no time in clasping him in her embrace, and reasoning with him as she wept. “My lord and master,” she said, “it is your duty, of course, to keep your son in proper order, but you should also regard the relationship of husband and wife. I'm already a woman of fifty and I've only got this scapegrace. Was there any need for you to give him such a bitter lesson? I wouldn't presume to use any strong dissuasion; but having, on this occasion, gone so far as to harbour the design of killing him, isn't this a fixed purpose on your part to cut short my own existence? But as you are bent upon strangling him, be quick and first strangle me before you strangle him! It will be as well that we, mother and son, should die together, so that if even we go to hell, we may be able to rely upon each other!”

At the conclusion of these words, she enfolded Pao Yü in her embrace and raised her voice in loud sobs.

After listening to her appeal, Chia Cheng could not restrain a deep sigh; and taking a seat on one of the chairs, the tears ran down his cheeks like drops of rain.

page 139

But while Madame Wang held Pao Yü in her arms, she noticed that his face was sallow and his breath faint, and that his green gauze nether garments were all speckled with stains of blood, so she could not check her fingers from unloosening his girdle. And realising that from the thighs to the buttocks, his person was here green, there purple, here whole, there broken, and that there was, in fact, not the least bit, which had not sustained some injury, she of a sudden burst out in bitter lamentations for her offspring's wretched lot in life. But while bemoaning her unfortunate son, she again recalled to mind the memory of Chia Chu, and vehemently calling out “Chia Chu,” she sobbed: “if but you were alive, I would not care if even one hundred died!”

But by this time, the inmates of the inner rooms discovered that Madame Wang had gone out, and Li Kung-ts'ai, Wang Hsi-feng and Ting Ch'un and her sisters promptly rushed out of the garden and came to join her.

While Madame Wang mentioned, with eyes bathed in tears, the name of Chia Chu, every one listened with composure, with the exception of Li Kung-ts'ai, who unable to curb her feelings also raised her voice in sobs. As soon as Chia Cheng heard her complaints, his tears trickled down with greater profusion, like pearls scattered about. But just as there seemed no prospect of their being consoled, a servant-girl was unawares heard to announce: "Our dowager lady has come!" Before this announcement was ended, her tremulous accents reached their ears from outside the window. "If you were to beat me to death and then despatch him," she cried, "won't you be clear of us!"

Chia Cheng, upon seeing that his mother was coming, felt distressed and pained. With all promptitude, he went out to meet her. He perceived his old parent, toddling along, leaning on the arm of a servant-girl, wagging her head and gasping for breath.

Chia Cheng drew forward and made a curtsy. "On a hot broiling day like this," he ventured, forcing a smile, "what made you, mother, get so angry as to rush over in person? Had you anything to enjoin me, you could have sent for me, your son, and given me your orders."

Old lady Chia, at these words, halted and panted. "Are you really chiding me?" she at the same time said in a stern tone. "It's I who should call you to task! But as the son, I've brought up, isn't worth a straw, to whom can I go and address a word?"

When Chia Cheng heard language so unlike that generally used by her, he immediately fell on his knees. While doing all in his power to contain his tears: "The reason why," he explained, "your son corrects his offspring is a desire to reflect lustre on his ancestors and splendour on his seniors; so how can I, your son, deserve the rebuke with which you greet me, mother?"

At this reply, old lady Chia spurted contemptuously. "I made just one

remark," she added, "and you couldn't stand it, and can Pao Yü likely put up with that death-working cane? You say that your object in correcting your son is to reflect lustre on your ancestors and splendour on your seniors, but in what manner did your father correct you in days gone by?"

Saying this, tears suddenly rolled down from her eyes also.

Chia Cheng forced another smile. "Mother;" he proceeded, "you shouldn't distress yourself! Your son did it in a sudden fit of rage, but from this time forth I won't touch him again."

Dowager lady Chia smiled several loud sneering smiles. "But you shouldn't get into a huff with me!" she urged. "He's your son, so if you choose to flog him, you can naturally do so, but I cannot help thinking that you're sick and tired of me, your mother, of your wife and of your son, so wouldn't it be as well that we should get out of your way, the sooner the better, as we shall then be able to enjoy peace and quiet?"

So speaking, "Go and look after the chairs." she speedily cried to a servant. "I and your lady as well as Pao Yü will, without delay, return to Nanking."

The servant had no help but to assent.

Old lady Chia thereupon called Madame Wang over to her. "You needn't indulge in sorrow!" she exhorted her. "Pao Yü is now young, and you cherish him fondly; but does it follow that when in years to come he becomes an official, he'll remember that you are his mother? You mustn't therefore at present lavish too much of your affection upon him, so that you may by and bye, spare yourself, at least, some displeasure."

When these exhortations fell on Chia Cheng's ear, he instantly prostrated himself before her. "Your remarks mother," he observed, "cut the ground under your son's very feet."

"You distinctly act in a way," cynically smiled old lady Chia, "sufficient to deprive me of any ground to stand upon, and then you, on the contrary, go and speak about yourself! But when we shall have gone back, your mind will be free of all trouble. We'll see then who'll interfere and dissuade you from beating people!"

After this reply, she went on to give orders to directly get ready the baggage, carriages, chairs and horses necessary for their return.

Chia Cheng stiffly and rigidly fell on his knees, and knocked his head before her, and pleaded guilty. Dowager lady Chia then addressed him some words, and as she did so, she came to have a look at Pao Yü. Upon perceiving that the thrashing he had got this time was unlike those of past occasions, she experienced both pain and resentment. So clasping him in her arms, she wept and wept incessantly. It was only after Madame Wang, lady Feng and the other ladies had reasoned with her for a time that they at length gradually

page 141

succeeded in consoling her.

But waiting-maids, married women, and other attendants soon came to support Pao Yü and take him away. Lady Feng however at once expostulated with them. "You stupid things," she exclaimed, won't you open your eyes and see! How ever could he be raised and made to walk in the state he's in! Don't you yet instantly run inside and fetch some rattan slings and a bench to carry him out of this on?

At this suggestion, the servants rushed hurry-scurry inside and actually brought a bench; and, lifting Pao Yü, they placed him on it. Then following dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang and the other inmates into the inner part of the building, they carried him into his grandmother's apartments. But Chia Cheng did not fail to notice that his old mother's passion had not by this time yet abated, so without presuming to consult his own convenience, he too came inside after them. Here he discovered how heavily he had in reality castigated Pao Yü. Upon perceiving Madame Wang also crying, with one breath, "My flesh;" and, with another, saying with tears: "My son, if you had died sooner, instead of Chu Erh, and left Chu Erh behind you, you would have saved your father these fits of anger, and even I would not have had to fruitlessly worry and fret for half of my existence! Were anything to happen now to make you forsake me, upon whom will you have me depend?" And then after heaping reproaches upon herself for a time, break out afresh in lamentations for her, unavailing offspring, Chia Cheng was much cut up and felt conscious that he should not with his own hand have struck his son so ruthlessly as to bring him to this state, and he first and foremost

directed his attention to consoling dowager lady Chia.

“If your son isn't good,” rejoined the old lady, repressing her tears, “it is naturally for you to exercise control over him. But you shouldn't beat him to such a pitch! Don't you yet bundle yourself away? What are you dallying in here for? Is it likely, pray, that your heart is not yet satisfied, and that you wish to feast your eyes by seeing him die before you go?”

These taunts induced Chia Cheng to eventually withdraw out of the room. By this time, Mrs. Hsüeh together with Pao-ch'ai, Hsiang Ling, Hsi Jen, Shih Hsiang-yün and his other cousins had also congregated in the apartments. Hsi Jen's heart was overflowing with grief; but she could not very well give expression to it. When she saw that a whole company of people shut him in, some pouring water over him, others fanning him; and that she herself could not lend a hand in any way, she availed herself of a favourable moment to make her exit. Proceeding then as far as the second gate, she bade the servant-boys go and fetch Pei-Ming. On his arrival, she submitted him to a searching inquiry. “Why is it,” she asked, “that he was beaten just now

page 142

without the least provocation; and that you didn't run over soon to tell me a word about it?”

“It happened,” answered Pei Ming in great perplexity, “that I wasn't present. It was only after he had given him half the flogging that I heard what was going on, and lost no time in ascertaining what it was all about. It's on account of those affairs connected with Ch'i Kuan and that girl Chin Ch'uan.”

“How did these things come to master's knowledge?” inquired Hsi Jen.

“As for that affair with Ch'i Kuan,” continued Pei Ming, “it is very likely Mr. Hsüeh P'an who has let it out; for as he has ever been jealous, he may, in the absence of any other way of quenching his resentment, have instigated some one or other outside, who knows, to come and see master and add fuel to his anger. As for Chin Ch'uan-erh's affair it has presumably been told him by Master Tertius. This I heard from the lips of some person, who was in attendance upon master.”

Hsi Jen saw how much his two versions tallied with the true circumstances, so she readily credited the greater portion of what was told her. Subsequently, she returned inside. Here she found a whole crowd of people trying to do the best to benefit Pao Yü. But after they had completed every arrangement, dowager lady Chia impressed on their minds that it would be better were they to carefully move him into his own quarters. With one voice they all signified their approval, and with a good deal of bustling and fussing, they speedily transferred Pao Yü into the I Hung court, where they stretched him out comfortably on his own bed. Then after some further excitement, the members of the family began gradually to disperse. Hsi Jen at last entered his room, and waited upon him with singleness of heart.

But, reader, if you feel any curiosity to hear what follows, listen to what you will find divulged in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Tai-yü loves Pao-yü with extreme affection; but, on account of this affection, her female cousin gets indignant.

Hsüeh P'an commits a grave mistake; but Pao-ch'ai makes this mistake a pretext to tender advice to her brother.

When Hsi Jen saw dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang

page 143

and the other members of the family take their leave, our narrative says, she entered the room. and, taking a seat next to Pao-yü, she asked him, while she did all she could to hide her tears: "How was it that he beat you to such extremes?"

Pao-yü heaved a sigh. "It was simply," he replied, "about those trifles. But what's the use of your asking me about them? The lower part of my body is so very sore! Do look and see where I'm bruised!"

At these words, Hsi Jen put out her hand, and inserting it gently under his clothes, she began to pull down the middle garments. She had but slightly moved them, however, when Pao-yü ground his teeth and groaned "ai-ya." Hsi Jen at once stayed her hand. It was after three or four similar attempts that she, at length, succeeded in drawing them down. Then looking closely, Hsi Jen discovered that the upper part of his legs was all green and purple, one mass of scars four fingers wide, and covered with huge blisters.

Hsi Jen gnashed her teeth. "My mother!" she ejaculated, "how is it that he struck you with such a ruthless hand! Had you minded the least bit of my advice to you, things wouldn't have come to such a pass! Luckily, no harm was done to any tendon or bone; for had you been crippled by the thrashing you got, what could we do?"

In the middle of these remarks, she saw the servant-girls come, and they

told her that Miss Pao-ch'ai had arrived. Hearing this, Hsi Jen saw well enough that she had no time to put him on his middle garments, so forthwith snatching a double gauze coverlet, she threw it over Pao-yü. This done, she perceived Pao-ch'ai walk in, her hands laden with pills and medicines.

“At night,” she said to Hsi Jen, “take these medicines and dissolve them in wine and then apply them on him, and, when the fiery virus from that stagnant blood has been dispelled, he'll be all right again.”

After these directions, she handed the medicines to Hsi Jen. “Is he feeling any better now?” she proceeded to inquire.

“Thanks!” rejoined Pao-yü. “I'm feeling better,” he at the same time went on to say; after which, he pressed her to take a seat.

Pao-ch'ai noticed that he could open his eyes wide, that he could speak and that he was not as bad as he had been, and she felt considerable inward relief. But nodding her head, she sighed. “If you had long ago listened to the least bit of the advice tendered to you by people things would not have reached this climax to-day,” she said. “Not to speak of the pain experienced by our dear ancestor and aunt Wang, the sight of you in this state makes even us feel at heart....”

Just as she had uttered half of the remark she meant to pass, she quickly suppressed the rest; and smitten by remorse for having spoken too hastily, she could not help getting red in the face and lowering her head.

Pao-yü was realising how affectionate, how friendly and how replete with

page 144

deep meaning were the sentiments that dropped from her mouth, when, of a sudden, he saw her seal her lips and, flashing crimson, droop her head, and simply fumble with her girdle. Yet so fascinating was she in those timid blushes, which completely baffle description, that his feelings were roused within him to such a degree, that all sense of pain flew at once beyond the empyrean. “I've only had to bear a few blows,” he reflected, “and yet every one of them puts on those pitiful looks sufficient

to evoke love and regard; so were, after all, any mishap or untimely end to unexpectedly befall me, who can tell how much more afflicted they won't be! And as they go on in this way, I shall have them, were I even to die in a moment, to feel so much for me; so there will indeed be no reason for regret, albeit the concerns of a whole lifetime will be thus flung entirely to the winds!"

While indulging in these meditations, she overheard Pao-ch'ai ask Hsi Jen: "How is it that he got angry, without rhyme or reason, and started beating him?" and Hsi Jen tell her, in reply, the version given to her by Pei Ming.

Pao-yü had, in fact, no idea as yet of what had been said by Chia Huan, and, when he heard Hsi Jen's disclosures, he eventually got to know what it was; but as it also criminated Hsüeh P'an, he feared lest Pao-ch'ai might feel unhappy, so he lost no time in interrupting Hsi Jen.

"Cousin Hsüeh," he interposed, "has never been like that; you people mustn't therefore give way to idle surmises!"

These words were enough to make Pao-ch'ai see that Pao-yü had thought it expedient to say something to stop Hsi Jen's mouth, apprehending that her suspicions might get roused; and she consequently secretly mused within herself: "He has been beaten to such a pitch, and yet, heedless of his own pains and aches, he's still so careful not to hurt people's feelings. But since you can be so considerate, why don't you take a little more care in greater concerns outside, so that your father should feel a little happier, and that you also should not have to suffer such bitter ordeals! But notwithstanding that the dread of my feeling hurt has prompted you to interrupt Hsi Jen in what she had to tell me, is it likely that I am blind to the fact that my brother has ever followed his fancies, allowed his passions to run riot, and never done a thing to exercise any check over himself? His temperament is such that he some time back created, all on account of that fellow Ch'in Chung, a rumpus that turned heaven and earth topsy-turvy; and, as a matter of course, he's now far worse than he was ever before!"

"You people," she then observed aloud, at the close of these cogitations, "shouldn't bear this one or that one a grudge. I can't help thinking that it's,

after all, because of your usual readiness, cousin Pao-yü, to hobnob with that

page 145

set that your father recently lost control over his temper. But assuming that my brother did speak in a careless manner and did casually allude to you cousin Pao-yü, it was with no design to instigate any one! In the first place, the remarks he made were really founded on actual facts; and secondly, he's not one to ever trouble himself about such petty trifles as trying to guard against animosities. Ever since your youth up, Miss Hsi, you've simply had before your eyes a person so punctilious as cousin Pao-yü, but have you ever had any experience of one like that brother of mine, who neither fears the powers in heaven or in earth, and who readily blurts out all he thinks?"

Hsi Jen, seeing Pao-yü interrupt her, at the bare mention of Hsüeh P'an, understood at once that she must have spoken recklessly and gave way to misgivings lest Pao-ch'ai might not have been placed in a false position, but when she heard the language used by Pao-ch'ai, she was filled with a keener sense of shame and could not utter a word. Pao-yü too, after listening to the sentiments, which Pao-ch'ai expressed, felt, partly because they were so magnanimous and noble, and partly because they banished all misconception from his mind, his heart and soul throb with greater emotion than ever before. When, however, about to put in his word, he noticed Pao-ch'ai rise to her feet.

"I'll come again to see you to-morrow," she said, "but take good care of yourself! I gave the medicines I brought just now to Hsi Jen; let her rub you with them at night and I feel sure you'll get all right."

With these recommendations, she walked out of the door.

Hsi Jen hastened to catch her up and escorted her beyond the court. "Miss," she remarked, "we've really put you to the trouble of coming. Some other day, when Mr. Secundus is well, I shall come in person to thank you."

"What's there to thank me for?" replied Pao-ch'ai, turning her head round

and smiling. "But mind, you advise him to carefully tend his health, and not to give way to idle thoughts and reckless ideas, and he'll recover. If there's anything he fancies to eat or to amuse himself with, come quietly over to me and fetch it for him. There will be no use to disturb either our old lady, or Madame Wang, or any of the others; for in the event of its reaching Mr. Chia Cheng's ear, nothing may, at the time, come of it; but if by and bye he finds it to be true, we'll, doubtless, suffer for it!"

While tendering this advice, she went on her way.

Hsi Jen retraced her steps and returned into the room, fostering genuine feelings of gratitude for Pao-ch'ai. But on entering, she espied Pao-yü silently lost in deep thought, and looking as if he were asleep, and yet not quite asleep, so she withdrew into the outer quarters to comb her hair and wash.

page 146

Pao-yü meanwhile lay motionless in bed. His buttocks tingled with pain, as if they were pricked with needles, or dug with knives; giving him to boot a fiery sensation just as if fire were eating into them. He tried to change his position a bit, but unable to bear the anguish, he burst into groans. The shades of evening were by this time falling. Perceiving that though Hsi Jen had left his side there remained still two or three waiting-maids in attendance, he said to them, as he could find nothing for them to do just then, "You might as well go and comb your hair and perform your ablutions; come in, when I call you."

Hearing this, they likewise retired. During this while, Pao-yü fell into a drowsy state. Chiang Yü-han then rose before his vision and told him all about his capture by men from the Chung Shun mansion. Presently, Chin Ch'uan-erh too appeared in his room bathed in tears, and explained to him the circumstances which drove her to leap into the well. But Pao-yü, who was half dreaming and half awake, was not able to give his mind to anything that was told him. Unawares, he became conscious of some one having given him a push; and faintly fell on his ear the plaintive tones of some person in distress. Pao-yü was startled out of his dreams. On opening his eyes, he found it to be no other than Lin Tai-yü. But still fearing that it was only a dream, he promptly raised himself, and drawing

near her face he passed her features under a minute scrutiny. Seeing her two eyes so swollen, as to look as big as peaches, and her face glistening all over with tears: "If it is not Tai-yü," (he thought), "who else can it be?"

Pao-yü meant to continue his scrutiny, but the lower part of his person gave him such unbearable sharp twitches that finding it a hard task to keep up, he, with a shout of "Ai-yo," lay himself down again, as he heaved a sigh. "What do you once more come here for?" he asked. "The sun, it is true, has set; but the heat remaining on the ground hasn't yet gone, so you may, by coming over, get another sunstroke. Of course, I've had a thrashing but I don't feel any pains or aches. If I behave in this fashion, it's all put on to work upon their credulity, so that they may go and spread the reports outside in such a way as to reach my father's ear. Really it's all sham; so you mustn't treat it as a fact!"

Though Lin Tai-yü was not giving way at the time to any wails or loud sobs, yet the more she indulged in those suppressed complaints of hers, the worse she felt her breath get choked and her throat obstructed; so that when Pao-yü's assurances fell on her ear, she could not express a single sentiment, though she treasured thousands in her mind. It was only after a long pause that she at last could observe, with agitated voice: "You must after this turn over a new leaf."

page 147

At these words, Pao-yü heaved a deep sigh. "Compose your mind," he urged. "Don't speak to me like this; for I am quite prepared to even lay down my life for all those persons!"

But scarcely had he concluded this remark than some one outside the court was heard to say: "Our lady Secunda has arrived."

Lin Tai-yü readily concluded that it was lady Feng coming, so springing to her feet at once, "I'm off," she said; "out by the back-court. I'll look you up again by and bye."

"This is indeed strange!" exclaimed Pao-yü as he laid hold of her and tried to detain her. "How is it that you've deliberately started living in fear

and trembling of her!”

Lin Tai-yü grew impatient and stamped her feet. “Look at my eyes!” she added in an undertone. “Must those people amuse themselves again by poking fun at me?”

After this response, Pao-yü speedily let her go.

Lin Tai-yü with hurried step withdrew behind the bed; and no sooner had she issued into the back-court, than lady Feng made her appearance in the room by the front entrance.

“Are you better?” she asked Pao-yü. “If you fancy anything to eat, mind you send some one over to my place to fetch it for you.”

Thereupon Mrs. Hsüeh also came to pay him a visit. Shortly after, a messenger likewise arrived from old lady Chia (to inquire after him).

When the time came to prepare the lights, Pao-yü had a couple of mouthfuls of soup to eat, but he felt so drowsy and heavy that he fell asleep.

Presently, Chou Jui's wife, Wu Hsin-teng's wife and Cheng Hao-shih's wife, all of whom were old dames who frequently went to and fro, heard that Pao-yü had been flogged and they too hurried into his quarters.

Hsi Jen promptly went out to greet them. “Aunts,” she whispered, smiling, “you've come a little too late; Master Secundus is sleeping.” Saying this, she led them into the room on the opposite side, and, pressing them to sit down, she poured them some tea.

After sitting perfectly still for a time, “When Master Secundus awakes” the dames observed, “do send us word!”

Hsi Jen assured them that she would, and escorted them out. Just, however, as she was about to retrace her footsteps, she met an old matron, sent over by Madame Wang, who said to her: “Our mistress wants one of Master Secundus attendants to go and see her.”

Upon hearing this message, Hsi Jen communed with her own thoughts. Then turning round, she whispered to Ch'ing Wen, She Yüeh, Ch'iu Wen, and the other maids: "Our lady wishes to see one of us, so be careful and remain

page 148

in the room while I go. I'll be back soon."

At the close of her injunctions, she and the matron made their exit out of the garden by a short cut, and repaired into the drawing-room.

Madame Wang was seated on the cool couch, waving a banana-leaf fan. When she became conscious of her arrival: "It didn't matter whom you sent," she remarked, "any one would have done. But have you left him again? Who's there to wait on him?"

At this question, Hsi Jen lost no time in forcing a smile. "Master Secundus," she replied, "just now fell into a sound sleep. Those four or five girls are all right now, they are well able to attend to their master, so please, Madame, dispel all anxious thoughts! I was afraid that your ladyship might have some orders to give, and that if I sent any of them, they might probably not hear distinctly, and thus occasion delay in what there was to be done."

"There's nothing much to tell you," added Madame Wang. "I only wish to ask how his pains and aches are getting on now?"

"I applied on Mr. Secundus," answered Hsi Jen, "the medicine, which Miss Pao-ch'ai brought over; and he's better than he was. He was so sore at one time that he couldn't lie comfortably; but the deep sleep, in which he is plunged now, is a clear sign of his having improved."

"Has he had anything to eat?" further inquired Madame Wang.

"Our dowager mistress sent him a bowl of soup," Hsi Jen continued, "and of this he has had a few mouthfuls. He shouted and shouted that his mouth was parched and fancied a decoction of sour plums, but remembering that sour plums are astringent things, that he had been

thrashed only a short time before, and that not having been allowed to groan, he must, of course, have been so hard pressed that fiery virus and heated blood must unavoidably have accumulated in the heart, and that were he to put anything of the kind within his lips, it might be driven into the cardiac regions and give rise to some serious illness; and what then would we do? I therefore reasoned with him for ever so long and at last succeeded in deterring him from touching any. So simply taking that syrup of roses, prepared with sugar, I mixed some with water and he had half a small cup of it. But he drank it with distaste; for, being surfeited with it, he found it neither scented nor sweet.”

“Ai-yah!” ejaculated Madame Wang. “Why didn't you come earlier and tell me? Some one sent me the other day several bottles of scented water. I meant at one time to have given him some, but as I feared that it would be mere waste, I didn't let him have any. But since he is so sick and tired of that preparation of roses, that he turns up his nose at it, take those two bottles with you. If you just mix a teaspoonful of it in a cup of water, it will impart to it a very strong perfume.”

page 149

So saying, she hastened to tell Ts'ai Yün to fetch the bottles of scented water, which she had received as a present a few days before.

“Let her only bring a couple of them, they'll be enough!” Hsi Jen chimed in. “If you give us more, it will be a useless waste! If it isn't enough, I can come and fetch a fresh supply. It will come to the same thing!”

Having listened to all they had to say, Ts'ai Yün left the room. After some considerable time, she, in point of fact, returned with only a couple of bottles, which she delivered to Hsi Jen.

On examination, Hsi Jen saw two small glass bottles, no more than three inches in size, with screwing silver stoppers at the top. On the gosling-yellow labels was written, on one: “Pure extract of olea fragrans,” on the other, “Pure extract of roses.”

“What fine things these are!” Hsi Jen smiled. “How many small bottles the like of this can there be?”

“They are of the kind sent to the palace,” rejoined Madame Wang. “Didn't you notice that gosling-yellow slip? But mind, take good care of them for him; don't fritter them away!”

Hsi Jen assented. She was about to depart when Madame Wang called her back. “I've thought of something,” she said, “that I want to ask you.”

Hsi Jen hastily came back.

Madame Wang made sure that there was no one in the room. “I've heard a faint rumour,” she then inquired, “to the effect that Pao-yü got a thrashing on this occasion on account of something or other which Huan-Erh told my husband. Have you perchance heard what it was that he said? If you happen to learn anything about it, do confide in me, and I won't make any fuss and let people know that it was you who told me.”

“I haven't heard anything of the kind,” answered Hsi Jen. “It was because Mr. Secundus forcibly detained an actor, and that people came and asked master to restore him to them that he got flogged.”

“It was also for this,” continued Madame Wang as she nodded her head, “but there's another reason besides.”

“As for the other reason, I honestly haven't the least idea about it,” explained Hsi Jen. “But I'll make bold to-day, and say something in your presence, Madame, about which I don't know whether I am right or wrong in speaking. According to what's proper....”

She had only spoken half a sentence, when hastily she closed her mouth again.

“You are at liberty to proceed,” urged Madame Wang.

“If your ladyship will not get angry, I'll speak out,” remarked Hsi Jen.

“Why should I get angry?” observed Madame Wang. “Proceed!”

“According to what's proper,” resumed Hsi Jen, “our Mr. Secundus should receive our master's admonition, for if master doesn't hold him in check, there's no saying what he mightn't do in the future.”

As soon as Madame Wang heard this, she clasped her hands and uttered the invocation, “O-mi-to-fu!” Unable to resist the impulse, she drew near Hsi Jen. “My dear child,” she added, “you have also luckily understood the real state of things. What you told me is in perfect harmony with my own views! Is it likely that I don't know how to look after a son? In former days, when your elder master, Chu, was alive, how did I succeed in keeping him in order? And can it be that I don't, after all, now understand how to manage a son? But there's a why and a wherefore in it. The thought is ever present in my mind now, that I'm already a woman past fifty, that of my children there only remains this single one, that he too is developing a delicate physique, and that, what's more, our dear senior prizes him as much as she would a jewel, that were he kept under strict control, and anything perchance to happen to him, she might, an old lady as she is, sustain some harm from resentment, and that as the high as well as the low will then have no peace or quiet, won't things get in a bad way? So I feel prompted to spoil him by over-indulgence. Time and again I reason with him. Sometimes, I talk to him; sometimes, I advise him; sometimes, I cry with him. But though, for the time being, he's all right, he doesn't, later on, worry his mind in any way about what I say, until he positively gets into some other mess, when he settles down again. But should any harm befall him, through these floggings, upon whom will I depend by and bye?”

As she spoke, she could not help melting into tears.

At the sight of Madame Wang in this disconsolate mood, Hsi Jen herself unconsciously grew wounded at heart, and as she wept along with her, “Mr. Secundus,” she ventured, “is your ladyship's own child, so how could you not love him? Even we, who are mere servants, think it a piece of good fortune when we can wait on him for a time, and all parties can enjoy peace and quiet. But if he begins to behave in this manner, even peace and quiet will be completely out of the question for us. On what day, and at what hour, don't I advise Mr. Secundus; yet I can't manage to stir him up by any advice! But it happens that all that crew are ever ready

to court his friendship, so it isn't to be wondered that he is what he is! The truth is that he thinks the advice we give him is not right and proper! As you have to-day, Madame, alluded to this subject, I've got something to tell you which has weighed heavy on my mind. I've been anxious to come and confide it to your ladyship and to solicit your guidance, but I've been in fear and dread lest you should give way to suspicion. For not only would then all my disclosures have been

page 151

in vain, but I would have deprived myself of even a piece of ground wherein my remains could be laid."

Madame Wang perceived that her remarks were prompted by some purpose. "My dear child," she eagerly urged; "go on, speak out! When I recently heard one and all praise you secretly behind your back, I simply fancied that it was because you were careful in your attendance on Pao-yü; or possibly because you got on well with every one; all on account of minor considerations like these; (but I never thought it was on account of your good qualities). As it happens, what you told me just now concerns, in all its bearings, a great principle, and is in perfect accord with my ideas, so speak out freely, if you have aught to say! Only let no one else know anything about it, that is all that is needed."

"I've got nothing more to say," proceeded Hsi Jen. "My sole idea was to solicit your advice, Madame, as to how to devise a plan to induce Mr. Secundus to move his quarters out of the garden by and bye, as things will get all right then."

This allusion much alarmed Madame Wang. Speedily taking Hsi Jen's hand in hers: "Is it likely," she inquired, "that Pao-yü has been up to any mischief with any one?"

"Don't be too suspicious!" precipitately replied Hsi Jen. "It wasn't at anything of the kind that I was hinting. I merely expressed my humble opinion. Mr. Secundus is a young man now, and the young ladies inside are no more children. More than that, Miss Lin and Miss Pao may be two female maternal first cousins of his, but albeit his cousins, there is nevertheless the distinction of male and female between them; and day

and night, as they are together, it isn't always convenient, when they have to rise and when they have to sit; so this cannot help making one give way to misgivings. Were, in fact, any outsider to see what's going on, it would not look like the propriety, which should exist in great families. The proverb appositely says that: 'when there's no trouble, one should make provision for the time of trouble.' How many concerns there are in the world, of which there's no making head or tail, mostly because what persons do without any design is construed by such designing people, as chance to have their notice attracted to it, as having been designedly accomplished, and go on talking and talking till, instead of mending matters, they make them worse! But if precautions be not taken beforehand, something improper will surely happen, for your ladyship is well aware of the temperament Mr. Secundus has shown all along! Besides, his great weakness is to fuss in our midst, so if no caution be exercised, and the slightest mistake be sooner or later committed, there'll be then no question of true or false: for when people are many one says one thing and another, and what

page 152

is there that the months of that mean lot will shun with any sign of respect? Why, if their hearts be well disposed, they will maintain that he is far superior to Buddha himself. But if their hearts be badly disposed, they will at once knit a tissue of lies to show that he cannot even reach the standard of a beast! Now, if people by and bye speak well of Mr. Secundus, we'll all go on smoothly with our lives. But should he perchance give reason to any one to breathe the slightest disparaging remark, won't his body, needless for us to say, be smashed to pieces, his bones ground to powder, and the blame, which he might incur, be made ten thousand times more serious than it is? These things are all commonplace trifles; but won't Mr. Secundus' name and reputation be subsequently done for for life? Secondly, it's no easy thing for your ladyship to see anything of our master. A proverb also says: 'The perfect man makes provision beforehand;' so wouldn't it be better that we should, this very minute, adopt such steps as will enable us to guard against such things? Your ladyship has much to attend to, and you couldn't, of course, think of these things in a moment. And as for us, it would have been well and good, had they never suggested themselves to our minds; but since they have, we should be the more to blame did we not tell you

anything about them, Madame. Of late, I have racked my mind, both day and night on this score; and though I couldn't very well confide to any one, my lamp alone knows everything!"

After listening to these words, Madame Wang felt as if she had been blasted by thunder and struck by lightning; and, as they fitted so appositely with the incident connected with Chin Ch'uan-erh, her heart was more than ever fired with boundless affection for Hsi Jen. "My dear girl," she promptly smiled, "it's you, who are gifted with enough foresight to be able to think of these things so thoroughly. Yet, did I not also think of them? But so busy have I been these several times that they slipped from my memory. What you've told me to-day, however, has brought me to my senses! It's, thanks to you, that the reputation of me, his mother, and of him, my son, is preserved intact! I really never had the faintest idea that you were so excellent! But you had better go now; I know of a way. Yet, just another word. After your remarks to me, I'll hand him over to your charge; please be careful of him. If you preserve him from harm, it will be tantamount to preserving me from harm, and I shall certainly not be ungrateful to you for it."

Hsi Jen said several consecutive yes's, and went on her way. She got back just in time to see Pao-yü awake. Hsi Jen explained all about the scented water; and, so intensely delighted was Pao-yü, that he at once asked that some should be mixed and brought to him to taste. In very deed, he found it unusually fragrant and good. But as his heart was a prey to anxiety

page 153

on Tai-yü's behalf, he was full of longings to despatch some one to look her up. He was, however, afraid of Hsi Jen. Readily therefore he devised a plan to first get Hsi Jen out of the way, by despatching her to Pao-ch'ai's, to borrow a book. After Hsi Jen's departure, he forthwith called Ch'ing Wen. "Go," he said, "over to Miss Lin's and see what she's up to. Should she inquire about me, all you need tell her is that I'm all right."

"What shall I go empty-handed for?" rejoined Ch'ing Wen. "If I were, at least, to give her a message, it would look as if I had gone for something."

"I have no message that you can give her," added Pao-yü.

"If it can't be that," suggested Ch'ing Wen; "I might either take something over or fetch something. Otherwise, when I get there, what excuse will I be able to find?"

After some cogitation, Pao-yü stretched out his hand and, laying hold of a couple of handkerchiefs, he threw them to Ch'ing Wen. "These will do," he smiled. "Just tell her that I bade you take them to her."

"This is strange!" exclaimed Ch'ing Wen. "Will she accept these two half worn-out handkerchiefs! She'll besides get angry and say that you were making fun of her."

"Don't worry yourself about that;" laughed Pao-yü. "She will certainly know what I mean."

Ch'ing Wen, at this rejoinder, had no help but to take the handkerchiefs and to go to the Hsiao Hsiang lodge, where she discovered Ch'un Hsien in the act of hanging out handkerchiefs on the railings to dry. As soon as she saw her walk in, she vehemently waved her hand. "She's gone to sleep!" she said. Ch'ing Wen, however, entered the room. It was in perfect darkness. There was not even so much as a lantern burning, and Tai-yü was already ensconced in bed. "Who is there?" she shouted.

"It's Ch'ing Wen!" promptly replied Ch'ing Wen.

"What are you up to?" Tai-yü inquired.

"Mr. Secundus," explained Ch'ing Wen, "sends you some handkerchiefs, Miss."

Tai-yü's spirits sunk as soon as she caught her reply. "What can he have sent me handkerchiefs for?" she secretly reasoned within herself. "Who gave him these handkerchiefs?" she then asked aloud. "They must be fine ones, so tell him to keep them and give them to some one else; for I don't need such things at present."

"They're not new," smiled Ch'ing Wen. "They are of an ordinary kind, and old."

page 154

Hearing this, Lin Tai-yü felt downcast. But after minutely searching her heart, she at last suddenly grasped his meaning and she hastily observed: "Leave them and go your way."

Ch'ing Wen was compelled to put them down; and turning round, she betook herself back again. But much though she turned things over in her mind during the whole of her way homewards, she did not succeed in solving their import.

When Tai-yü guessed the object of the handkerchief, her very soul unawares flitted from her. "As Pao-yü has gone to such pains," she pondered, "to try and probe this dejection of mine, I have, on one hand, sufficient cause to feel gratified; but as there's no knowing what my dejection will come to in the future there is, on the other, enough to make me sad. Here he abruptly and deliberately sends me a couple of handkerchiefs; and, were it not that he has divined my inmost feelings, the mere sight of these handkerchiefs would be enough to make me treat the whole thing as ridiculous. The secret exchange of presents between us," she went on to muse, "fills me also with fears; and the thought that those tears, which I am ever so fond of shedding to myself, are of no avail, drives me likewise to blush with shame."

And by dint of musing and reflecting, her heart began, in a moment, to bubble over with such excitement that, much against her will, her thoughts in their superabundance rolled on incessantly. So speedily directing that a lamp should be lighted, she little concerned herself about avoiding suspicion, shunning the use of names, or any other such things, and set to work and rubbed the ink, soaked the pen, and then wrote the following stanzas on the two old handkerchiefs:

*Vain in my eyes the tears collect; those tears in vain they flow,
Which I in secret shed; they slowly drop; but for whom though?
The silk kerchiefs, which he so kindly troubled to give me,
How ever could they not with anguish and distress fill me?*

The second ran thus:

*Like falling pearls or rolling gems, they trickle on the sly.
Daily I have no heart for aught; listless all day am I.
As on my pillow or sleeves' edge I may not wipe them dry,
I let them dot by dot, and drop by drop to run freely.*

And the third:

*The coloured thread cannot contain the pearls cov'ring my face.
Tears were of old at Hsiang Chiang shed, but faint has waxed each
trace.
Outside my window thousands of bamboos, lo, also grow,
But whether they be stained with tears or not, I do not know.*

Lin Tai-yü was still bent upon going on writing, but feeling her whole body burn like fire, and her face scalding hot, she advanced towards the cheval-glass, and, raising the embroidered cover, she looked in. She saw at a glance that her cheeks wore so red that they, in very truth, put even the peach blossom

page 155

to the shade. Yet little did she dream that from this date her illness would assume a more serious phase. Shortly, she threw herself on the bed, and, with the handkerchiefs still grasped in her hand, she was lost in a reverie.

Putting her aside, we will now take up our story with Hsi Jen. She went to pay a visit to Pao-ch'ai, but as it happened, Pao-ch'ai was not in the garden, but had gone to look up her mother. Hsi Jen, however, could not very well come back with empty hands so she waited until the second watch, when Pao-ch'ai eventually returned to her quarters.

Indeed, so correct an estimate of Hsüeh P'an's natural disposition did Pao-ch'ai ever have, that from an early moment she entertained within herself some faint suspicion that it must have been Hsüeh P'an, who had instigated some person or other to come and lodge a complaint against

Pao-yü. And when she also unexpectedly heard Hsi Jen's disclosures on the subject, she became more positive in her surmises. The one, who had, in fact, told Hsi Jen was Pei Ming. But Pei Ming too had arrived at the conjecture in his own mind, and could not adduce any definite proof, so that every one treated his statements as founded partly on mere suppositions, and partly on actual facts; but, despite this, they felt quite certain that it was (Hsüeh P'an) who had intrigued.

Hsüeh P'an had always enjoyed this reputation; but on this particular instance the harm was not, actually, his own doing; yet as every one, with one consent, tenaciously affirmed that it was he, it was no easy matter for him, much though he might argue, to clear himself of blame.

Soon after his return, on this day, from a drinking bout out of doors, he came to see his mother; but finding Pao-ch'ai in her rooms, they exchanged a few irrelevant remarks. "I hear," he consequently asked, "that cousin Pao-yü has got into trouble; why is it?"

Mrs. Hsüeh was at the time much distressed on this score. As soon therefore as she caught this question, she gnashed her teeth with rage, and shouted: "You good-for-nothing spiteful fellow! It's all you who are at the bottom of this trouble; and do you still have the face to come and ply me with questions?"

These words made Hsüeh P'an wince. "When did I stir up any trouble?" he quickly asked.

"Do you still go on shamming!" cried Mrs. Hsüeh. "Every one knows full well that it was you, who said those things, and do you yet prevaricate?"

"Were every one," insinuated Hsüeh P'an, "to assert that I had committed murder, would you believe even that?"

"Your very sister is well aware that they were said by you." Mrs. Hsüeh continued, "and is it likely that she would accuse you falsely, pray?"

page 156

"Mother," promptly interposed Pao-ch'ai, "you shouldn't be brawling with

brother just now! If you wait quietly, we'll find out the plain and honest truth." Then turning towards Hsüeh P'an: "Whether it's you, who said those things or not," she added, "it's of no consequence. The whole affair, besides, is a matter of the past, so what need is there for any arguments; they will only be making a mountain of a mole-hill! I have just one word of advice to give you; don't, from henceforward, be up to so much reckless mischief outside; and concern yourself a little less with other people's affairs! All you do is day after day to associate with your friends and foolishly gad about! You are a happy-go-lucky sort of creature! If nothing happens well and good; but should by and bye anything turn up, every one will, though it be none of your doing, imagine again that you are at the bottom of it! Not to speak of others, why I myself will be the first to suspect you!"

Hsüeh P'an was naturally open-hearted and plain-spoken, and could not brook anything in the way of innuendoes, so, when on the one side, Pao-ch'ai advised him not to foolishly gad about, and his mother, on the other, hinted that he had a foul tongue, and that he was the cause that Pao-yü had been flogged, he at once got so exasperated that he jumped about in an erratic manner and did all in his power, by vowing and swearing, to explain matters. "Who has," he ejaculated, heaping abuse upon every one, "laid such a tissue of lies to my charge! I'd like to take the teeth of that felon and pull them out! It's clear as day that they shove me forward as a target; for now that Pao-yü has been flogged they find no means of making a display of their zeal. But, is Pao-yü forsooth the lord of the heavens that because he has had a thrashing from his father, the whole household should be fussing for days? The other time, he behaved improperly, and my uncle gave him two whacks. But our venerable ancestor came, after a time, somehow or other, I don't know how, to hear about it, and, maintaining that it was all due to Mr. Chia Chen, she called him before her, and gave him a good blowing up. And here to-day, they have gone further, and involved me. They may drag me in as much as they like, I don't fear a rap! But won't it be better for me to go into the garden, and take Pao-yü and give him a bit of my mind and kill him? I can then pay the penalty by laying down my life for his, and one and all will enjoy peace and quiet!"

While he clamoured and shouted, he looked about him for the bar of the door, and, snatching it up, he there and then was running off, to the

consternation of Mrs. Hsüeh, who clutched him in her arms. "You murderous child of retribution!" she cried. "Whom would you go and beat? come first and assail me?"

From excitement Hsüeh P'an's eyes protruded like copper bells. "What

page 157

are you up to," he vociferated, "that you won't let me go where I please, and that you deliberately go on calumniating me? But every day that Pao-yü lives, the longer by that day I have to bear a false charge, so it's as well that we should both die that things be cleared up?"

Pao-ch'ai too hurriedly rushed forward. "Be patient a bit!" she exhorted him. "Here's mamma in an awful state of despair. Not to mention that it should be for you to come and pacify her, you contrariwise kick up all this rumpus! Why, saying nothing about her who is your parent, were even a perfect stranger to advise you, it would be meant for your good! But the good counsel she gave you has stirred up your monkey instead."

"From the way you're now speaking," Hsüeh P'an rejoined, "it must be you, who said that it was I; no one else but you!"

"You simply know how to feel displeased with me for speaking," argued Pao-ch'ai, "but you don't feel displeased with yourself for that reckless way of yours of looking ahead and not minding what is behind!"

"You now bear me a grudge," Hsüeh P'an added, "for looking to what is ahead and not to what is behind; but how is it you don't feel indignant with Pao-yü for stirring up strife and provoking trouble outside? Leaving aside everything else, I'll merely take that affair of Ch'i Kuan-erh's, which occurred the other day, and recount it to you as an instance. My friends and I came across this Ch'i Kuan-erh, ten times at least, but never has he made a single intimate remark to me, and how is it that, as soon as he met Pao-yü the other day, he at once produced his sash, and gave it to him, though he did not so much as know what his surname and name were? Now is it likely, forsooth, that this too was something that I started?"

“Do you still refer to this?” exclaimed Mrs. Hsüeh and Pao-ch'ai, out of patience. “Wasn't it about this that he was beaten? This makes it clear enough that it's you who gave the thing out.”

“Really, you're enough to exasperate one to death!” Hsüeh P'an exclaimed. “Had you confined yourselves to saying that I had started the yarn, I wouldn't have lost my temper; but what irritates me is that such a fuss should be made for a single Pao-yü, as to subvert heaven and earth!”

“Who fusses?” shouted Pao-ch'ai. “You are the first to arm yourself to the teeth and start a row, and then you say that it's others who are up to mischief!”

Hsüeh P'an, seeing that every remark, made by Pao-ch'ai, contained so much reasonableness that he could with difficulty refute it, and that her words were even harder for him to reply to than were those uttered by his mother, he was consequently bent upon contriving a plan to make use of such language as could silence her and compel her to return to her room, so as to have no one

page 158

bold enough to interfere with his speaking; but, his temper being up, he was not in a position to weigh his speech. “Dear Sister!” he readily therefore said, “you needn't be flying into a huff with me! I've long ago divined your feelings. Mother told me some time back that for you with that gold trinket, must be selected some suitor provided with a jade one; as such a one will be a suitable match for you. And having treasured this in your mind, and seen that Pao-yü has that rubbishy thing of his, you naturally now seize every occasion to screen him....”

However, before he could finish, Pao-ch'ai trembled with anger, and clinging to Mrs. Hsüeh, she melted into tears. “Mother,” she observed, “have you heard what brother says, what is it all about?”

Hsüeh P'an, at the sight of his sister bathed in tears, became alive to the fact that he had spoken inconsiderately, and, flying into a rage, he walked away to his own quarters and retired to rest. But we can well dispense

with any further comment on the subject.

Pao-ch'ai was, at heart, full of vexation and displeasure. She meant to give vent to her feelings in some way, but the fear again of upsetting her mother compelled her to conceal her tears. She therefore took leave of her parent, and went back all alone. On her return to her chamber, she sobbed and sobbed throughout the whole night. The next day, she got out of bed, as soon as it dawned; but feeling even no inclination to comb her chevelure or perform her ablutions, she carelessly adjusted her clothes and came out of the garden to see her mother.

As luck would have it, she encountered Tai-yü standing alone under the shade of the trees, who inquired of her: "Where she was off to?"

"I'm going home," Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai replied. And as she uttered these words, she kept on her way.

But Tai-yü perceived that she was going off in a disconsolate mood; and, noticing that her eyes betrayed signs of crying, and that her manner was unlike that of other days, she smilingly called out to her from behind: "Sister, you should take care of yourself a bit. Were you even to cry so much as to fill two water jars with tears, you wouldn't heal the wounds inflicted by the cane."

But as what reply Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai gave is not yet known to you, reader, lend an ear to the explanation contained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Pai Yü-ch'uan tastes too the lotus-leaf soup.

Huang Chin-ying skilfully plaits the plum-blossom-knotted nets.

Pao ch'ai had, our story goes, distinctly heard Lin Tai-yü's sneer, but in

page 159

her eagerness to see her mother and brother, she did not so much as turn her head round, but continued straight on her way.

During this time, Lin Tai-yü halted under the shadow of the trees. Upon casting a glance, in the distance towards the I Hung Yüan, she observed Li Kung-ts'ai, Ying Ch'un, T'an Ch'un, Hsi Ch'un and various inmates wending their steps in a body in the direction of the I Hung court; but after they had gone past, and company after company of them had dispersed, she only failed to see lady Feng come. "How is it," she cogitated within herself, "that she doesn't come to see Pao-yü? Even supposing that there was some business to detain her, she should also have put in an appearance, so as to curry favour with our venerable senior and Madame Wang. But if she hasn't shown herself at this hour of the day, there must certainly be some cause or other."

While preoccupied with conjectures, she raised her head. At a second glance, she discerned a crowd of people, as thick as flowers in a bouquet, pursuing their way also into the I Hung court. On looking fixedly, she recognised dowager lady Chia, leaning on lady Feng's arm, followed by Mesdames Hsing and Wang, Mrs. Chou and servant-girls, married women and other domestics. In a body they walked into the court. At the sight of them, Tai-yü unwittingly nodded her head, and reflected on the benefit of having a father and mother; and tears forthwith again bedewed her face. In a while, she beheld Pao-ch'ai, Mrs. Hsüeh and the rest likewise go in.

But at quite an unexpected moment she became aware that Tzu Chüan was approaching her from behind. "Miss," she said, "you had better go

and take your medicine! The hot water too has got cold.”

“What do you, after all, mean by keeping on pressing me so?” inquired Tai-yü. “Whether I have it or not, what's that to you?”

“Your cough,” smiled Tzu Chüan, “has recently got a trifle better, and won't you again take your medicine? This is, it's true, the fifth moon, and the weather is hot, but you should, nevertheless, take good care of yourself a bit! Here you've been at this early hour of the morning standing for ever so long in this damp place; so you should go back and have some rest!”

This single hint recalled Tai-yü to her senses. She at length realised that her legs felt rather tired. After lingering about abstractedly for a long while, she quietly returned into the Hsiao Hsiang lodge, supporting herself on Tzu Chüan. As soon as they stepped inside the entrance of the court, her gaze was attracted by the confused shadows of the bamboos, which covered the ground, and the traces of moss, here thick, there thin, and she could not help recalling to mind those two lines of the passage in the Hsi Hsiang Chi:

*“In that lone nook some one saunters about,
White dew coldly bespecks the verdant moss.”*

page 160

“Shuang Wen,” she consequently secretly communed within herself, as she sighed, “had of course a poor fate; but she nevertheless had a widowed mother and a young brother; but in the unhappy destiny, to which I, Tai-yü, am at present doomed, I have neither a widowed mother nor a young brother.”

At this point in her reflections, she was about to melt into another fit of crying, when of a sudden, the parrot under the verandah caught sight of Tai-yü approaching, and, with a shriek, he jumped down from his perch, and made her start with fright.

“Are you bent upon compassing your own death!” she exclaimed. “You've covered my head all over with dust again!”

The parrot flew back to his perch. "Hsüeh Yen," he kept on shouting, "quick, raise the portiere! Miss is come!"

Tai-yü stopped short and rapped on the frame with her hand. "Have his food and water been replenished?" she asked.

The parrot forthwith heaved a deep sigh, closely resembling, in sound, the groans usually indulged in by Tai-yü, and then went on to recite:

"Here I am fain these flowers to inter, but humankind will laugh me as a fool."

Who knows who will in years to come commit me to my grave.

As soon as these lines fell on the ear of Tai-yü and Tzu Chüan, they blurted out laughing.

"This is what you were repeating some time back, Miss." Tzu Chüan laughed, "How did he ever manage to commit it to memory?"

Tai-yü then directed some one to take down the frame and suspend it instead on a hook, outside the circular window, and presently entering her room, she seated herself inside the circular window. She had just done drinking her medicine, when she perceived that the shade cast by the cluster of bamboos, planted outside the window, was reflected so far on the gauze lattice as to fill the room with a faint light, so green and mellow, and to impart a certain coolness to the teapoys and mats. But Tai-yü had no means at hand to dispel her ennui, so from inside the gauze lattice, she instigated the parrot to perform his pranks; and selecting some verses, which had ever found favour with her, she tried to teach them to him.

But without descending to particulars, let us now advert to Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai. On her return home, she found her mother alone combing her hair and having a wash. "Why do you run over at this early hour of the morning?" she speedily inquired when she saw her enter.

"To see," replied Pao-ch'ai, "whether you were all right or not, mother. Did he come again, I wonder, after I left yesterday and make any more

trouble or not?"

As she spoke, she sat by her mother's side, but unable to curb her tears, she began to weep.

page 161

Seeing her sobbing, Mrs. Hsüeh herself could not check her feelings, and she, too, burst out into a fit of crying. "My child," she simultaneously exhorted her, "don't feel aggrieved! Wait, and I'll call that child of wrath to order; for were anything to happen to you, from whom will I have anything to hope?"

Hsüeh P'an was outside and happened to overhear their conversation, so with alacrity he ran over, and facing Pao-ch'ai he made a bow, now to the left and now to the right, observing the while: "My dear sister, forgive me this time. The fact is that I took some wine yesterday; I came back late, as I met a few friends on the way. On my return home, I hadn't as yet got over the fumes, so I unintentionally talked a lot of nonsense. But I don't so much as remember anything about all I said. It isn't worth your while, however, losing your temper over such a thing!"

Pao-ch'ai was, in fact, weeping, as she covered her face, but the moment this language fell on her ear, she could scarcely again refrain from laughing. Forthwith raising her head, she sputtered contemptuously on the ground. "You can well dispense with all this sham!" she exclaimed, "I'm well aware that you so dislike us both, that you're anxious to devise some way of inducing us to part company with you, so that you may be at liberty."

Hsüeh P'an, at these words, hastened to smile. "Sister," he argued, "what makes you say so? once upon a time, you weren't so suspicious and given to uttering anything so perverse!"

Mrs. Hsüeh hurriedly took up the thread of the conversation. "All you know," she interposed, "is to find fault with your sister's remarks as being perverse; but can it be that what you said last night was the proper thing to say? In very truth, you were drunk!"

"There's no need for you to get angry, mother!" Hsüeh P'an rejoined, "nor for you sister either; for from this day, I shan't any more make common cause with them nor drink wine or gad about. What do you say to that?"

"That's equal to an acknowledgment of your failings," Pao-ch'ai laughed.

"Could you exercise such strength of will," added Mrs. Hsüeh, "why, the dragon too would lay eggs."

"If I again go and gad about with them," Hsüeh P'an replied, "and you, sister, come to hear of it, you can freely spit in my face and call me a beast and no human being. Do you agree to that? But why should you two be daily worried; and all through me alone? For you, mother, to be angry on my account is anyhow excusable; but for me to keep on worrying you, sister, makes me less then ever worthy of the name of a human being! If now that

page 162

father is no more, I manage, instead of showing you plenty of filial piety, mamma, and you, sister, plenty of love, to provoke my mother to anger, and annoy my sister, why I can't compare myself to even a four-footed creature!"

While from his mouth issued these words, tears rolled down from his eyes; for he too found it hard to contain them.

Mrs. Hsüeh had not at first been overcome by her feelings; but the moment his utterances reached her ear, she once more began to experience the anguish, which they stirred in her heart.

Pao-ch'ai made an effort to force a smile. "You've already," she said, "been the cause of quite enough trouble, and do you now provoke mother to have another cry?"

Hearing this, Hsüeh P'an promptly checked his tears. As he put on a smiling expression, "When did I," he asked, "make mother cry? But never mind; enough of this! let's drop the matter, and not allude to it any more! Call Hsiang Ling to come and give you a cup of tea, sister!"

"I don't want any tea." Pao-ch'ai answered. "I'll wait until mother has finished washing her hands and then go with her into the garden."

"Let me see your necklet, sister," Hsüeh P'an continued. "I think it requires cleaning."

"It is so yellow and bright," rejoined Pao-ch'ai, "and what's the use of cleaning it again?"

"Sister," proceeded Hsüeh P'an, "you must now add a few more clothes to your wardrobe, so tell me what colour and what design you like best."

"I haven't yet worn out all the clothes I have," Pao-ch'ai explained, "and why should I have more made?"

But, in a little time, Mrs. Hsüeh effected the change in her costume, and hand in hand with Pao-ch'ai, she started on her way to the garden.

Hsüeh P'an thereupon took his departure. During this while, Mrs. Hsüeh and Pao-ch'ai trudged in the direction of the garden to look up Pao-yü. As soon as they reached the interior of the I Hung court, they saw a large concourse of waiting-maids and matrons standing inside as well as outside the antechambers and they readily concluded that old lady Chia and the other ladies were assembled in his rooms. Mrs. Hsüeh and her daughter stepped in. After exchanging salutations with every one present, they noticed that Pao-yü was reclining on the couch and Mrs. Hsüeh inquired of him whether he felt any better.

Pao-yü hastily attempted to bow. "I'm considerably better;" he said. "All I do," he went on, "is to disturb you, aunt, and you, my cousin, but I don't deserve such attentions."

Mrs. Hsüeh lost no time in supporting and laying him down. "Mind you

page 163

tell me whatever may take your fancy!" she proceeded.

“If I do fancy anything,” retorted Pao-yü smilingly, “I shall certainly send to you, aunt, for it.”

“What would you like to eat,” likewise inquired Madame Wang, “so that I may, on my return, send it round to you?”

“There's nothing that I care for,” smiled Pao-yü, “though the soup made for me the other day, with young lotus leaves, and small lotus cores was, I thought, somewhat nice.”

“From what I hear, its flavour is nothing very grand,” lady Feng chimed in laughingly, from where she stood on one side. “It involves, however, a good deal of trouble to concoct; and here you deliberately go and fancy this very thing.”

“Go and get it ready!” cried dowager lady Chia several successive times.

“Venerable ancestor,” urged lady Feng with a smile, “don't you bother yourself about it! Let me try and remember who can have put the moulds away!” Then turning her head round, “Go and bid,” she enjoined an old matron, “the chief in the cook-house go and apply for them!”

After a considerable lapse of time, the matron returned. “The chief in the cook-house,” she explained, “says that the four sets of moulds for soups have all been handed up.”

Upon hearing this, lady Feng thought again for a while. “Yes, I remember,” she afterwards remarked, “they were handed up, but I can't recollect to whom they were given. Possibly they're in the tea-room.”

Thereupon, she also despatched a servant to go and inquire of the keeper of the tea-room about them; but he too had not got them; and it was subsequently the butler, entrusted with the care of the gold and silver articles, who brought them round.

Mrs. Hsüeh was the first to take them and examine them. What, in fact, struck her gaze was a small box, the contents of which were four sets of silver moulds. Each of these was over a foot long, and one square inch (in breadth). On the top, holes were bored of the size of beans. Some

resembled chrysanthemums, others plum blossom. Some were in the shape of lotus seed-cases, others like water chestnuts. They numbered in all thirty or forty kinds, and were ingeniously executed.

“In your mansion,” she felt impelled to observe smilingly to old lady Chia and Madame Wang, “everything has been amply provided for! Have you got all these things to prepare a plate of soup with! Hadn't you told me, and I happened to see them, I wouldn't have been able to make out what they were intended for!”

page 164

Lady Feng did not allow time to any one to put in her word. “Aunt,” she said, “how could you ever have divined that these were used last year for the imperial viands! They thought of a way by which they devised, somehow or other, I can't tell how, some dough shapes, which borrow a little of the pure fragrance of the new lotus leaves. But as all mainly depends upon the quality of the soup, they're not, after all, of much use! Yet who often goes in for such soup! It was made once only, and that at the time when the moulds were brought; and how is it that he has come to think of it to-day?” So speaking, she took (the moulds), and handed them to a married woman, to go and issue directions to the people in the cook-house to procure at once several fowls, and to add other ingredients besides and prepare ten bowls of soup.

“What do you want all that lot for?” observed Madame Wang.

“There's good reason for it,” answered lady Feng. “A dish of this kind isn't, at ordinary times, very often made, and were, now that brother Pao-yü has alluded to it, only sufficient prepared for him, and none for you, dear senior, you, aunt, and you, Madame Wang, it won't be quite the thing! So isn't it better that this opportunity should be availed of to get ready a whole supply so that every one should partake of some, and that even I should, through my reliance on your kind favour, taste this novel kind of relish.”

“You are sharper than a monkey!” Dowager lady Chia laughingly exclaimed in reply to her proposal. “You make use of public money to confer boons upon people.”

This remark evoked general laughter.

“This is a mere bagatelle!” eagerly laughed lady Feng. “Even I can afford to stand you such a small treat!” Then turning her head round, “Tell them in the cook-house,” she said to a married woman, “to please make an extra supply, and that they’ll get the money from me.”

The matron assented and went out of the room.

Pao-ch'ai, who was standing near, thereupon interposed with a smile. “During the few years that have gone by since I've come here, I've carefully noticed that sister-in-law Secunda, cannot, with all her acumen, outwit our venerable ancestor.”

“My dear child!” forthwith replied old lady Chia at these words. “I'm now quite an old woman, and how can there still remain any wit in me! When I was, long ago, of your manlike cousin Feng's age, I had far more wits about me than she has! Albeit she now avers that she can't reach our standard, she's good enough; and compared with your aunt Wang, why, she's infinitely superior. Your aunt, poor thing, won't speak much! She's like a block of wood; and when with her father and mother-in-law, she won't show herself off to advantage. But that girl Feng has a sharp tongue, so is it a

page 165

wonder if people take to her.”

“From what you say,” insinuated Pao-yü with a smile, “those who don't talk much are not loved.”

“Those who don't speak much,” resumed dowager lady Chia, “possess the endearing quality of reserve. But among those, with glib tongues, there's also a certain despicable lot; thus it's better, in a word, not to have too much to say for one's self.”

“Quite so,” smiled Pao-yü, “yet though senior sister-in-law Chia Chu doesn't, I must confess, talk much, you, venerable ancestor, treat her just

as you do cousin Feng. But if you maintain that those alone, who can talk, are worthy of love, then among all these young ladies, sister Feng and cousin Lin are the only ones good enough to be loved.”

“With regard to the young ladies,” remarked dowager lady Chia, “it isn't that I have any wish to flatter your aunt Hsüeh in her presence, but it is a positive and incontestable fact that there isn't, beginning from the four girls in our household, a single one able to hold a candle to that girl Pao-ch'ai.”

At these words, Mrs. Hsüeh promptly smiled. “Dear venerable senior!” she said, “you're rather partial in your verdict.”

“Our dear senior,” vehemently put in Madame Wang, also smiling, “has often told me in private how nice your daughter Pao-ch'ai is; so this is no lie.”

Pao-yü had tried to lead old lady Chia on, originally with the idea of inducing her to speak highly of Lin Tai-yü, but when unawares she began to eulogise Pao-ch'ai instead the result exceeded all his thoughts and went far beyond his expectations. Forthwith he cast a glance at Pao-chai, and gave her a smile, but Pao-chai at once twisted her head round and went and chatted with Hsi Jen. But of a sudden, some one came to ask them to go and have their meal. Dowager lady Chia rose to her feet, and enjoined Pao-yü to be careful of himself. She then gave a few directions to the waiting-maids, and resting her weight on lady Feng's arm, and pressing Mrs. Hsüeh to go out first, she, and all with her, left the apartment in a body. But still she kept on inquiring whether the soup was ready or not. “If there's anything you might fancy to eat,” she also said to Mrs. Hsüeh and the others, “mind you, come and tell me, and I know how to coax that hussey Feng to get it for you as well as me.”

“My venerable senior!” rejoined Mrs. Hsüeh, “you do have the happy knack of putting her on her mettle; but though she has often got things ready for you, you've, after all, not eaten very much of them.”

“Aunt,” smiled lady Feng, “don't make such statements! If our worthy senior hasn't eaten me up it's purely and simply because she dislikes human flesh as being sour. Did she not look down upon it as sour, why,

she would

page 166

long ago have gobbled me up!”

This joke was scarcely ended, when it so tickled the fancy of old lady Chia and all the inmates that they broke out with one voice in a boisterous fit of laughter. Even Pao-yü, who was inside the room, could not keep quiet.

“Really,” Hsi Jen laughed, “the mouth of our mistress Secunda is enough to terrify people to death!”

Pao-yü put out his arm and pulled Hsi Jen. “You've been standing for so long,” he smiled, “that you must be feeling tired.”

Saying this, he dragged her down and made her take a seat next to him.

“Here you've again forgotten!” laughingly exclaimed Hsi Jen. “Avail yourself now that Miss Pao-ch'ai is in the court to tell her to kindly bid their Ying Erh come and plait a few girdles with twisted cords.”

“How lucky it is you've reminded me?” Pao-yü observed with a smile. And putting, while he spoke, his head out of the window: “Cousin Pao-ch'ai,” he cried, “when you've had your repast, do tell Ying Erh to come over. I would like to ask her to plait a few girdles for me. Has she got the time to spare?”

Pao-ch'ai heard him speak; and turning round: “How about no time?” she answered. “I'll tell her by and bye to come; it will be all right.”

Dowager lady Chia and the others, however, failed to catch distinctly the drift of their talk; and they halted and made inquiries of Pao-ch'ai what it was about. Pao-ch'ai gave them the necessary explanations.

“My dear child,” remarked old lady Chia, “do let her come and twist a few girdles for your cousin! And should you be in need of any one for anything, I have over at my place a whole number of servant-girls doing

nothing! Out of them, you are at liberty to send for any you like to wait on you!”

“We'll send her to plait them!” Mrs. Hsüeh and Pao-ch'ai observed smilingly with one consent. “What can we want her for? she also daily idles her time away and is up to every mischief!”

But chatting the while, they were about to proceed on their way when they unexpectedly caught sight of Hsiang-yün, P'ing Erh, Hsiang Lin and other girls picking balsam flowers near the rocks; who, as soon as they saw the company approaching, advanced to welcome them.

Shortly, they all sallied out of the garden. Madame Wang was worrying lest dowager lady Chia's strength might be exhausted, and she did her utmost to induce her to enter the drawing room and sit down. Old lady Chia herself was feeling her legs quite tired out, so she at once nodded her head and expressed her assent. Madame Wang then directed a waiting-maid to hurriedly precede them, and get ready the seats. But as Mrs. Chao had, about this time, pleaded indisposition, there was only therefore Mrs. Chou, with the

page 167

matrons and servant-girls at hand, so they had ample to do to raise the portieres, to put the back-cushions in their places, and to spread out the rugs.

Dowager lady Chia stepped into the room, leaning on lady Feng's arm. She and Mrs. Hsüeh took their places, with due regard to the distinction between hostess and visitors; and Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai and Shih Hsiang-yün seated themselves below. Madame Wang then came forward, and presented with her own hands tea to old lady Chia, while Li Kung-ts'ai handed a cup to Mrs. Hsüeh.

“You'd better let those young sisters-in law do the honours,” remonstrated old lady Chia, “and sit over there so that we may be able to have a chat.”

Madame Wang at length sat on a small bench. “Let our worthy senior's

viands," she cried, addressing herself to lady Feng, "be served here. And let a few more things be brought!"

Lady Feng acquiesced without delay, and she told a servant to cross over to their old mistress' quarters and to bid the matrons, employed in that part of the household, promptly go out and summon the waiting-girls. The various waiting-maids arrived with all despatch. Madame Wang directed them to ask their young ladies round. But after a protracted absence on the errand, only two of the girls turned up: T'an Ch'un and Hsi Ch'un. Ying Ch'un, was not, in her state of health, equal to the fatigue, or able to put anything in her mouth, and Lin Tai-yü, superfluous to add, could only safely partake of five out of ten meals, so no one thought anything of their non-appearance. Presently the eatables were brought, and the servants arranged them in their proper places on the table.

Lady Feng took a napkin and wrapped a bundle of chopsticks in it. "Venerable ancestor and you, Mrs. Hsüeh," she smiled, standing the while below, "there's no need of any yielding! Just you listen to me and I'll make things all right."

"Let's do as she wills!" old lady Chia remarked to Mrs. Hsüeh laughingly.

Mrs. Hsüeh signified her approval with a smile; so lady Feng placed, in due course, four pairs of chopsticks on the table; the two pairs on the upper end for dowager lady Chia and Mrs. Hsüeh; those on the two sides for Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai and Shih Hsiang-yün. Madame Wang, Li Kung-ts'ai and a few others, stood together below and watched the attendants serve the viands. Lady Feng first and foremost hastily asked for clean utensils, and drew near the table to select some eatables for Pao-yü. Presently, the soup a la lotus leaves arrived. After old lady Chia had well scrutinised it, Madame Wang turned her head, and catching sight of Yü Ch'uan-erh, she immediately commissioned

page 168

her to take some over to Pao-yü.

"She can't carry it single-handed," demurred lady Feng.

But by a strange coincidence, Ying Erh then walked into the room along with Hsi Erh, and Pao-ch'ai knowing very well that they had already had their meal forthwith said to Ying Erh: "Your Master Secundus, Mr. Pao-yü, just asked that you should go and twist a few girdles for him; so you two might as well proceed together!"

Ying Erh expressed her readiness and left the apartment, in company with Yü Ch'uan-erh.

"How can you carry it, so very hot as it is, the whole way there?" observed Ying Erh.

"Don't distress yourself!" rejoined Yü Ch'uan smiling. "I know how to do it."

Saying this, she directed a matron to come and place the soup, rice and the rest of the eatables in a present box; and bidding her lay hold of it and follow them, the two girls sped on their way with empty hands, and made straight for the entrance of the I Hung court. Here Yü Ch'uan-erh at length took the things herself, and entered the room in company with Ying Erh. The trio, Hsi Jen, She Yüeh and Ch'iu Wen were at the time chatting and laughing with Pao-yü; but the moment they saw their two friends arrive they speedily jumped to their feet. "How is it," they exclaimed laughingly, "that you two drop in just the nick of time? Have you come together?"

With these words on their lips, they descended to greet them. Yü Ch'uan took at once a seat on a small stool. Ying Erh, however, did not presume to seat herself; and though Hsi Jen was quick enough in moving a footstool for her, Ying Erh did not still venture to sit down.

Ying Erh's arrival filled Pao-yü with intense delight. But as soon as he noticed Yü Ch'uan-erh, he recalled to memory her sister Chin Ch'uan-erh, and he felt wounded to the very heart, and overpowered with shame. And, without troubling his mind about Ying Erh, he addressed his remarks to Yü Ch'uan-erh.

Hsi Jen saw very well that Ying Erh failed to attract his attention and she

began to fear lest she felt uncomfortable; and when she further realised that Ying Erh herself would not take a seat, she drew her out of the room and repaired with her into the outer apartment, where they had a chat over their tea.

She Yüeh and her companions had, in the meantime, got the bowls and chopsticks ready and came to wait upon (Pao-yü) during his meal. But Pao-yü would not have anything to eat. "Is your mother all right," he forthwith inquired of Yü Ch'uan-erh.

page 169

An angry scowl crept over Yü Ch'uan-erh's face. She did not even look straight at Pao-yü. And only after a long pause was it that she at last uttered merely the words, "all right," by way of reply. Pao-yü, therefore, found talking to her of little zest. But after a protracted silence he felt impelled to again force a smile, and to ask: "Who told you to bring these things over to me?"

"The ladies," answered Yü Chuan-erh.

Pao-yü discerned the mournful expression, which still beclouded her countenance and he readily jumped at the conclusion that it must be entirely occasioned by the fate which had befallen Chin Ch'uan-erh, but when fain to put on a meek and unassuming manner, and endeavour to cheer her, he saw how little he could demean himself in the presence of so many people, and consequently he did his best and discovered the means of getting every one out of the way. Afterwards, straining another smile, he plied her with all sorts of questions.

Yü Ch'uan-erh, it is true, did not at first choose to heed his advances, yet when she observed that Pao-yü did not put on any airs, and, that in spite of all her querulous reproaches, he still continued pleasant and agreeable, she felt disconcerted and her features at last assumed a certain expression of cheerfulness. Pao-yü thereupon smiled. "My dear girl," he said, as he gave way to entreaties, "bring that soup and let me taste it!"

"I've never been in the habit of feeding people," Yü Ch'uan-erh replied.

“You'd better wait till the others return; you can have some then.”

“I don't want you to feed me,” laughed Pao-yü. “It's because I can't move about that I appeal to you. Do let me have it! You'll then get back early and be able, when you've handed over the things, to have your meal. But were I to go on wasting your time, won't you feel upset from hunger? Should you be lazy to budge, well then, I'll endure the pain and get down and fetch it myself.”

As he spoke, he tried to alight from bed. He strained every nerve, and raised himself, but unable to stand the exertion, he burst out into groans. At the sight of his anguish, Yü Ch'uan-erh had not the heart to refuse her help. Springing up, “Lie down!” she cried. “In what former existence did you commit such evil that your retribution in the present one is so apparent? Which of my eyes however can brook looking at you going on in that way?”

While taunting him, she again blurted out laughing, and brought the soup over to him.

“My dear girl;” smiled Pao-yü, “if you want to show temper, better do so here! When you see our venerable senior and madame, my mother, you should be a little more even-tempered, for if you still behave like this, you'll

page 170

at once get a scolding!”

“Eat away, eat away!” urged Yü Ch'uan-erh. “There's no need for you to be so sweet-mouthed and honey-tongued with me. I don't put any faith in such talk!”

So speaking, she pressed Pao-yü until he had two mouthfuls of soup. “It isn't nice, it isn't nice!” Pao-yü purposely exclaimed.

“Omi-to-fu!” ejaculated Yü Ch'uan-erh. “If this isn't nice, what's nice?”

“There's no flavour about it at all,” resumed Pao-yü. “If you don't believe

me taste it, and you'll find out for yourself.”

Yü Ch'uan-erh in a tantrum actually put some of it to her lips.

“Well,” laughed Pao-yü, “it is nice!”

This exclamation eventually enabled Yü Ch'uan to see what Pao-yü was driving at, for Pao-yü had in fact been trying to beguile her to have a mouthful.

“As, at one moment, you say you don't want any,” she forthwith observed, “and now you say it is nice, I won't give you any.”

While Pao-yü returned her smiles, he kept on earnestly entreating her to let him have some.

Yü Ch'uan-erh however would still not give him any; and she, at the same time, called to the servants to fetch what there was for him to eat. But the instant the waiting-maid put her foot into the room, servants came quite unexpectedly to deliver a message.

“Two nurses,” they said, “have arrived from the household of Mr. Fu, Secundus, to present his compliments. They have now come to see you, Mr. Secundus.” As soon as Pao-yü heard this report, he felt sure that they must be nurses sent over from the household of Deputy Sub-Prefect, Fu Shih.

This Fu Shih had originally been a pupil of Chia Cheng, and had, indeed, had to rely entirely upon the reputation enjoyed by the Chia family for the realisation of his wishes. Chia Cheng had, likewise, treated him with such genuine regard, and so unlike any of his other pupils, that he (Fu Shih) ever and anon despatched inmates from his mansion to come and see him so as to keep up friendly relations.

Pao-yü had at all times entertained an aversion for bold-faced men and unsophisticated women, so why did he once more, on this occasion, issue directions that the two matrons should be introduced into his presence? There was, in fact, a reason for his action. It was simply that Pao-yü had come to learn that Fu Shih had a sister, Ch'iu-fang by name,

a girl as comely as a magnificent gem, and perfection itself, the report of outside people went, as much in intellect as in beauty. He had, it is true, not yet seen anything of her

page 171

with his own eyes, but the sentiments, which made him think of her and cherish her, from a distance, were characterised by such extreme sincerity, that dreading lest he should, by refusing to admit the matrons, reflect discredit upon Fu Ch'iu-fang, he was prompted to lose no time in expressing a wish that they should be ushered in.

This Fu Shih had really risen from the vulgar herd, so seeing that Ch'iu-fang possessed several traits of beauty and exceptional intellectual talents, Fu Shih arrived at the resolution of making his sister the means of joining relationship with the influential family of some honourable clan. And so unwilling was he to promise her lightly to any suitor that things were delayed up to this time. Therefore Fu Ch'iu-fang, though at present past her twentieth birthday, was not as yet engaged. But the various well-to-do families, belonging to honourable clans, looked down, on the other hand, on her poor and mean extraction, holding her in such light esteem, as not to relish the idea of making any offer for her hand. So if Fu Shih cultivated intimate terms with the Chia household, he, needless to add, did so with an interested motive.

The two matrons, deputed on the present errand, completely lacked, as it happened, all knowledge of the world, and the moment they heard that Pao-yü wished to see them, they wended their steps inside. But no sooner had they inquired how he was, and passed a few remarks than Yü Ch'uan-erh, becoming conscious of the arrival of strangers, did not bandy words with Pao-yü, but stood with the plate of soup in her hands, engrossed in listening to the conversation. Pao-yü, again, was absorbed in speaking to the matrons; and, while eating some rice, he stretched out his arm to get at the soup; but both his and her (Yü Ch'uan-erh's) eyes were rivetted on the women, and as he thoughtlessly jerked out his hand with some violence, he struck the bowl and turned it clean over. The soup fell over Pao-yü's hand. But it did not hurt Yü Ch'uan-erh. She sustained, however, such a fright that she gave a start.

“How did this happen!” she smilingly shouted with vehemence to the intense consternation of the waiting-maids, who rushed up and clasped the bowl. But notwithstanding that Pao-yü had scalded his own hand, he was quite unconscious of the accident; so much so, that he assailed Yü Ch'uan-erh with a heap of questions, as to where she had been burnt, and whether it was sore or not.

Yü Ch'uan-erh and every one present were highly amused.

“You yourself,” observed Yü Ch'uan-erh, “have been scalded, and do you keep on asking about myself?”

At these words, Pao-yü became at last aware of the injury he had received. The servants rushed with all promptitude and cleared the mess. But

page 172

Pao-yü was not inclined to touch any more food. He washed his hands, drank a cup of tea, and then exchanged a few further sentences with the two matrons. But subsequently, the two women said good-bye and quitted the room. Ch'ing Wen and some other girls saw them as far as the bridge, after which, they retraced their steps.

The two matrons perceived, that there was no one about, and while proceeding on their way, they started a conversation.

“It isn't strange,” smiled the one, “if people say that this Pao-yü of theirs is handsome in appearance, but stupid as far as brains go. Nice enough a thing to look at but not to put to one's lips; rather idiotic in fact; for he burns his own hand, and then he asks some one else whether she's sore or not. Now, isn't this being a regular fool?”

“The last time I came,” the other remarked, also smiling, “I heard that many inmates of his family feel ill-will against him. In real truth he is a fool! For there he drips in the heavy downpour like a water fowl, and instead of running to shelter himself, he reminds other people of the rain, and urges them to get quick out of the wet. Now, tell me, isn't this ridiculous, eh? Time and again, when no one is present, he cries to

himself, then laughs to himself. When he sees a swallow, he instantly talks to it; when he espies a fish, in the river, he forthwith speaks to it. At the sight of stars or the moon, if he doesn't groan and sigh, he mutters and mutters. Indeed, he hasn't the least bit of character; so much so, that he even puts up with the temper shown by those low-bred maids. If he takes a fancy to a thing, it's nice enough even though it be a bit of thread. But as for waste, what does he mind? A thing may be worth a thousand or ten thousand pieces of money, he doesn't worry his mind in the least about it."

While they talked, they reached the exterior of the garden, and they betook themselves back to their home; where we will leave them.

As soon as Hsi Jen, for we will return to her, saw the women leave the room, she took Ying Erh by the hand and led her in, and they asked Pao-yü what kind of girdle he wanted made.

"I was just now so bent upon talking," Pao-yü smiled to Ying Erh, "that I forgot all about you. I put you to the trouble of coming, not for anything else, but that you should also make me a few nets."

"Nets! To put what in?" Ying Erh inquired.

Pao-yü, at this question, put on a smile. "Don't concern yourself about what they are for!" he replied. "Just make me a few of each kind!"

Ying Erh clapped her hand and laughed. "Could this ever be done!" she cried, "If you want all that lot, why, they couldn't be finished in ten years time."

page 173

"My dear girl," smiled Pao-yü, "work at them for me then whenever you are at leisure, and have nothing better to do."

"How could you get through them all in a little time?" Hsi Jen interposed smilingly. "First choose now therefore such as are most urgently needed and make a couple of them."

“What about urgently needed?” Ying-Erh exclaimed, “They are merely used for fans, scented pendants and handkerchiefs.”

“Nets for handkerchiefs will do all right.” Pao-yü answered.

“What's the colour of your handkerchief?” inquired Ying Erh.

“It's a deep red one.” Pao-yü rejoined.

“For a deep red one,” continued Ying Erh, “a black net will do very nicely, or one of dark green. Both these agree with the colour.”

“What goes well with brown?” Pao-yü asked.

“Peach-red goes well with brown.” Ying Erh added.

“That will make them look gaudy!” Pao-yü observed. “Yet with all their plainness, they should be somewhat gaudy.”

“Leek-green and willow-yellow are what are most to my taste,” Ying Erh pursued.

“Yes, they'll also do!” Pao-yü retorted. “But make one of peach-red too and then one of leek-green.”

“Of what design?” Ying Erh remarked.

“How many kinds of designs are there?” Pao-yü said.

“There are 'the stick of incense,' 'stools upset towards heaven,' 'part of elephant's eyes,' 'squares,' 'chains,' 'plum blossom,' and 'willow leaves.’” Ying Erh answered.

“What was the kind of design you made for Miss Tertia the other day?” Pao-yü inquired.

“It was the 'plum blossom with piled cores,’” Ying Erh explained in reply.

“Yes, that's nice.” Pao-yü rejoined.

As he uttered this remark, Hsi Jen arrived with the cords. But no sooner were they brought than a matron cried, from outside the window: "Girls, your viands are ready!"

"Go and have your meal," urged Pao-yü, "and come back quick after you've had it."

"There are visitors here," Hsi Jen smiled, "and how can I very well go?"

"What makes you say so?" Ying Erh laughed, while adjusting the cords. "It's only right and proper that you should go and have your food at once and then return."

page 174

Hearing this, Hsi Jen and her companions went off, leaving behind only two youthful servant-girls to answer the calls.

Pao-yü watched Ying Erh make the nets. But, while keeping his eyes intent on her, he talked at the same time of one thing and then another, and next went on to ask her how far she was in her teens.

Ying Erh continued plaiting. "I'm sixteen," she simultaneously rejoined.

"What was your original surname?" Pao-yü added.

"It was Huang;" answered Ying Erh.

"That's just the thing," Pao-yü smiled; "for in real truth there's the 'Huang Ying-erh;' (oriole)."

"My name, at one time, consisted of two characters," continued Ying Erh. "I was called Chin Ying; but Miss Pao-ch'ai didn't like it, as it was difficult to pronounce, and only called me Ying Erh; so now I've come to be known under that name."

"One can very well say that cousin Pao-ch'ai is fond of you!" Pao-yü pursued. "By and bye, when she gets married, she's sure to take you

along with her.”

Ying Erh puckered up her lips, and gave a significant smile.

“I've often told Hsi Jen,” Pao-yü smiled, “that I can't help wondering who'll shortly be the lucky ones to win your mistress and yourself.”

“You aren't aware,” laughed Ying Erh, “that our young mistress possesses several qualities not to be found in a single person in this world; her face is a second consideration.”

Pao-yü noticed how captivating Ying Erh's tone of voice was, how complaisant she was, and how simpleton-like unaffected in her language and smiles, and he soon felt the warmest affection for her; and particularly so, when she started the conversation about Pao-ch'ai. “Where do her qualities lie?” he readily inquired. “My dear girl, please tell me!”

“If I tell you,” said Ying Erh, “you must, on no account, let her know anything about it again.”

“This goes without saying,” smiled Pao-yü.

But this answer was still on his lips, when they overheard some one outside remark: “How is it that everything is so quiet?”

Both gazed round to see who possibly it could be. They discovered, strange enough, no one else than Pao-ch'ai herself.

Pao-yü hastily offered her a seat. Pao-ch'ai seated herself, and then wanted to know what Ying Erh was busy plaiting. Inquiring the while, she approached her and scrutinised what she held in her hands, half of which had by this time been done. “What's the fun of a thing like this?” she said. “Wouldn't it be preferable to plait a net, and put the jade in it?”

page 175

This allusion suggested the idea to Pao-yü. Speedily clapping his hands, he smiled and exclaimed: “Your idea is splendid, cousin. I'd forgotten all

about it! The only thing is what colour will suit it best?"

"It will never do to use mixed colours," Pao-ch'ai rejoined. "Deep red will, on one hand, clash with the colour; while yellow is not pleasing to the eye; and black, on the other hand, is too sombre. But wait, I'll try and devise something. Bring that gold cord and use it with the black beaded cord; and if you twist one of each together, and make a net with them, it will look very pretty!"

Upon hearing this, Pao-yü was immeasurably delighted, and time after time he shouted to the servants to fetch the gold cord. But just at that moment Hsi Jen stepped in, with two bowls of eatables. "How very strange this is to-day!" she said to Pao-yü. "Why, a few minutes back, my mistress, your mother, sent some one to bring me two bowls of viands."

"The supply," replied Pao-yü smiling, "must have been so plentiful to-day, that they've sent some to every one of you."

"It isn't that," continued Hsi Jen, "for they were distinctly given to me by name. What's more, I wasn't bidden go and knock my head; so this is indeed remarkable!"

"If they're given to you," Pao-yü smiled, "why, you had better go and eat them. What's there in this to fill you with conjectures?"

"There's never been anything like this before," Hsi Jen added, "so, it makes me feel uneasy."

Pao-ch'ai compressed her lips. "If this," she laughed; "makes you feel uneasy, there will be by and bye other things to make you far more uneasy."

Hsi Jen realised that she implied something by her insinuations, as she knew from past experience that Pao-ch'ai was not one given to lightly and contemptuously poking fun at people; and, remembering the notions entertained by Madame Wang on the last occasion she had seen her, she dropped at once any further allusions to the subject and brought the eatables up to Pao-yü for his inspection. "I shall come and hold the cords," she observed, "as soon as I've rinsed my hands."

This said, she immediately quitted the apartment. After her meal, she washed her hands and came inside to hold the gold cords for Ying Erh to plait the net with.

By this time, Pao-ch'ai had been called away by a servant, despatched by Hsüeh P'an. But while Pao-yü was watching the net that was being made he caught sight, at a moment least expected, of two servant-girls, who came from the part of Madame Hsing of the other mansion, to bring him a few kinds of fruits, and to inquire whether he was able to walk. "If you can

page 176

go about," they told him, "(our mistress) desires you, Mr. Pao-yü, to cross over to-morrow and have a little distraction. Her ladyship really longs to see you."

"Were I able to walk," Pao-yü answered with alacrity, "I would feel it my duty to go and pay my respects to your mistress! Anyhow, the pain is better than before, so request your lady to allay her solicitude."

As he bade them both sit down, he, at the same time, called Ch'iu Wen. "Take," he said to her, "half of the fruits, just received, to Miss Lin as a present."

Ch'iu Wen signified her obedience, and was about to start on her errand, when she heard Tai-yü talking in the court, and Pao-yü eagerly shout out: "Request her to walk in at once!"

But should there be any further particulars, which you, reader, might feel disposed to know, peruse the details given in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

While Hsi Jen is busy embroidering mandarin ducks, Pao-yü receives, in the Chiang Yün Pavilion, an omen from a dream.

Pao-yü apprehends that there is a destiny in affections, when his feelings are aroused to a sense of the situation in the Pear Fragrance court.

Ever since dowager lady Chia's return from Madame Wang's quarters, for we will now take up the string of our narrative, she naturally felt happier in her mind as she saw that Pao-yü improved from day to day; but nervous lest Chia Cheng should again in the future send for him, she lost no time in bidding a servant summon a head-page, a constant attendant upon Chia Cheng, to come to her, and in impressing upon him various orders. "Should," she enjoined him, "anything turn up henceforward connected with meeting guests, entertaining visitors and other such matters, and your master mean to send for Pao-yü, you can dispense with going to deliver the message. Just you tell him that I say that after the severe thrashing he has had, great care must be first taken of him during several months before he can be allowed to walk; and that, secondly, his constellation is unpropitious and that he could not see any outsider, while sacrifices are being offered to the stars; that I won't have him therefore put his foot beyond the second gate before the expiry of the eighth moon."

The head-page listened patiently to her instructions, and, assenting to all she had to say, he took his leave.

Old lady Chia thereupon also sent for nurse Li, Hsi Jen and the other waiting-maids and recommended them to tell Pao-yü about her injunctions so that

page 177

he might be able to quiet his mind.

Pao-yü had always had a repugnance for entertaining high officials and men in general, and the greatest horror of going in official hat and ceremonial dress, to offer congratulations, or express condolences, to pay calls, return visits, or perform other similar conventionalities, but upon receipt on the present occasion of this message, he became so much the more confirmed in his dislikes that not only did he suspend all intercourse with every single relative and friend, but even went so far as to study more than he had ever done before, his own caprices in the fulfilment of those morning and evening salutations due to the senior members of his family. Day after day he spent in the garden, doing nothing else than loafing about, sitting down here, or reclining there. Of a morning, he would, as soon as it was day, stroll as far as the quarters of dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang, to repair back, however, in no time. Yet ever ready was he every day that went by to perform menial services for any of the waiting-maids. He, in fact, wasted away in the most complete *dolce far niente* days as well as months. If perchance Pao-ch'ai or any other girl of the same age as herself found at any time an opportunity to give him advice, he would, instead of taking it in good part, fly into a huff. "A pure and spotless maiden," he would say, "has likewise gone and deliberately imitated those persons, whose aim is to fish for reputation and to seek praise; that set of government thieves and salaried devils. This result entirely arises from the fact that there have been people in former times, who have uselessly stirred up trouble and purposely fabricated stories with the primary object of enticing the filthy male creatures, who would spring up in future ages, to follow in their steps! And who would have thought it, I have had the misfortune of being born a masculine being! But, even those beautiful girls, in the female apartments, have been so contaminated by this practice that verily they show themselves ungrateful for the virtue of Heaven and Earth, in endowing them with perception, and in rearing them with so much comeliness."

Seeing therefore what an insane mania possessed him, not one of his cousins came forward to tender him one proper word of counsel. Lin Tai-yü was the only one of them, who, from his very infancy, had never once admonished him to strive and make a position and attain fame, so thus it was that he entertained for Tai-yü profound consideration. But enough of minor details.

We will now turn our attention to lady Feng. Soon after the news of Chin Ch'uan-erh's death reached her, she saw that domestics from various branches of the family paid her frequent visits at most unexpected hours, and presented her a lot of things, and that they courted her presence at most unseasonable moments,

page 178

to pay their compliments and adulate her, and she begun to harbour suspicions, in her own mind, as she little knew what their object could possibly be. On this date, she again noticed that some of them had brought their gifts, so, when evening arrived, and no one was present, she felt compelled to inquire jocosely of P'ing Erh what their aim could be.

“Can't your ladyship fathom even this?” P'ing Erh answered with a sardonic smile. “Why, their daughters must, I fancy, be servant-girls in Madame Wang's apartments! For her ladyship's rooms four elderly girls are at present allotted with a monthly allowance of one tael; the rest simply receiving several hundreds of cash each month; so now that Chin Ch'uan-erh is dead and gone, these people must, of course, be anxious to try their tricks and get this one-tael job!”

Hearing this, lady Feng smiled a significant smile. “That's it. Yes, that's it!” she exclaimed. “You've really suggested the idea to my mind! From all appearances, these people are a most insatiable lot; for they make quite enough in the way of money! And as for any business that requires a little exertion, why they are never ready to bear a share of it! They make use of their girls as so many tools to shove their own duties upon. Yet one overlooks that. But must they too have designs upon this job? Never mind! These people cannot easily afford to spend upon me the money they do. But they bring this upon their own selves, so I'll keep every bit of thing they send. I've, after all, resolved how to act in the matter!”

Having arrived at this decision, lady Feng purely and simply protracted the delay until all the women had sent her enough to satisfy her, when she at last suited her own convenience and spoke to Madame Wang (on the subject of the vacant post).

Mrs. Hsüeh and her daughter were sitting one day, at noon, in Madame Wang's quarters, together with Lin Tai-yü and the other girls, when lady Feng found an opportunity and broached the topic with Madame Wang. "Ever since," she said, "sister Chin Ch'uan-erh's death, there has been one servant less in your ladyship's service. But you may possibly have set your choice upon some girl; if so, do let me know who it is, so that I may be able to pay her her monthly wages."

This reminder made Madame Wang commune with her own self. "I fancy," she remarked; "that the custom is that there should be four or five of them; but as long as there are enough to wait upon me, I don't mind, so we can really dispense with another."

"What you say is, properly speaking, perfectly correct," smiled lady Feng; "but it's an old established custom. There are still a couple to be found in other people's rooms and won't you, Madame, conform with the rule? Besides, the saving of a tael is a small matter."

page 179

After this argument, Madame Wang indulged in further thought. "Never mind," she then observed, "just you bring over this allowance and pay it to me. And there will be no need to supply another girl. I'll hand over this tael to her younger sister, Yü Ch'uan-erh, and finish with it. Her elder sister came to an unpleasant end, after a long term of service with me; so if the younger sister, she leaves behind in my employ, receives a double share, it won't be any too excessive."

Lady Feng expressed her approval and turning round she said smilingly to Yü Ch'uan-erh: "I congratulate you, I congratulate you!"

Yü Ch'uan-erh thereupon crossed over and prostrated herself.

"I just want to ask you," Madame Wang went on to inquire, "how much Mrs. Chao and Mrs. Chou are allowed monthly?"

"They have a fixed allowance," answered lady Feng, "each of them draws two taels. But Mrs. Chao gets two taels for cousin Chia Huan, so hers amounts in all to four taels; besides these, four strings of cash."

“Are they paid in full month after month?” Madame Wang inquired.

Lady Feng thought the question so very strange that she hastened to exclaim by way of reply: “How are they not paid in full?”

“The other day,” Madame Wang proceeded, “I heard a faint rumour that there was some one, who complained in an aggrieved way that she had got a string short. How and why is this?”

“The monthly allowances of the servant-girls, attached to the secondary wives,” lady Feng hurriedly added with a smile, “amounted originally to a *tiao* each, but ever since last year, it was decided, by those people outside, that the shares of each of those ladies' girls should be reduced by half, that is, each to five hundred cash; and, as each lady has a couple of servant-girls, they receive therefore a *tiao* short. But for this, they can't bear me a grudge. As far as I'm concerned, I would only be too glad to let them have it; but our people outside will again disallow it; so is it likely that I can authorise any increase, pray? In this matter of payments I merely receive the money, and I've nothing to do with how it comes and how it goes. I nevertheless recommended, on two or three occasions, that it would be better if these two shares were again raised to the old amount; but they said that there's only that much money, so that I can't very well volunteer any further suggestions! Now that the funds are paid into my hands, I give them to them every month, without any irregularity of even so much as a day. When payments hitherto were effected outside, what month were they not short of money? And did they ever, on any single instance, obtain their pay at the proper time and date?”

Having heard this explanation, Madame Wang kept silent for a while.

page 180

Next, she proceeded to ask, how many girls there were with dowager lady Chia drawing one tael.

“Eight of them,” rejoined lady Feng, “but there are at present only seven; the other one is Hsi Jen.”

“Quite right,” assented Madame Wang. “But your cousin Pao-yü hasn't any maid at one tael; for Hsi Jen is still a servant belonging to old lady Chia's household.”

“Hsi Jen,” lady Feng smiled, “is still our dear ancestor's servant; she's only lent to cousin Pao-yü; so that she still receives this tael in her capacity of maid to our worthy senior. Any proposal, therefore, that might now be made, that this tael should, as Hsi Jen is Pao-yü's servant, be curtailed, can, on no account, be entertained. Yet, were it suggested that another servant should be added to our senior's staff, then in this way one could reduce the tael she gets. But if this be not curtailed, it will be necessary to also add a servant in cousin Chia Huan's rooms, in order that there should be a fair apportionment. In fact, Ch'ing Wen, She Yüeh and the others, numbering seven senior maids, receive each a *tiao* a month; and Chiao Hui and the rest of the junior maids, eight in all, get each five hundred cash per *mensem*; and this was recommended by our venerable ancestor herself; so how can any one be angry and feel displeasure?”

“Just listen,” laughed Mrs. Hsüeh, “to that girl Feng's mouth! It rattles and rattles like a cart laden with walnuts, which has turned topsy-turvy! Yet, her accounts are, from what one can gather, clear enough, and her arguments full of reason.”

“Aunt,” rejoined lady Feng smiling, “was I likely, pray, wrong in what I said?”

“Who ever said you were wrong?” Mrs. Hsüeh smiled. “But were you to talk a little slower, wouldn't it be a saving of exertion for you?”

Lady Feng was about to laugh, but hastily checking herself, she lent an ear to what Madame Wang might have to tell her.

Madame Wang indulged in thought for a considerable time. Afterwards, facing lady Feng, “You'd better,” she said, “select a waiting-maid tomorrow and send her over to our worthy senior to fill up Hsi Jen's place. Then, discontinue that allowance, which Hsi Jen draws, and keep out of the sum of twenty taels, allotted to me monthly, two taels and a *tiao*, and give them to Hsi Jen. So henceforward what Mrs. Chao and

Mrs. Chou will get, Hsi Jen will likewise get, with the only difference that the share granted to Hsi Jen, will be entirely apportioned out of my own allowance. Mind, therefore, there will be no necessity to touch the public funds!”

Lady Feng acquiesced to each one of her recommendations, and, pushing Mrs. Hsüeh, “Aunt,” she inquired, “have you heard her proposal? What have I all along maintained? Well, my words have actually come out true to-day!”

page 181

“This should have been accomplished long ago,” Mrs. Hsüeh answered. “For without, of course, making any allusion to her looks, her way of doing business is liberal; her speech and her relations with people are always prompted by an even temper, while inwardly she has plenty of singleness of heart and eagerness to hold her own. Indeed, such a girl is not easy to come across!”

Madame Wang made every effort to conceal her tears. “How could you people ever rightly estimate Hsi Jen's qualities?” she observed. “Why, she's a hundred times better than my own Pao-yü. How fortunate, in reality, Pao-yü is! Well would it be if he could have her wait upon him for the whole length of his life!”

“In that case,” lady Feng suggested, “why, have her face shaved at once, and openly place her in his room as a secondary wife. Won't this be a good plan?”

“This won't do!” Madame Wang retorted. “For first and foremost he's of tender years. In the second place, my husband won't countenance any such thing! In the third, so long as Pao-yü sees that Hsi Jen is his waiting-maid, he may, in the event of anything occurring from his having been allowed to run wild, listen to any good counsel she might give him. But were she now to be made his secondary wife, Hsi Jen would not venture to tender him any extreme advice, even when it's necessary to do so. It's better, therefore, to let things stand as they are for the present, and talk about them again, after the lapse of another two or three years.”

At the close of these arguments, lady Feng could not put in a word, by way of reply, to refute them, so turning round, she left the room. She had no sooner, however, got under the verandah, than she discerned the wives of a number of butlers, waiting for her to report various matters to her. Seeing her issue out of the room, they with one consent smiled. "What has your ladyship had to lay before Madame Wang," they remarked, "that you've been talking away this length of time? Didn't you find it hot work?"

Lady Feng tucked up her sleeves several times. Then resting her foot on the step of the side door, she laughed and rejoined: "The draft in this passage is so cool, that I'll stop, and let it play on me a bit before I go on. You people," she proceeded to tell them, "say that I've been talking to her all this while, but Madame Wang conjured up all that has occurred for the last two hundred years and questioned me about it; so could I very well not have anything to say in reply? But from this day forth," she added with a sarcastic smile,

page 182

"I shall do several mean things, and should even (Mrs. Chao and Mrs. Chou) go, out of any ill-will, and tell Madame Wang, I won't know what fear is for such stupid, glib-tongued, foul-mouthed creatures as they, who are bound not to see a good end! It isn't for them to indulge in those fanciful dreams of becoming primary wives, for there, will come soon a day when the whole lump sum of their allowance will be cut off! They grumble against us for having now reduced the perquisites of the servant-maids, but they don't consider whether they deserve to have so many as three girls to dance attendance on them!"

While heaping abuse on their heads, she started homewards, and went all alone in search of some domestic to go and deliver a message to old lady Chia.

But without any further reference to her, we will take up the thread of our narrative with Mrs. Hsüeh, and the others along with her. During this interval they finished feasting on melons. After some more gossip, each went her own way; and Pao-ch'ai, Tai-yü and the rest of the cousins returned into the garden. Pao-ch'ai then asked Tai-yü to repair with her to

the O Hsiang Arbour. But Tai-yü said that she was just going to have her bath, so they parted company, and Pao-ch'ai walked back all by herself. On her way, she stepped into the I Hung Yüan, to look up Pao-yü and have a friendly hobnob with him, with the idea of dispelling her mid-day lassitude; but, contrary to her expectations, the moment she put her foot into the court, she did not so much as catch the caw of a crow. Even the two storks stood under the banana trees, plunged in sleep. Pao-ch'ai proceeded along the covered passage and entered the rooms. Here she discovered the servant-girls sleeping soundly on the bed of the outer apartment; some lying one way, some another; so turning round the decorated screen, she wended her steps into Pao-yü's chamber. Pao-yü was asleep in bed. Hsi Jen was seated by his side, busy plying her needle. Next to her, lay a yak tail. Pao-ch'ai advanced up to her. "You're really far too scrupulous," she said smilingly in an undertone. "Are there still flies or mosquitos in here? and why do yet use that fly-flap for, to drive what away?"

Hsi Jen was quite taken by surprise. But hastily raising her head, and realising that it was Pao-ch'ai, she hurriedly put down her needlework. "Miss," she whispered with a smile, "you came upon me so unawares that you gave me quite a start! You don't know, Miss, that though there be no flies or mosquitoes there is, no one would believe it, a kind of small insect, which penetrates through the holes of this gauze; it is scarcely to be detected, but when one is asleep, it bites just like ants do!"

"It isn't to be wondered at," Pao-ch'ai suggested,

page 183

"for the back of these rooms adjoins the water; the whole place is also one mass of fragrant flowers, and the interior of this room is, too, full of their aroma. These insects grow mostly in the core of flowers, so no sooner do they scent the smell of any than they at once rush in."

Saying this, she cast a look on the needlework she (Hsi Jen) held in her hands. It consisted, in fact, of a belt of white silk, lined with red, and embroidered on the upper part with designs representing mandarin ducks, disporting themselves among some lotus. The lotus flowers were red, the leaves green, the ducks of variegated colours.

“Ai-yah!” ejaculated Pao-ch'ai, “what very beautiful work! For whom is this, that it's worth your while wasting so much labour on it?”

Hsi Jen pouted her lips towards the bed.

“Does a big strapping fellow like this,” Pao-ch'ai laughed, “still wear such things?”

“He would never wear any before,” Hsi Jen smiled, “that's why such a nice one was specially worked for him, in order that when he was allowed to see it, he should not be able to do otherwise than use it. With the present hot weather, he goes to sleep anyhow, but as he has been coaxed to wear it, it doesn't matter if even he doesn't cover himself well at night. You say that I bestow much labour upon this, but you haven't yet seen the one he has on!”

“It is a lucky thing,” Pao-ch'ai observed, smiling, “that you're gifted with such patience.”

“I've done so much of it to-day,” remarked Hsi Jen, “that my neck is quite sore from bending over it. My dear Miss,” she then urged with a beaming countenance, “do sit here a little. I'll go out for a turn. I'll be back shortly.”

With these words, she sallied out of the room.

Pao-ch'ai was intent upon examining the embroidery, so in her absentmindedness, she, with one bend of her body, settled herself on the very same spot, which Hsi Jen had recently occupied. But she found, on second scrutiny, the work so really admirable, that impulsively picking up the needle, she continued it for her. At quite an unforeseen moment—for Lin Tai-yü had met Shih Hsiang-yün and asked her to come along with her and present her congratulations to Hsi Jen—these two girls made their appearance in the court. Finding the whole place plunged in silence, Hsiang-yün turned round and betook herself first into the side-rooms in search of Hsi Jen. Lin Tai-yü, meanwhile, walked up to the window from outside, and peeped in through the gauze frame. At a glance, she espied Pao-yü, clad in a silvery-red coat, lying carelessly on the bed, and Pao-ch'ai, seated by his side, busy at some needlework, with a fly-brush

resting by her side.

page 184

As soon as Lin Tai-yü became conscious of the situation, she immediately slipped out of sight, and stopping her mouth with one hand, as she did not venture to laugh aloud, she waved her other hand and beckoned to Hsiang-yün. The moment Hsiang-yün saw the way she went on, she concluded that she must have something new to impart to her, and she approached her with all promptitude. At the sight, which opened itself before her eyes, she also felt inclined to laugh. Yet the sudden recollection of the kindness, with which Pao-ch'ai had always dealt towards her, induced her to quickly seal her lips. And knowing well enough that Tai-yü never spared any one with her mouth, she was seized with such fear lest she should jeer at them, that she immediately dragged her past the window. "Come along!" she observed. "Hsi Jen, I remember, said that she would be going at noon to wash some clothes at the pond. I presume she's there already so let's go and join her."

Tai-yü inwardly grasped her meaning, but, after indulging in a couple of sardonic smiles, she had no alternative but to follow in her footsteps.

Pao-ch'ai had, during this while, managed to embroider two or three petals, when she heard Pao-yü begin to shout abusively in his dreams. "How can," he cried, "one ever believe what bonzes and Taoist priests say? What about a match between gold and jade? My impression is that it's to be a union between a shrub and a stone!"

Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai caught every single word uttered by him and fell unconsciously in a state of excitement. Of a sudden, however, Hsi Jen appeared on the scene. "Hasn't he yet woke up?" she inquired.

Pao-ch'ai nodded her head by way of reply.

"I just came across," Hsi Jen smiled, "Miss Lin and Miss Shih. Did they happen to come in?"

"I didn't see them come in," Pao-ch'ai answered. "Did they tell you anything?" she next smilingly asked of Hsi Jen.

Hsi Jen blushed and laughed significantly. "They simply came out with some of those jokes of theirs," she explained. "What decent things could such as they have had to tell me?"

"They made insinuations to-day," Pao-ch'ai laughed, "which are anything but a joke! I was on the point of telling you them, when you rushed away in an awful hurry."

But no sooner had she concluded, than she perceived a servant, come over from lady Feng's part to fetch Hsi Jen. "It must be on account of what they hinted," Pao-ch'ai smilingly added.

Hsi Jen could not therefore do otherwise than arouse two servant-maids and go. She proceeded, with Pao-ch'ai, out of the I Hung court, and then

page 185

repaired all alone to lady Feng's on this side. It was indeed to communicate to her what had been decided about her, and to explain to her, as well, that though she could go and prostrate herself before Madame Wang, she could dispense with seeing dowager lady Chia. This news made Hsi Jen feel very awkward; to such an extent, that no sooner had she got through her visit to Madame Wang, than she returned in a hurry to her rooms.

Pao-yü had already awoke. He asked the reason why she had been called away, but Hsi Jen temporised by giving him an evasive answer. And only at night, when every one was quiet, did Hsi Jen at length give him a full account of the whole matter. Pao-yü was delighted beyond measure. "I'll see now," he said, with a face beaming with smiles, "whether you'll go back home or not. On your return, after your last visit to your people, you stated that your brother wished to redeem you, adding that this place was no home for you, and that you didn't know what would become of you in the long run. You freely uttered all that language devoid of feeling and reason, and enough too to produce an estrangement between us, in order to frighten me; but I'd like to see who'll henceforward have the audacity to come and ask you to leave!"

Hsi Jen, upon hearing this, smiled a smile full of irony. "You shouldn't say such things!" she replied. "From henceforward I shall be our Madame Wang's servant, so that, if I choose to go I needn't even breathe a word to you. All I'll have to do will be to tell her, and then I shall be free to do as I like."

"But supposing that I behaved improperly," demurred Pao-yü laughingly, "and that you took your leave after letting mother know, you yourself will be placed in no nice fix, when people get wind that you left on account of my having been improper."

"What no nice fix!" smiled Hsi Jen. "Is it likely that I am bound to serve even highway robbers? Well, failing anything else, I can die; for human beings may live a hundred years, but they're bound, in the long run, to fall a victim to death! And when this breath shall have departed, and I shall have lost the sense of hearing and of seeing, all will then be well!"

When her rejoinder fell on his ear, Pao-yü promptly stopped her mouth with both his hands. "Enough! enough! that will do," he shouted. "There's no necessity for you to utter language of this kind."

Hsi Jen was well aware that Pao-yü was gifted with such a peculiar temperament, that he even looked upon flattering or auspicious phrases with utter aversion, treating them as meaningless and consequently insincere, so when, after listening to those truths, she had spoken with such pathos, he, lapsed into another of his melancholy moods, she blamed herself for the want

page 186

of consideration she had betrayed. Hastily therefore putting on a smile, she tried to hit upon some suitable remarks, with which to interrupt the conversation. Her choice fell upon those licentious and immodest topics, which had ever been a relish to the taste of Pao-yü; and from these the conversation drifted to the subject of womankind. But when, subsequently, reference was made to the excellency of the weak sex, they somehow or other also came to touch upon the mortal nature of women, and Hsi Jen promptly closed her lips in silence.

Noticing however that now that the conversation had reached a point so full of zest for him, she had nothing to say for herself, Pao-yü smilingly remarked: "What human being is there that can escape death? But the main thing is to come to a proper end! All that those abject male creatures excel in is, the civil officers, to sacrifice their lives by remonstrating with the Emperor; and, the military, to leave their bones on the battlefield. Both these deaths do confer, after life is extinct, the fame of great men upon them; but isn't it, in fact, better for them not to die? For as it is absolutely necessary that there should be a disorderly Emperor before they can afford any admonition, to what future fate do they thus expose their sovereign, if they rashly throw away their lives, with the sole aim of reaping a fair name for themselves? War too must supervene before they can fight; but if they go and recklessly lay down their lives, with the exclusive idea of gaining the reputation of intrepid warriors, to what destiny will they abandon their country by and bye? Hence it is that neither of these deaths can be looked upon as a legitimate death."

"Loyal ministers," Hsi Jen argued, "and excellent generals simply die because it isn't in their power to do otherwise."

"Military officers," Pao-yü explained, "place such entire reliance upon brute force that they become lax in their stratagems and faulty in their plans. It's because they don't possess any inherent abilities that they lose their lives. Could one therefore, pray, say that they had no other alternative? Civil officials, on the other hand, can still less compare with military officers. They read a few passages from books, and commit them to memory; and, on the slightest mistake made by the Emperor, they're at once rash enough to remonstrate with him, prompted by the sole idea of attaining the fame of loyalty and devotion. But, as soon as their stupid notions have bubbled over, they forfeit their lives, and is it likely that it doesn't lie within their power to do otherwise? Why, they should also bear in mind that the Emperor receives his decrees from Heaven; and, that were he not a perfect man, Heaven itself would, on no account whatever, confer upon him a charge so extremely onerous. This makes it evident therefore that the whole pack and parcel of those officers, who are dead and gone, have invariably fallen victims to their

endeavours to attain a high reputation, and that they had no knowledge whatever of the import of the great principle of right! Take me as an instance now. Were really mine the good fortune of departing life at a fit time, I'd avail myself of the present when all you girls are alive, to pass away. And could I get you to shed such profuse tears for me as to swell out into a stream large enough to raise my corpse and carry it to some secluded place, whither no bird even has ever wended its flight, and could I become invisible like the wind, and nevermore from this time, come into existence as a human being, I shall then have died at a proper season."

Hsi Jen suddenly awoke to the fact that he was beginning to give vent to a lot of twaddle, and speedily, pleading fatigue, she paid no further notice to him. This compelled Pao-yü to at last be quiet and go to sleep. By the morrow, all recollection of the discussion had vanished from his mind.

One day, Pao-yü was feeling weary at heart, after strolling all over the place, when remembering the song of the "Peony Pavilion," he read it over twice to himself; but still his spirits continued anything but joyous. Having heard, however, that among the twelve girls in the Pear Fragrance Court there was one called Ling Kuan, who excelled in singing, he purposely issued forth by a side gate and came in search of her. But the moment he got there, he discovered Pao Kuan, and Yü Kuan in the court. As soon as they caught sight of Pao-yü, they, with one consent, smiled and urged him to take a seat. Pao-yü then inquired where Ling Kuan was. Both girls explained that she was in her room, so Pao-yü hastened in. Here he found Ling Kuan alone, reclining against a pillow. Though perfectly conscious of his arrival, she did not move a muscle. Pao-yü ensconced himself next to her. He had always been in the habit of playing with the rest of the girls, so thinking that Ling Kuan was like the others, he felt impelled to draw near her and to entreat her, with a forced smile, to get up and sing part of the "Niao Ch'ing Ssu." But his hopes were baffled; for as soon as Ling Kuan perceived him sit down, she impetuously raised herself and withdrew from his side. "I'm hoarse," she rejoined with a stern expression on her face. "The Empress the other day called us into the palace; but I couldn't sing even then."

Seeing her sit bolt upright, Pao-yü went on to pass her under a minute survey. He discovered that it was the girl, whom he had, some time ago

beheld under the cinnamon roses, drawing the character "Ch'iang." But seeing the reception she accorded him, who had never so far known what it was to be treated contemptuously by any one, he blushed crimson, while muttering some abuse to himself, and felt constrained to quit the room.

Pao Kuan and her companion could not fathom why he was so red and inquired of him the reason. Pao-yü told them. "Wait a while," Pao Kuan said,

page 188

"until Mr. Ch'iang Secundus comes; and when he asks her to sing, she is bound to sing."

Pao-yü at these words felt very sad within himself. "Where's brother Ch'iang gone to?" he asked.

"He's just gone out," Pao Kuan answered. "Of course, Ling Kuan must have wanted something or other, and he's gone to devise ways and means to bring it to her."

Pao-yü thought this remark very extraordinary. But after standing about for a while, he actually saw Chia Ch'iang arrive from outside, carrying a cage, with a tiny stage inserted at the top, and a bird as well; and wend his steps, in a gleeful mood, towards the interior to join Ling Kuan. The moment, however, he noticed Pao-yü, he felt under the necessity of halting.

"What kind of bird is that?" Pao-yü asked. "Can it hold a flag in its beak, or do any tricks?"

"It's the 'jade-crested and gold-headed bird,'" smiled Chia Ch'iang.

"How much did you give for it?" Pao-yü continued.

"A tael and eight mace," replied Chia Ch'iang.

But while replying to his inquiries, he motioned to Pao-yü to take a seat,

and then went himself into Ling Kuan's apartment.

Pao-yü had, by this time, lost every wish of hearing a song. His sole desire was to find what relations existed between his cousin and Ling Kuan, when he perceived Chia Ch'iang walk in and laughingly say to her, "Come and see this thing."

"What's it?" Ling Kuan asked, rising.

"I've bought a bird for you to amuse yourself with," Chia Ch'iang added, "so that you mayn't daily feel dull and have nothing to distract yourself with. But I'll first play with it and let you see."

With this prelude, he took a few seeds and began to coax the bird, until it, in point of fact, performed various tricks, on the stage, claspings in its beak a mask and a flag.

All the girls shouted out: "How nice;" with the sole exception of Ling Kuan, who gave a couple of apathetic smirks, and went in a huff to lie down. Again Chia Ch'iang, however, kept on forcing smiles, and inquiring of her whether she liked it or not.

"Isn't it enough," Ling Kuan observed, "that your family entraps a fine lot of human beings like us and coops us up in this hole to study this stuff and nonsense, but do you also now go and get a bird, which likewise is, as it happens, up to this sort of thing? You distinctly fetch it to make fun of us, and mimic us, and do you still ask me whether I like it or not?"

Hearing this reproach, Chia Ch'iang of a sudden sprang to his feet with

page 189

alacrity and vehemently endeavoured by vowing and swearing to establish his innocence. "How ever could I have been such a fool to-day," he proceeded, "as to go and throw away a tael or two to purchase this bird? I really did it in the hope that it would afford you amusement. I never for a moment entertained such thoughts as those you credit me with. But never mind; I'll let it go, and save you all this misery!"

So saying, he verily gave the bird its liberty; and, with one blow, he smashed the cage to atoms.

“This bird,” still argued Ling Kuan, “differs, it's true, from a human being; but it too has a mother and father in its nest, and could you have had the heart to bring it here to perform these silly pranks? In coughing to-day, I expectorated two mouthfuls of blood, and Madame Wang sent some one here to find you so as to tell you to ask the doctor round to minutely diagnose my complaint, and have you instead brought this to mock me with? But it so happens that I, who have not a soul to look after me, or to care for me, also have the fate to fall ill!”

Chia Ch'iang listened to her. “Yesterday evening,” he eagerly explained, “I asked the doctor about it. He said that it was nothing at all, that you should take a few doses of medicine, and that he would be coming again in a day or two to see how you were getting on. But who'd have thought it, you have again to-day expectorated blood. I'll go at once and invite him to come round.”

Speaking the while, he was about to go immediately when Ling Kuan cried out and stopped him. “Do you go off in a tantrum in this hot broiling sun?” she said. “You may ask him to come, but I won't see him.”

When he heard her resolution, Chia Ch'iang had perforce to stand still.

Pao-yü, perceiving what transpired between them, fell unwittingly in a dull reverie. He then at length got an insight into the deep import of the tracing of the character “Ch'iang.” But unable to bear the ordeal any longer, he forthwith took himself out of the way. So absorbed, however, was Chia Ch'iang's whole mind with Ling Kuan that he could not even give a thought to escorting any one; and it was, in fact, the rest of the singing-girls who saw (Pao-yü) out.

Pao-yü's heart was gnawed with doubts and conjectures. In an imbecile frame of mind, he came to the I Hung court. Lin Tai-yü was, at the moment, sitting with Hsi Jen, and chatting with her. As soon as Pao-yü entered his quarters, he addressed himself to Hsi Jen, with a long sigh. “I was very wrong in what I said yesterday evening,” he remarked. “It's no matter of surprise that father says that I am so narrow-minded that I look

at things through a tube and measure them with a clam-shell. I mentioned something

page 190

last night about having nothing but tears, shed by all of you girls, to be buried in. But this was a mere delusion! So as I can't get the tears of the whole lot of you, each one of you can henceforward keep her own for herself, and have done."

Hsi Jen had flattered herself that the words he had uttered the previous evening amounted to idle talk, and she had long ago dispelled all thought of them from her mind, but when Pao-yü unawares made further allusion to them, she smilingly rejoined: "You are verily somewhat cracked!"

Pao-yü kept silent, and attempted to make no reply. Yet from this time he fully apprehended that the lot of human affections is, in every instance, subject to predestination, and time and again he was wont to secretly muse, with much anguish: "Who, I wonder, will shed tears for me, at my burial?"

Lin Tai-yü, for we will now allude to her, noticed Pao-yü's behaviour, but readily concluding that he must have been, somewhere or other, once more possessed by some malignant spirit, she did not feel it advisable to ask many questions. "I just saw," she consequently observed, "my maternal aunt, who hearing that to-morrow is Miss Hsüeh's birthday, bade me come at my convenience to ask you whether you'll go or not, (and to tell you) to send some one ahead to let them know what you mean to do."

"I didn't go the other day, when it was Mr. Chia She's birthday, so I won't go now." Pao-yü answered. "If it is a matter of meeting any one, I won't go anywhere. On a hot day like this to again don my ceremonial dress! No, I won't go. Aunt is not likely to feel displeased with me!"

"What are you driving at?" Hsi Jen speedily ventured. "She couldn't be put on the same footing as our senior master! She lives close by here. Besides she's a relative. Why, if you don't go, won't you make her imagine things? Well, if you dread the heat, just get up at an early hour

and go over and prostrate yourself before her, and come back again, after you've had a cup of tea. Won't this look well?"

Before Pao-yü had time to say anything by way of response, Tai-yü anticipated him. "You should," she smiled, "go as far as there for the sake of her, who drives the mosquitoes away from you."

Pao-yü could not make out the drift of her insinuation. "What about driving mosquitoes away?" he vehemently inquired.

Hsi Jen then explained to him how while he was fast asleep the previous day and no one was about to keep him company, Miss Pao-ch'ai had sat with him for a while.

"It shouldn't have been done!" Pao-yü promptly exclaimed, after hearing her explanations. "But how did I manage to go to sleep and show such utter discourtesy to her? I must go to-morrow!" he then went on to add. But

page 191

while these words were still on his lips, he unexpectedly caught sight of Shih Hsian-yün walk in in full dress, to bid them adieu, as she said that some one had been sent from her home to fetch her away.

The moment Pao-yü and Tai-yü heard what was the object of her visit, they quickly rose to their feet and pressed her to take a seat. But Shih Hsiang-yün would not sit down, so Pao-yü and Tai-yü were compelled to escort her as far as the front part of the mansion.

Shih Hsiang-yün's eyes were brimming with tears; but realising that several people from her home were present, she did not have the courage to give full vent to her feelings. But when shortly Pao-ch'ai ran over to find her, she felt so much the more drawn towards them, that she could not brook to part from them. Pao-ch'ai, however, inwardly understood that if her people told her aunt anything on their return, there would again be every fear of her being blown up, as soon as she got back home, and she therefore urged her to start on her way. One and all then walked with her up to the second gate, and Pao-yü wished to

accompany her still further outside, but Shih Hsiang-yün deterred him. Presently, they turned to go back. But once more, she called Pao-yü to her, and whispered to him in a soft tone of voice: "Should our venerable senior not think of me do often allude to me, so that she should depute some one to fetch me."

Pao-yü time after time assured her that he would comply with her wishes. And having followed her with their eyes, while she got into her curricule and started, they eventually retraced their steps towards the inner compound. But, reader, if you like to follow up the story, peruse the details contained in the chapter below.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

In the Study of Autumnal Cheerfulness is accidentally formed the Cydonia Japonica Society.

In the Heng Wu Court, the chrysanthemum is, on a certain night, proposed as a subject for verses.

But to continue. After Shih Hsiang-Yün 's return home, Pao-yü and the other inmates spent their time, as of old, in rambling about in the garden in search of pleasure, and in humming poetical compositions. But without further reference to their doings, let us take up our narrative with Chia Cheng.

Ever since the visit paid to her home by the imperial consort, he fulfilled his official duties with additional zeal, for the purpose of reverently making requital for the grace shown him by the Emperor. His correct bearing and

page 192

his spotless reputation did not escape His Majesty's notice, and he conferred upon him the special appointment of Literary Chancellor, with the sole object of singling out his true merit; for though he had not commenced his career through the arena of public examinations, he belonged nevertheless to a family addicted to letters during successive generations. Chia Cheng had, therefore, on the receipt of the imperial decree, to select the twentieth day of the eighth moon to set out on his journey. When the appointed day came, he worshipped at the shrines of his ancestors, took leave of them and of dowager lady Chia, and started for his post. It would be a needless task, however, to recount with any full particulars how Pao-yü and all the inmates saw him off, how Chia Cheng went to take up his official duties, and what occurred abroad, suffice it for us to notice that Pao-yü, ever since Chia Cheng's departure, indulged his caprices, allowed his feelings to run riot, and gadded wildly about. In fact, he wasted his time, and added fruitless days and months to his age.

On this special occasion, he experienced more than ever a sense of his lack of resources, and came to look up his grandmother Chia and

Madame Wang. With them, he whiled away some of his time, after which he returned into the garden. As soon as he changed his costume, he perceived Ts'ui Mo enter, with a couple of sheets of fancy notepaper, in her hand, which she delivered to him.

"It quite slipped from my mind," Pao-yü remarked. "I meant to have gone and seen my cousin Tertia; is she better that you come?"

"Miss is all right," Ts'ui Mo answered. "She hasn't even had any medicine to-day. It's only a slight chill."

When Pao-yü heard this reply, he unfolded the fancy notepaper. On perusal, he found the contents to be: "Your cousin, T'an Ch'un, respectfully lays this on her cousin Secundus' study-table. When the other night the blue sky newly opened out to view, the moon shone as if it had been washed clean! Such admiration did this pure and rare panorama evoke in me that I could not reconcile myself to the idea of going to bed. The clepsydra had already accomplished three turns, and yet I roamed by the railing under the dryandra trees. But such poor treatment did I receive from wind and dew (that I caught a chill), which brought about an ailment as severe (as that which prevented the man of old from) picking up sticks. You took the trouble yesterday to come in person and cheer me up. Time after time also did you send your attendants round to make affectionate inquiries about me. You likewise presented me with fresh lichees and relics of writings of Chen Ch'ing. How deep is really your gracious love! As I leant to-day on my table plunged in silence, I suddenly remembered that the ancients of successive ages were

page 193

placed in circumstances, in which they had to struggle for reputation and to fight for gain, but that they nevertheless acquired spots with hills and dripping streams, and, inviting people to come from far and near, they did all they could to detain them, by throwing the lynch-pins of their chariots into wells or by holding on to their shafts; and that they invariably joined friendship with two or three of the same mind as themselves, with whom they strolled about in these grounds, either erecting altars for song, or establishing societies for scanning poetical works. Their meetings were, it

is true, prompted, on the spur of the moment, by a sudden fit of good cheer, but these have again and again proved, during many years, a pleasant topic of conversation. I, your cousin, may, I admit, be devoid of talent, yet I have been fortunate enough to enjoy your company amidst streams and rockeries, and to furthermore admire the elegant verses composed by Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai and Lin Tai-yü. When we were in the breezy hall and the moonlit pavilion, what a pity we never talked about poets! But near the almond tree with the sign and the peach tree by the stream, we may perhaps, when under the fumes of wine, be able to fling round the cups, used for humming verses! Who is it who opines that societies with any claim to excellent abilities can only be formed by men? May it not be that the pleasant meetings on the Tung Shan might yield in merit to those, such as ourselves, of the weaker sex? Should you not think it too much to walk on the snow, I shall make bold to ask you round, and sweep the way clean of flowers and wait for you. Respectfully written."

The perusal of this note filled Pao-yü unawares with exultation. Clapping his hands; "My third cousin," he laughed, "is the one eminently polished; I'll go at once to-day and talk matters over with her."

As he spoke, he started immediately, followed by Ts'ui Mo. As soon as they reached the Hsin Fang pavilion, they espied the matron, on duty that day at the back door of the garden, advancing towards them with a note in her hand. The moment she perceived Pao-yü she forthwith came up to meet him. "Mr. Yün," she said, "presents his compliments to you. He is waiting for you at the back gate. This is a note he bade me bring you."

Upon opening the note, Pao-yü found it to read as follows: "An unfilial son, Yün, reverently inquires about his worthy father's boundless happiness and precious health. Remembering the honour conferred upon me by your recognising me, in your heavenly bounty, as your son, I tried both day as well as night to do something in evidence of my pious obedience, but no opportunity could I find to perform anything filial. When I had, some time back, to purchase flowers and plants, I succeeded, thanks to your vast influence, venerable senior, in finally making friends with several gardeners and in seeing a good number of gardens. As the other day I unexpectedly came across a

white begonia, of a rare species, I exhausted every possible means to get some and managed to obtain just two pots. If you, worthy senior, regard your son as your own very son, do keep them to feast your eyes upon! But with this hot weather to-day, the young ladies in the garden will, I fear, not be at their ease. I do not consequently presume to come and see you in person, so I present you this letter, written with due respect, while knocking my head before your table. Your son, Yün , on his knees, lays this epistle at your feet. A joke!”

After reading this note, Pao-yü laughed. “Has he come alone?” he asked. “Or has he any one else with him?”

“He's got two flower pots as well,” rejoined the matron.

“You go and tell him,” Pao-yü urged, “that I've informed myself of the contents of his note, and that there are few who think of me as he does! If you also take the flowers and, put them in my room, it will be all right.”

So saying, he came with Ts'ui Mo into the Ch'iu Shuang study, where he discovered Pao-ch'ai, Tai-yü, Ying Ch'un and Hsi Ch'un already assembled. When they saw him drop in upon them, they all burst out laughing. “Here comes still another!” they exclaimed.

“I'm not a boor,” smiled T'an Ch'un, “so when the idea casually crossed my mind, I wrote a few notes to try and see who would come. But who'd have thought that, as soon as I asked you, you would all come.”

“It's unfortunately late,” Pao-yü smilingly observed. “We should have started this society long ago.”

“You can't call this late!” Tai-yü interposed, “so why give way to regret! The only thing is, you must form your society, without including me in the number; for I daren't be one of you.”

“If you daren't,” Ying Ch'un smiled, “who can presume to do so?”

“This is,” suggested Pao-yü, “a legitimate and great purpose; and we

should all exert our energies. You shouldn't be modest, and I yielding; but every one of us, who thinks of anything, should freely express it for general discussion. So senior cousin Pao-ch'ai do make some suggestion; and you junior cousin Lin Tai-yü say something."

"What are you in this hurry for?" Pao-ch'ai exclaimed. "We are not all here yet."

This remark was barely concluded, when Li Wan also arrived. As soon as she crossed the threshold, "It's an excellent proposal," she laughingly cried, "this of starting a poetical society. I recommend myself as controller. Some time ago in spring, I thought of this, 'but,' I mused, 'I am unable to compose verses, so what's the use of making a mess of things?' This is why I dispelled the idea from my mind, and made no mention about it. But since

page 195]

it's your good pleasure, cousin Tertia, to start it, I'll help you to set it on foot."

"As you've made up your minds," Tai-yü put in, "to initiate a poetical society, every one of us will be poets, so we should, as a first step, do away with those various appellations of cousin and uncle and aunt, and thus avoid everything that bears a semblance of vulgarity."

"First rate," exclaimed Li Wan, "and why should we not fix upon some new designations by which to address ourselves? This will be a far more refined way! As for my own, I've selected that of the 'Old farmer of Tao Hsiang;' so let none of you encroach on it."

"I'll then call myself the 'resident-scholar of the Ch'iu Shuang,' and have done," T'an Ch'un observed with a smile.

"'Resident-scholar or master' is, in fact, not to the point. It's clumsy, besides," Pao-yü interposed. "The place here is full of dryandra and banana trees, and if one could possibly hit upon some name bearing upon the dryandra and banana, it would be preferable."

"I've got one," shouted T'an Ch'un smilingly. "I'll style myself 'the guest under the banana trees.'"

"How uncommon!" they unanimously cried. "It's a nice one!"

"You had better," laughed Tai-yü, "be quick and drag her away and stew some slices of her flesh, for people to eat with their wine."

No one grasped her meaning, "Ch'uang-tzu," Tai-yü proceeded to explain, smiling, "says: 'The banana leaves shelter the deer,' and as she styles herself the guest under the banana tree, is she not a deer? So be quick and make pieces of dried venison of her."

At these words, the whole company laughed.

"Don't be in a hurry!" T'an Ch'un remarked, as she laughed. "You make use of specious language to abuse people; but I've thought of a fine and most apposite name for you!" Whereupon addressing herself to the party, "In days gone by," she added, "an imperial concubine, Nü Ying, sprinkled her tears on the bamboo, and they became spots, so from olden times to the present spotted bamboos have been known as the 'Hsiang imperial concubine bamboo.' Now she lives in the Hsiao Hsiang lodge, and has a weakness too for tears, so the bamboos over there will by and bye, I presume, likewise become transformed into speckled bamboos; every one therefore must henceforward call her the 'Hsiao Hsiang imperial concubine' and finish with it."

After listening to her, they one and all clapped their hands, and cried out: "Capital!" Lin Tai-yü however drooped her head and did not so much as utter a single word.

"I've also," Li Wan smiled, "devised a suitable name for senior cousin,

page 196

Hsüeh Pao-chai. It too is one of three characters."

"What's it?" eagerly inquired the party.

"I'll raise her to the rank of 'Princess of Heng Wu,'" Li Wan rejoined. "I wonder what you all think about this."

"This title of honour," T'an Ch'un observed, "is most apposite."

"What about mine?" Pao-yü asked. "You should try and think of one for me also!"

"Your style has long ago been decided upon," Pao-ch'ai smiled. "It consists of three words: 'fussing for nothing!' It's most pat!"

"You should, after all, retain your old name of 'master of the flowers in the purple cave,'" Li Wan suggested. "That will do very well."

"Those were some of the doings of my youth; why rake them up again?" Pao-yü laughed.

"Your styles are very many," T'an Ch'un observed, "and what do you want to choose another for? All you've got to do is to make suitable reply when we call you whatever takes our fancy."

"I must however give you a name," Pao-ch'ai remarked. "There's a very vulgar name, but it's just the very thing for you. What is difficult to obtain in the world are riches and honours; what is not easy to combine with them is leisure. These two blessings cannot be enjoyed together, but, as it happens, you hold one along with the other, so that we might as well dub you the 'rich and honourable idler.'"

"It won't do; it isn't suitable," Pao-yü laughed. "It's better that you should call me, at random, whatever you like."

"What names are to be chosen for Miss Secunda and Miss Quarta?" Li Wan inquired.

"We also don't excel in versifying; what's the use consequently of giving us names, all for no avail?" Ying Ch'un said.

"In spite of this," argued T'an Ch'un, "it would be well to likewise find something for you!"

“She lives in the Tzu Ling Chou, (purple caltrop Isle), so let us call her 'Ling Chou,’” Pao-ch'ai suggested. “As for that girl Quarta, she lives in the On Hsiang Hsieh, (lotus fragrance pavilion); she should thus be called On Hsieh and have done!”

“These will do very well!” Li Wan cried. “But as far as age goes, I am the senior, and you should all defer to my wishes; but I feel certain that when I've told you what they are, you will unanimously agree to them. We are seven here to form the society, but neither I, nor Miss Secunda, nor Miss Quarta can write verses; so if you will exclude us three, we'll each share some special duties.”

page 197

“Their names have already been chosen,” T'an Ch'un smilingly demurred; “and do you still keep on addressing them like this? Well, in that case, won't it be as well for them to have no names? But we must also decide upon some scale of fines, for future guidance, in the event of any mistakes.”

“There will be ample time to fix upon a scale of fines after the society has been definitely established.” Li Wan replied. “There's plenty of room over in my place so let's hold our meetings there. I'm not, it is true, a good hand at verses, but if you poets won't treat me disdainfully as a rustic boor, and if you will allow me to play the hostess, I may certainly also gradually become more and more refined. As for conceding to me the presidentship of the society, it won't be enough, of course, for me alone to preside; it will be necessary to invite two others to serve as vice-presidents; you might then enlist Ling Chou and Ou Hsieh, both of whom are cultured persons. The one to choose the themes and assign the metre, the other to act as copyist and supervisor. We three cannot, however, definitely say that we won't write verses, for, if we come across any comparatively easy subject and metre, we too will indite a stanza if we feel so disposed. But you four will positively have to do so. If you agree to this, well, we can proceed with the society; but, if you don't fall in with my wishes, I can't presume to join you.”

Ying Ch'un and Hsi Ch'un had a natural aversion for verses. What is

more, Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai and Lin Tai-yü were present. As soon therefore as they heard these proposals, which harmonised so thoroughly with their own views, they both, with one voice, approved them as excellent. T'an Ch'un and the others were likewise well aware of their object, but they could not, when they saw with what willingness they accepted the charge insist, with any propriety, upon their writing verses, and they felt obliged to say yes.

“Your proposals,” she consequently said, “may be right enough; but in my views they are ridiculous. For here I've had the trouble of initiating this idea of a society, and, instead of my having anything to say in the matter, I've been the means of making you three come and exercise control over me.”

“Well then,” Pao-yü suggested, “let's go to the Tao Hsiang village.”

“You're always in a hurry!” Li Wan remarked. “We're here to-day to simply deliberate. So wait until I've sent for you again.”

“It would be well,” Pao-ch'ai interposed, “that we should also decide every how many days we are to meet.”

“If we meet too often,” argued T'an Ch'un, “there won't be fun in it. We should simply come together two or three times in a month.”

“It will be ample if we meet twice or thrice a month,” Pao-ch'ai added. “But when the dates have been settled neither wind nor rain should prevent us. Exclusive, however, of these two days, any one in high spirits and disposed to

page 198

have an extra meeting can either ask us to go over to her place, or you can all come to us; either will do well enough! But won't it be more pleasant if no hard-and-fast dates were laid down?”

“This suggestion is excellent,” they all exclaimed.

“This idea was primarily originated by me,” T'an Ch'un observed, “and I

should be the first to play the hostess, so that these good spirits of mine shouldn't all go for nothing."

"Well, after this remark," Li Wan proceeded, "what do you say to your being the first to convene a meeting to-morrow?"

"To-morrow," T'an Ch'un demurred, "is not as good as to-day; the best thing is to have it at once! You'd better therefore choose the subjects, while Ling Chou can fix the metre, and Ou Hsieh act as supervisor."

"According to my ideas," Ying Ch'un chimed in, "we shouldn't yield to the wishes of any single person in the choice of themes and the settlement of the rhythm. What would really be fair and right would be to draw lots."

"When I came just now," Li Wan pursued, "I noticed them bring in two pots of white begonias, which were simply beautiful; and why should you not write some verses on them?"

"Can we write verses," Ying Ch'un retorted, "before we have as yet seen anything of the flowers?"

"They're purely and simply white begonias," Pao-chai answered, "and is there again any need to see them before you put together your verses? Men of old merely indited poetical compositions to express their good cheer and conceal their sentiments; had they waited to write on things they had seen, why, the whole number of their works would not be in existence at present!"

"In that case," Ying Ch'un said, "let me fix the metre."

With these words, she walked up to the book-case, and, extracting a volume, she opened it, at random, at some verses which turned out to be a heptameter stanza. Then handing it round for general perusal, everybody had to compose lines with seven words in each. Ying Ch'un next closed the book of verses and addressed herself to a young waiting-maid. "Just utter," she bade her, "the first character that comes to your mouth."

The waiting-maid was standing, leaning against the door, so readily she

suggested the word "door."

"The rhyme then will be the word 'door,'" Ying Ch'un smiled, "under the thirteenth character 'Yuan.' The final word of the first line is therefore 'door'."

Saying this, she asked for the box with the rhyme slips, and, pulling out the thirteenth drawer with the character "Yuan," she directed a young waiting-maid to take four words as they came under her hand. The waiting-maid com-

page 199

plied with her directions, and picked out four slips, on which were written "*p'en, hun, hen* and *hun*," pot, spirit, traces and dusk.

"The two characters pot and door," observed Pao-yü, "are not very easy to rhyme with."

But Shih Shu then got ready four lots of paper and pens, share and share alike, and one and all quietly set to work, racking their brains to perform their task, with the exception of Tai-yü, who either kept on rubbing the dryandra flowers, or looking at the autumnal weather, or bandying jokes as well with the servant-girls; while Ying Ch'un ordered a waiting-maid to light a "dream-sweet" incense stick.

This "dream-sweet" stick was, it must be explained, made only about three inches long and about the thickness of a lamp-wick, in order to easily burn down. Setting therefore her choice upon one of these as a limit of time, any one who failed to accomplish the allotted task, by the time the stick was consumed, had to pay a penalty.

Presently, T'an Ch'un was the first to think of some verses, and, taking up her pen, she wrote them down; and, after submitting them to several alterations, she handed them up to Ying Ch'un.

"Princess of Heng Wu," she then inquired of Pao-ch'ai, "have you finished?"

“As for finishing, I have finished,” Pao-ch'ai rejoined; “but they're worth nothing.”

Pao-yü paced up and down the verandah with his hands behind his back. “Have you heard?” he thereupon said to Tai-yü, “they've all done!”

“Don't concern yourself about me!” Tai-yü returned for answer.

Pao-yü also perceived that Pao-ch'ai had already copied hers out. “Dreadful!” he exclaimed. “There only remains an inch of the stick and I've only just composed four lines. The incense stick is nearly burnt out,” he continued, speaking to Tai-yü, “and what do you keep squatting on that damp ground like that for?”

But Tai-yü did not again worry her mind about what he said.

“Well,” Pao-yü added, “I can't be looking after you! Whether good or bad, I'll write mine out too and have done.”

As he spoke, he likewise drew up to the table and began putting his lines down.

“We'll now peruse the verses,” Li Wan interposed, “and if by the time we've done, you haven't as yet handed up your papers, you'll have to be fined.”

“Old farmer of Tao Hsiang,” Pao-yü remarked, “you're not, it is true, a good hand at writing verses, but you can read well, and, what's more, you're the fairest of the lot; so you'd better adjudge the good and bad, and

page 200

we'll submit to your judgment.”

“Of course!” responded the party with one voice.

In due course, therefore, she first read T'an Ch'un's draft. It ran as follows:—

Verses on the Begonia.

What time the sun's rays slant, and the grass waxeth cold, close the double doors.

After a shower of rain, green moss plenteously covers the whole pot. Beauteous is jade, but yet with thee in purity it cannot ever vie.

*Thy frame, spotless as snow, from admiration easy robs me of my wits
Thy fragrant core is like unto a dot, so full of grace, so delicate!*

When the moon reacheth the third watch, thy comely shade begins to show itself.

Do not tell me that a chaste fairy like thee can take wings and pass away.

How lovely are thy charms, when in thy company at dusk I sing my lay!

After she had read them aloud, one and all sang their praise for a time. She then took up Pao-ch'ai's, which consisted of:

If thou would'st careful tend those fragrant lovely flowers, close of a day the doors,

And with thine own hands take the can and sprinkle water o'er the mossy pots.

Red, as if with cosmetic washed, are the shadows in autumn on the steps.

Their crystal snowy bloom invites the dew on their spirits to heap itself.

Their extreme whiteness mostly shows that they're more comely than all other flowers.

When much they grieve, how can their jade-like form lack the traces of tears?

Would'st thou the god of those white flowers repay? then purity need'st thou observe.

In silence plunges their fine bloom, now that once more day yields to dusk.

“After all,” observed Li Wan, “it's the Princess of Heng Wu, who expresses herself to the point.”

Next they bestowed their attention on the following lines, composed by

Pao-yü:—

*Thy form in autumn faint reflects against the double doors.
So heaps the snow in the seventh feast that it filleth thy pots.
Thy shade is spotless as Tai Chen, when from her bath she hails.
Like Hsi Tzu's, whose hand ever pressed her heart, jade-like thy soul.
When the morn-ushering breeze falls not, thy thousand blossoms
grieve.*

*To all thy tears the evening shower addeth another trace.
Alone thou lean'st against the coloured rails as if with sense imbued.
As heavy-hearted as the fond wife, beating clothes, or her that sadly
listens to the flute, thou mark'st the fall of dusk.*

When they had perused his verses, Pao-yü opined that T'an Ch'un's carried the palm. Li Wan was, however, inclined to concede to the stanza, indited by Pao-ch'ai, the credit of possessing much merit. But she then went on to tell Tai-yü to look sharp.

“Have you all done?” Tai-yü asked.

So saying, she picked up a pen and completing her task, with a few dashes, she threw it to them to look over. On perusal, Li Wan and her compa-

page 201

nions found her verses to run in this strain:—

*Half rolled the speckled portiere hangs, half closed the door.
Thy mould like broken ice it looks, jade-like thy pot.*

This couplet over, Pao-yü took the initiative and shouted: “Capital.” But he had just had time to inquire where she had recalled them to mind from, when they turned their mind to the succeeding lines:

*Three points of whiteness from the pear petals thou steal'st;
And from the plum bloom its spirit thou borrowest.*

“Splendid!” every one (who heard) them conned over, felt impelled to cry.

“It is a positive fact,” they said, “that her imagination is, compared with that of others, quite unique.”

But the rest of the composition was next considered. Its text was:

*The fairy in Selene's cavity donned a plain attire.
The maiden, plunged in autumn grief, dries in her room the prints of
tears.
Winsome she blushes, in silence she's plunged, with none a word she
breathes;
But wearily she leans against the eastern breeze, though dusk has long
since fall'n.*

“This stanza ranks above all!” they unanimously remarked, after it had been read for their benefit.

“As regards beauty of thought and originality, this stanza certainly deserves credit,” Li Wan asserted; “but as regards pregnancy and simplicity of language, it, after all, yields to that of Heng Wu.”

“This criticism is right.” T'an Ch'un put in. “That of the Hsiao Hsiang consort must take second place.”

“Yours, gentleman of I Hung,” Li Wan pursued, “is the last of the lot. Do you agreeably submit to this verdict?”

“My stanza,” Pao-yü ventured, “isn't really worth a straw. Your criticism is exceedingly fair. But,” he smilingly added, “the two poems, written by Heng Wu and Hsiao Hsiang, have still to be discussed.”

“You should,” argued Li Wan, “fall in with my judgment; this is no business of any of you, so whoever says anything more will have to pay a penalty.”

Pao-yü at this reply found that he had no alternative but to drop the subject.

“I decide that from henceforward,” Li Wan proceeded, “we should hold meetings twice every month, on the second and sixteenth. In the

selection of themes and the settlement of the rhymes, you'll all have then to do as I wish. But any person who may, during the intervals, feel so disposed, will be at perfect liberty to choose another day for an extra meeting. What will I care if there's a meeting every day of the moon? It will be no concern of mine, so long as when the second and sixteenth arrive, you do, as you're bound to, and come over to my place."

page 202

"We should, as is but right," Pao-yü suggested, "choose some name or other for our society."

"Were an ordinary one chosen, it wouldn't be nice," T'an Ch'un explained, "and anything too new-fangled, eccentric or strange won't also be quite the thing! As luck would have it, we've just started with the poems on the begonia, so let us call it the 'Begonia Poetical Society.' This title is, it's true, somewhat commonplace; but as it's positively based on fact, it shouldn't matter."

After this proposal of hers, they held further consultation; and partaking of some slight refreshments, each of them eventually retired. Some repaired to their quarters. Others went to dowager lady Chia's or Madame Wang's apartments. But we will leave them without further comment.

When Hsi Jen, for we will now come to her, perceived Pao-yü peruse the note and walk off in a great flurry, along with Ts'ui Mo, she was quite at a loss what to make of it. Subsequently, she also saw the matrons, on duty at the back gate, bring two pots of begonias. Hsi Jen inquired of them where they came from. The women explained to her all about them. As soon as Hsi Jen heard their reply, she at once desired them to put the flowers in their proper places, and asked them to sit down in the lower rooms. She then entered the house, and, weighing six mace of silver, she wrapped it up properly, and fetching besides three hundred cash, she came over and handed both the amounts to the two matrons. "This silver," she said, "is a present for the boys, who carried the flowers; and these cash are for you to buy yourselves a cup of tea with."

The women rose to their feet in such high glee that their eyebrows dilated and their eyes smiled; but, though they waxed eloquent in the expression

of their deep gratitude, they would not accept the money. It was only after they had perceived how obstinate Hsi Jen was in not taking it back that they at last volunteered to keep it.

“Are there,” Hsi Jen then inquired, “any servant-boys on duty outside the back gate?”

“There are four of them every day,” answered one of the matrons. “They're put there with the sole idea of attending to any orders that might be given them from inside. But, Miss, if you've anything to order them to do, we'll go and deliver your message.”

“What orders can I have to give them?” Hsi Jen laughed. “Mr. Pao, our master Secundus, was purposing to send some one to-day to the young marquis' house to take something over to Miss Shih. But you come at an opportune moment so you might, on your way out, tell the servant-boys at the back gate to hire a carriage; and on its return you can come here and get the

page 203

money. But don't let them rush recklessly against people in the front part of the compound!”

The matrons signified their obedience and took their leave. Hsi Jen retraced her steps into the house to fetch a tray in which to place the presents intended for Shih Hsiang-Yün, but she discovered the shelf for trays empty. Upon turning round, however, she caught sight of Ch'ing Wen, Ch'iu Wen, She Yüeh and the other girls, seated together, busy with their needlework. “Where is the white cornelian tray with twisted threads gone to?” Hsi Jen asked.

At this question, one looked at the one, and the other stared at the other, but none of them could remember anything about it. After a protracted lapse of time, Ch'ing Wen smiled. “It was taken to Miss Tertia's with a present of lichees,” she rejoined, “and it hasn't as yet been returned.”

“There are plenty of articles,” Hsi Jen remarked, “for sending over things on ordinary occasions; and do you deliberately go and carry this off?”

“Didn't I maintain the same thing?” Ch'ing Wen retorted. “But so well did this tray match with the fresh lichees it contained, that when I took it over, Miss T'an Ch'un herself noticed the fact. 'How splendid,' she said, and lo, putting even the tray by, she never had it brought over. But, look! hasn't the pair of beaded vases, which stood on the very top of that shelf, been fetched as yet?”

“The mention of these vases,” Ch'iu Wen laughed, “reminds me again of a funny incident. Whenever our Mr. Pao-yü's filial piety is aroused, he shows himself filial over and above the highest degree! The other day, he espied the olea flowers in the park, and he plucked two twigs. His original idea was to place them in a vase for himself, but a sudden thought struck him. 'These are flowers,' he mused, 'which have newly opened in our garden, so how can I presume to be the first to enjoy them?' And actually taking down that pair of vases, he filled them with water with his own hands, put the flowers in, and, calling a servant to carry them, he in person took one of the vases into dowager lady Chia's, and then took the other to Madame Wang's. But, as it happens, even his attendants reap some benefit, when once his filial feelings are stirred up! As luck would have it, the one who carried the vases over on that day was myself. The sight of these flowers so enchanted our venerable lady that there was nothing that she wouldn't do. 'Pao-yü,' she said to every one she met, 'is the one, after all, who shows me much attention. So much so, that he has even thought of bringing me a twig of flowers! And yet, the others bear me a grudge on account of the love that I lavish on him!' Our venerable mistress, you all know very well, has never had much to say to me. I have all along not been much of a favourite in the old lady's eyes. But on that occasion she verily

page 204

directed some one to give me several hundreds of cash. 'I was to be pitied,' she observed, 'for being born with a weak physique!' This was, indeed, an unforeseen piece of good luck! The several hundreds of cash are a mere trifle; but what's not easy to get is this sort of honour! After that, we went over into Madame Wang's. Madame Wang was, at the time, with our lady Secunda, Mrs. Chao, and a whole lot of people; turning the boxes topsy-turvey, trying to find some coloured clothes her

ladyship had worn long ago in her youth, so as to give them to some one or other. Who it was, I don't know. But the moment she saw us, she did not even think of searching for any clothes, but got lost in admiration for the flowers. Our lady Secunda was also standing by, and she made sport of the matter. She extolled our master Pao, for his filial piety and for his knowledge of right and wrong; and what with what was true and what wasn't, she came out with two cart-loads of compliments. These things spoken in the presence of the whole company so added to Madame Wang's lustre and sealed every one's mouth, that her ladyship was more and more filled with gratification, and she gave me two ready-made clothes as a present. These too are of no consequence; one way or another, we get some every year; but nothing can come up to this sort of lucky chance!"

"Psha!" Ch'ing Wen ejaculated with a significant smile, "you are indeed a mean thing, who has seen nothing of the world! She gave the good ones to others and the refuse to you; and do you still pat on all this side?"

"No matter whether what she gave me was refuse or not," Ch'iu Wen protested, "it's, after all, an act of bounty on the part of her ladyship."

"Had it been myself," Ch'ing Wen pursued, "I would at once have refused them! It wouldn't have mattered if she had given me what had been left by some one else; but we all stand on an equal footing in these rooms, and is there any one, forsooth, so much the more exalted or honorable than the other as to justify her taking what is good and bestowing it upon her and giving me what is left? I had rather not take them! I might have had to give offence to Madame Wang, but I wouldn't have put up with such a slight!"

"To whom did she give any in these rooms?" Ch'iu Wen vehemently inquired. "I was unwell and went home for several days, so that I am not aware to whom any were given. Dear sister, do tell me who it is so that I may know."

"Were I to tell you," Ch'ing Wen rejoined, "is it likely that you would return them at this hour to Madame Wang?"

"What nonsense," Ch'iu Wen laughed. "Ever since I've heard about it, I've

been delighted and happy. No matter if she even bestowed upon me what remained from anything given to a dog in these rooms, I would have been

page 205

thankful for her ladyship's kindness. I wouldn't have worried my mind with anything else!"

After listening to her, everybody laughed. "Doesn't she know how to jeer in fine style!" they ejaculated unanimously; "for weren't they given to that foreign spotted pug dog?"

"You lot of filthy-tongued creatures!" Hsi Jen laughed, "when you've got nothing to do, you make me the scapegoat to crack your jokes, and poke your fun at! But what kind of death will, I wonder, each of you have!"

"Was it verily you, sister, who got them?" Ch'iu Wen asked with a smile. "I assure you I had no idea about it! I tender you my apologies."

"You might be a little less domineering!" Hsi Jen remarked smilingly. "The thing now is, who of you will go and fetch the tray."

"The vases too," Shih Yüeh suggested, "must be got back when there's any time to spare; for there's nothing to say about our venerable mistress' quarters, but Madame Wang's apartments teem with people and many hands. The rest are all right; but Mrs. Chao and all that company will, when they see that the vase hails from these rooms, surely again foster evil designs, and they won't feel happy until they've done all they can to spoil it! Besides, Madame Wang doesn't trouble herself about such things. So had we not as well bring it over a moment sooner?"

Hearing this, Ch'ing Wen threw down her needlework. "What you say is perfectly right," she assented, "so you'd better let me go and fetch it."

"I'll, after all, go for it." Ch'iu Wen cried. "You can go and get that tray of yours!"

"You should let me once go for something!" Ch'ing Wen pleaded.

“Whenever any lucky chance has turned up, you've invariably grabbed it; and can it be that you won't let me have a single turn?”

“Altogether,” She Yüeh said laughingly, “that girl Ch'iu Wen got a few clothes just once; can such a lucky coincidence present itself again today that you too should find them engaged in searching for clothes?”

“Albeit I mayn't come across any clothes,” Ch'ing Wen rejoined with a sardonic smile, “our Madame Wang may notice how diligent I am, and apportion me a couple of taels out of her public expenses; there's no saying.” Continuing, “Don't you people,” she laughed, “try and play your pranks with me; for is there anything that I don't twig?”

As she spoke, she ran outside. Ch'iu Wen too left the room in her company; but she repaired to T'an Ch'un's quarters and fetched the tray.

Hsi Jen then got everything ready. Calling an old nurse attached to the same place as herself, Sung by name, “Just go first and wash, comb your hair and put on your out-of-door clothes,” she said to her, “and then come back

page 206

as I want to send you at once with a present to Miss Shih.”

“Miss,” urged the nurse Sung, “just give me what you have; and, if you have any message, tell it me; so that when I've tidied myself I may go straightway.”

Hsi Jen, at this proposal, brought two small twisted wire boxes; and, opening first the one in which were two kinds of fresh fruits, consisting of caltrops and “chicken head” fruit, and afterwards uncovering the other, containing a tray with new cakes, made of chestnut powder, and steamed in sugar, scented with the olea, “All these fresh fruits are newly plucked this year from our own garden,” she observed; “our Mr. Secundus sends them to Miss Shih to taste. The other day, too, she was quite taken with this cornelian tray so let her keep it for her use. In this silk bag she'll find the work, which she asked me some time ago to do for her. (Tell her) that she mustn't despise it for its coarseness, but make the best of it and turn

it to some account. Present respects to her from our part and inquire after her health on behalf of Mr. Pao-yü; that will be all there's to say."

"Has Mr. Pao, I wonder, anything more for me to tell her?" the nurse Sung added, "Miss, do go and inquire, so that on my return, he mayn't again say that I forgot."

"He was just now," Hsi Jen consequently asked Ch'iu Wen, "over there in Miss Tertia's rooms, wasn't he?"

"They were all assembled there, deliberating about starting some poetical society or other," Ch'iu Wen explained, "and they all wrote verses too. But I fancy he's got no message to give you; so you might as well start."

After this assurance, nurse Sung forthwith took the things, and quitted the apartment. When she had changed her clothes and arranged her hair, Hsi Jen further enjoined them to go by the back door, where there was a servant-boy, waiting with a curricule. Nurse Sung thereupon set out on her errand. But we will leave her for the present.

In a little time Pao-yü came back. After first cursorily glancing at the begonias for a time, he walked into his rooms, and explained to Hsi Jen all about the poetical society they had managed to establish, Hsi Jen then told him that she had sent the nurse Sung along with some things, to Shih Hsiang-Yün . As soon as Pao-yü heard this, he clapped his hands. "I forgot all about her!" he cried. "I knew very well that I had something to attend to; but I couldn't remember what it was! Luckily, you've alluded to her! I was just meaning to ask her to come, for what fun will there be in this poetical society without her?"

"Is this of any serious import?" Hsi Jen reasoned with him. "It's all, for the mere sake of recreation! She's not however able to go about at her

page 207

own free will as you people do. Nor can she at home have her own way. When you therefore let her know, it won't again rest with her, however willing she may be to avail herself of your invitation. And if she can't come, she will long and crave to be with you all, so isn't it better that you

shouldn't be the means of making her unhappy?"

"Never mind!" responded Pao-yü. "I'll tell our venerable senior to despatch some one to bring her over."

But in the middle of their conversation, nurse Sung returned already from her mission, and expressed to him, (Hsiang-Yün 's) acknowledgment; and to Hsi Jen her thanks for the trouble. "She also inquired," the nurse proceeded, "what you, master Secundus, were up to, and I told her that you had started some poetical club or other with the young ladies and that you were engaged in writing verses. Miss Shih wondered why it was, if you were writing verses, that you didn't even mention anything to her; and she was extremely distressed about it."

Pao-yü, at these words, turned himself round and betook himself immediately into his grandmother's apartments, where he did all that lay in his power to urge her to depute servants to go and fetch her.

"It's too late to-day," dowager lady Chia answered; "they'll go tomorrow, as soon as it's daylight."

Pao-yü had no other course but to accede to her wishes. He, however, retraced his steps back to his room with a heavy heart. On the morrow, at early dawn, he paid another visit to old lady Chia and brought pressure to bear on her until she sent some one for her. Soon after midday, Shih Hsiang-Yün arrived. Pao-yü felt at length much relieved in his mind. Upon meeting her, he recounted to her all that had taken place from beginning to end. His purpose was likewise to let her see the poetical composition, but Li Wan and the others remonstrated. "Don't," they said, "allow her to see them! First tell her the rhymes and number of feet; and, as she comes late, she should, as a first step, pay a penalty by conforming to the task we had to do. Should what she writes be good, then she can readily be admitted as a member of the society; but if not good, she should be further punished by being made to stand a treat; after which, we can decide what's to be done."

"You've forgotten to ask me round," Hsiang-Yün laughed, "and I should, after all, fine you people! But produce the metre; for though I don't excel in versifying, I shall exert myself to do the best I can, so as to get rid of

every slur. If you will admit me into the club, I shall be even willing to sweep the floors and burn the incense.”

When they all saw how full of fun she was, they felt more than ever delighted with her and they reproached themselves, for having somehow or

page 208

other managed to forget her on the previous day. But they lost no time in telling her the metre of the verses.

Shih Hsiang-Yün was inwardly in ecstasies. So much so, that she could not wait to beat the tattoo and effect any alterations. But having succeeded, while conversing with her cousins, in devising a stanza in her mind, she promptly inscribed it on the first piece of paper that came to hand. “I have,” she remarked, with a precursory smile, “stuck to the metre and written two stanzas. Whether they be good or bad, I cannot say; all I’ve kept in view was to simply comply with your wishes.”

So speaking, she handed her paper to the company.

“We thought our four stanzas,” they observed, “had so thoroughly exhausted everything that could be imagined on the subject that another stanza was out of the question, and there you’ve devised a couple more! How could there be so much to say? These must be mere repetitions of our own sentiments.”

While bandying words, they perused her two stanzas. They found this to be their burden:

No. 1.

*The fairies yesterday came down within the city gates,
And like those gems, sown in the grassy field, planted one pot.
How clear it is that the goddess of frost is fond of cold!
It is no question of a pretty girl bent upon death!
Where does the snow, which comes in gloomy weather, issue from?
The drops of rain increase the prints, left from the previous night.
How the flowers rejoice that bards are not weary of song!*

But are they ever left to spend in peace a day or night?

No. 2.

*The "heng chih" covered steps lead to the creeper-laden door.
How fit to plant by the corner of walls; how fit for pots?
The flowers so relish purity that they can't find a mate.
Easy in autumn snaps the soul of sorrow-wasted man.
The tears, which from the jade-like candle drip, dry in the wind.
The crystal-like portiere asunder rends Selene's rays.
Their private feelings to the moon goddess they longed to tell,
But gone, alas! is the lustre she shed on the empty court!*

Every line filled them with wonder and admiration. What they read, they praised. "This," they exclaimed, with one consent, "is not writing verses on the begonia for no purpose! We must really start a Begonia Society!"

"To-morrow," Shih Hsiang-Yün proposed, "first fine me by making me stand a treat, and letting me be the first to convene a meeting; may I?"

"This would be far better!" they all assented. So producing also the verses, composed the previous day, they submitted them to her for criticism.

In the evening, Hsiang-Yün came at the invitation of Pao-ch'ai, to the

page 209

Heng Wu Yüan to put up with her for the night. By lamplight, Hsiang-Yün consulted with her how she was to play the hostess and fix upon the themes; but, after lending a patient ear to all her proposals for a long time, Pao-ch'ai thought them so unsuitable for the occasion, that turning towards her, she raised objections. "If you want," she said, "to hold a meeting, you have to pay the piper. And albeit it's for mere fun, you have to make every possible provision; for while consulting your own interests, you must guard against giving umbrage to people. In that case every one will afterwards be happy and contented. You count for nothing too in your own home; and the whole lump sum of those few tiaos, you draw each month, are not sufficient for your own wants, and do you now also wish to burden yourself with this useless sort of thing? Why, if your aunt gets

wind of it, won't she be more incensed with you than ever! What's more, even though you might fork out all the money you can call your own to bear the outlay of this entertainment with, it won't be anything like enough, and can it possibly be, pray, that you would go home for the express purpose of requisitioning the necessary funds? Or will you perchance ask for some from in here?"

This long tirade had the effect of bringing the true facts of the case to Hsiang-Yün 's notice, and she began to waver in a state of uncertainty.

"I have already fixed upon a plan in my mind," Pao-ch'ai resumed. "There's an assistant in our pawnshop from whose family farm come some splendid crabs. Some time back, he sent us a few as a present, and now, starting from our venerable senior and including the inmates of the upper quarters, most of them are quite in love with crabs. It was only the other day that my mother mentioned that she intended inviting our worthy ancestor into the garden to look at the olea flowers and partake of crabs, but she has had her hands so full that she hasn't as yet asked her round. So just you now drop the poetical meeting, and invite the whole crowd to a show; and if we wait until they go, won't we be able to indite as many poems as we like? But let me speak to my brother and ask him to let us have several baskets of the fattest and largest crabs he can get, and to also go to some shop and fetch several jars of luscious wine. And if we then lay out four or five tables with plates full of refreshments, won't we save trouble and all have a jolly time as well?"

As soon as Hsiang-Yün heard (the alternative proposed by Pao-ch'ai,) she felt her heart throb with gratitude and in most profuse terms she praised her for her forethought.

"The proposal I've made." Pao-ch'ai pursued smilingly; "is prompted entirely by my sincere feelings for you; so whatever you do don't be touchy and imagine that I look down upon you; for in that case we two will have

page 210

been good friends all in vain. But if you won't give way to suspicion, I'll be able to tell them at once to go and get things ready."

“My dear cousin,” eagerly rejoined Hsiang-Yün , a smile on her lips, “if you say these things it's you who treat me with suspicion; for no matter how foolish a person I may be, as not to even know what's good and bad, I'm still a human being! Did I not regard you, cousin, in the same light as my own very sister, I wouldn't last time have had any wish or inclination to disclose to you every bit of those troubles, which ordinarily fall to my share at home.”

After listening to these assurances, Pao-ch'ai summoned a matron and bade her go out and tell her master, Hsüeh P'an, to procure a few hampers of crabs of the same kind as those which were sent on the previous occasion. “Our venerable senior,” (she said,) “and aunt Wang are asked to come to-morrow after their meal and admire the olea flowers, so mind, impress upon your master to please not forget, as I've already to-day issued the invitations.”

The matron walked out of the garden and distinctly delivered the message. But, on her return, she brought no reply.

During this while, Pao-ch'ai continued her conversation with Hsiang-Yün . “The themes for the verses,” she advised her, “mustn't also be too out-of-the-way. Just search the works of old writers, and where will you find any eccentric and peculiar subjects, or any extra difficult metre! If the subject be too much out-of-the-way and the metre too difficult, one cannot get good verses. In a word, we are a mean lot and our verses are certain, I fear, to consist of mere repetitions. Nor is it advisable for us to aim at excessive originality. The first thing for us to do is to have our ideas clear, as our language will then not be commonplace. In fact, this sort of thing is no vital matter; spinning and needlework are, in a word, the legitimate duties of you and me. Yet, if we can at any time afford the leisure, it's only right and proper that we should take some book, that will benefit both body and mind, and read a few chapters out of it.”

Hsiang-Yün simply signified her assent. “I'm now cogitating in my mind,” she then laughingly remarked, “that as the verses we wrote yesterday treated of begonias, we should, I think, compose on this occasion some on chrysanthemums, eh? What do you say?”

“Chrysanthemums are in season,” Pao-ch'ai replied. “The only objection

to them is that too many writers of old have made them the subject of their poems.”

“I also think so,” Hsiang-Yün added, “so that, I fear, we shall only be following in their footsteps.”

After some reflection, Pao-ch'ai exclaimed, “I've hit upon something! If we take, for the present instance, the chrysanthemums as a secondary term,

page 211

and man as the primary, we can, after all, select several themes. But they must all consist of two characters: the one, an empty word; the other, a full one. The full word might be chrysanthemums; while for the empty one, we might employ some word in general use. In this manner, we shall, on one hand, sing the chrysanthemum; and, on the other, compose verses on the theme. And as old writers have not written much in this style, it will be impossible for us to drift into the groove of their ideas. Thus in versifying on the scenery and in singing the objects, we will, in both respects, combine originality with liberality of thought.”

“This is all very well,” smiled Hsiang-Yün. “The only thing is what kind of empty words will, I wonder, be best to use? Just you first think of one and let me see.”

Pao-ch'ai plunged in thought for a time, after which she laughingly remarked: “Dream of chrysanthemums is good.”

“It's positively good!” Hsiang-Yün smiled. “I've also got one: 'the Chrysanthemum shadow,' will that do?”

“Well enough,” Pao-ch'ai answered, “the only objection is that people have written on it; yet if the themes are to be many, we might throw this in. I've got another one too!”

“Be quick, and tell it!” Hsiang-Yün urged.

“What do you say to 'ask the Chrysanthemums?’” Pao-ch'ai observed.

Hsiang-Yün clapped her hand on the table. "Capital," she cried. "I've thought of one also." She then quickly continued, "It is, search for chrysanthemums; what's your idea about it?"

Pao-ch'ai thought that too would do very well. "Let's choose ten of them first," she next proposed; "and afterwards note them down!"

While talking, they rubbed the ink and moistened the pens. These preparations over, Hsiang-Yün began to write, while Pao-ch'ai enumerated the themes. In a short time, they got ten of them.

"Ten don't form a set," Hsiang-Yün went on to smilingly suggest, after reading them over. "We'd better complete them by raising their number to twelve; they'll then also be on the same footing as people's pictures and books."

Hearing this proposal, Pao-ch'ai devised another couple of themes, thus bringing them to a dozen. "Well, since we've got so far," she pursued, "let's go one step further and copy them out in their proper order, putting those that are first, first; and those that come last, last."

"It would be still better like that," Hsiang-Yün acquiesced, "as we'll be able to make up a 'chrysanthemum book.'"

"The first stanza should be: 'Longing for chrysanthemums,'" Pao-chai

page 212

said, "and as one cannot get them by wishing, and has, in consequence, to search for them, the second should be 'searching for chrysanthemums.' After due search, one finds them, and plants them, so the third must be: 'planting chrysanthemums.' After they've been planted, they, blossom, and one faces them and enjoys them, so the fourth should be 'facing the chrysanthemums.' By facing them, one derives such excessive delight that one plucks them and brings them in and puts them in vases for one's own delectation, so the fifth must be 'placing chrysanthemums in vases.' If no verses are sung in their praise, after they've been placed in vases, it's tantamount to seeing no point of beauty in chrysanthemums, so the sixth must be 'sing about chrysanthemums.' After making them the burden of one's song, one can't help representing

them in pictures. The seventh place should therefore be conceded to 'drawing chrysanthemums.' Seeing that in spite of all the labour bestowed on the drawing of chrysanthemums, the fine traits there may be about them are not yet, in fact, apparent, one impulsively tries to find them out by inquiries, so the eighth should be 'asking the chrysanthemums.' As any perception, which the chrysanthemums might display in fathoming the questions set would help to make the inquirer immoderately happy, the ninth must be 'pinning the chrysanthemums in the hair.' And as after everything has been accomplished, that comes within the sphere of man, there will remain still some chrysanthemums about which something could be written, two stanzas on the 'shadow of the chrysanthemums,' and the 'dream about chrysanthemums' must be tagged on as numbers ten and eleven. While the last section should be 'the withering of the chrysanthemums' so as to bring to a close the sentiments expressed in the foregoing subjects. In this wise the fine scenery and fine doings of the third part of autumn, will both alike be included in our themes.”

Hsiang-Yün signified her approval, and taking the list she copied it out clean. But after once more passing her eye over it, she went on to inquire what rhymes should be determined upon.

“I do not, as a rule, like hard-and-fast rhymes,” Pao-ch'ai retorted. “It's evident enough that we can have good verses without them, so what's the use of any rhymes to shackle us? Don't let us imitate that mean lot of people. Let's simply choose our subject and pay no notice to rhymes. Our main object is to see whether we cannot by chance hit upon some well-written lines for the sake of fun. It isn't to make this the means of subjecting people to perplexities.”

“What you say is perfectly right,” Hsiang-Yün observed. “In this manner our poetical composition will improve one step higher. But we only muster five members, and there are here twelve themes. Is it likely that each

page 213

one of us will have to indite verses on all twelve?”

“That would be far too hard on the members!” Pao-ch'ai rejoined. “But let's copy out the themes clean, for lines with seven words will have to be

written on every one, and stick them to-morrow on the wall for general perusal. Each member can write on the subject which may be most in his or her line. Those, with any ability, may choose all twelve. While those, with none, may only limit themselves to one stanza. Both will do. Those, however, who will show high mental capacity, combined with quickness, will be held the best. But any one, who shall have completed all twelve themes, won't be permitted to hasten and begin over again; we'll have to fine such a one, and finish."

"Yes, that will do," assented Hsiang-Yün . But after settling everything satisfactorily, they extinguished the lamp and went to bed. Reader, do you want to know what subsequently took place? If you do, then listen to what is contained in the way of explanation in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Lin Hsiao-Hsiang carries the first prize in the poems on chrysanthemums.

Hsüeh Heng-wu chaffs Pao-yü by composing verses in the same style as his on the crabs.

After Pao-ch'ai and Hsiang-Yün, we will now explain, settled everything in their deliberations, nothing memorable occurred, the whole night, which deserves to be put on record.

The next day, Hsiang-Yün invited dowager lady Chia and her other relatives to come and look at the olea flowers. Old lady Chia and every one else answered that as she had had the kind attention to ask them, they felt it their duty to avail themselves of her gracious invitation, much though they would be putting her to trouble and inconvenience. At twelve o'clock, therefore, old lady Chia actually took with her Madame Wang and lady Feng, as well as Mrs. Hsüeh and other members of her family whom she had asked to join them, and repaired into the garden.

"Which is the best spot?" old lady Chia inquired.

"We are ready to go wherever you may like, dear senior," Madame Wang ventured in response.

"A collation has already been spread in the Lotus Fragrance Arbour," lady Feng interposed. "Besides, the two olea plants, on that hill, yonder, are now lovely in their full blossom, and the water of that stream is jade-like

page 214

and pellucid, so if we sit in the pavilion in the middle of it, won't we enjoy an open and bright view? It will be refreshing too to our eyes to watch the pool."

"Quite right!" assented dowager lady Chia at this suggestion; and while expressing her approbation, she ushered her train of followers into the Arbour of Lotus Fragrance.

This Arbour of Lotus Fragrance had, in fact, been erected in the centre of the pool. It had windows on all four sides. On the left and on the right, stood covered passages, which spanned the stream and connected with the hills. At the back, figured a winding bridge.

As the party ascended the bamboo bridge, lady Feng promptly advanced and supported dowager lady Chia. "Venerable ancestor," she said, "just walk boldly and with confident step; there's nothing to fear; it's the way of these bamboo bridges to go on creaking like this."

Presently, they entered the arbour. Here they saw two additional bamboo tables, placed beyond the balustrade. On the one, were arranged cups, chopsticks and every article necessary for drinking wine. On the other, were laid bamboo utensils for tea, a tea-service and various cups and saucers. On the off side, two or three waiting-maids were engaged in fanning the stove to boil the water for tea. On the near side were visible several other girls, who were trying with their fans to get a fire to light in the stove so as to warm the wines.

"It was a capital idea," dowager lady Chia hastily exclaimed laughingly with vehemence, "to bring tea here. What's more, the spot and the appurtenances are alike so spick and span!"

"These things were brought by cousin Pao-ch'ai," Hsiang-Yün smilingly explained, "so I got them ready."

"This child is, I say, so scrupulously particular," old lady Chia observed, "that everything she does is thoroughly devised."

As she gave utterance to her feelings, her attention was attracted by a pair of scrolls of black lacquer, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, suspended on the pillars, and she asked Hsiang-Yün to tell her what the mottoes were.

The text she read was:

*Snapped is the shade of the hibiscus by the fragrant oar of a boat
homeward bound.*

Deep flows the perfume of the lily and the lotus underneath the bamboo

bridge.

After listening to the motto, old lady Chia raised her head and cast a glance upon the tablet; then turning round: "Long ago, when I was young," she observed, addressing herself to Mrs. Hsüeh, "we likewise had at home a pavilion like this called 'the Hall reclining on the russet clouds,' or some other such name. At that time, I was of the same age as the girls, and my

page 215

went was to go day after day and play with my sisters there. One day, I, unexpectedly, slipped and fell into the water, and I had a narrow escape from being drowned; for it was after great difficulty, that they managed to drag me out safe and sound. But my head was, after all, bumped about against the wooden nails; so much so, that this hole of the length of a finger, which you can see up to this day on my temple, comes from the bruises I sustained. All my people were in a funk that I'd be the worse for this ducking and continued in fear and trembling lest I should catch a chill. 'It was dreadful, dreadful!' they opined, but I managed, little though every one thought it, to keep in splendid health."

Lady Feng allowed no time to any one else to put in a word; but anticipating them: "Had you then not survived, who would now be enjoying these immense blessings!" she smiled. "This makes it evident that no small amount of happiness and long life were in store for you, venerable ancestor, from your very youth up! It was by the agency of the spirits that this hole was knocked open so that they might fill it up with happiness and longevity! The old man Shou Hsing had, in fact, a hole in his head, which was so full of every kind of blessing conducive to happiness and long life that it bulged up ever so high!"

Before, however, she could conclude, dowager lady Chia and the rest were convulsed with such laughter that their bodies doubled in two.

"This monkey is given to dreadful tricks!" laughed old lady Chia. "She's always ready to make a scapegoat of me to evoke amusement. But would that I could take that glib mouth of yours and rend it in pieces."

"It's because I feared that the cold might, when you by and bye have some crabs to eat, accumulate in your intestines," lady Feng pleaded, "that I tried to induce you, dear senior, to have a laugh, so as to make you gay and merry. For one can, when in high spirits, indulge in a couple of them more with impunity."

"By and bye," smiled old lady Chia, "I'll make you follow me day and night, so that I may constantly be amused and feel my mind diverted; I won't let you go back to your home."

"It's that weakness of yours for her, venerable senior," Madame Wang observed with a smile, "that has got her into the way of behaving in this manner, and, if you go on speaking to her as you do, she'll soon become ever so much the more unreasonable."

"I like her such as she is," dowager lady Chia laughed. "Besides, she's truly no child, ignorant of the distinction between high and low. When we are at home, with no strangers present, we ladies should be on terms like these, and as long, in fact, as we don't overstep propriety, it's all right. If not,

page 216

what would be the earthly use of making them behave like so many saints?"

While bandying words, they entered the pavilion in a body. After tea, lady Feng hastened to lay out the cups and chopsticks. At the upper table then seated herself old lady Chia, Mrs. Hsüeh, Pao-ch'ai, Tai-yü and Pao-yü. Round the table, on the east, sat Shih Hsiang-Yün, Madame Wang, Ying Ch'un, T'an Ch'un and Hsi Ch'un. At the small table, leaning against the door on the west side, Li Wan and lady Feng assigned themselves places. But it was for the mere sake of appearances, as neither of them ventured to sit down, but remained in attendance at the two tables, occupied by old lady Chia and Madame Wang.

"You'd better," lady Feng said, "not bring in too many crabs at a time. Throw these again into the steaming-basket! Only serve ten; and when they're eaten, a fresh supply can be fetched!"

Asking, at the same time, for water, she washed her hands, and, taking her position near dowager lady Chia, she scooped out the meat from a crab, and offered the first help to Mrs. Hsüeh.

“They’ll be sweeter were I to open them with my own hands,” Mrs. Hsüeh remarked, “there’s no need for any one to serve me.”

Lady Feng, therefore, presented it to old lady Chia and handed a second portion to Pao-yü.

“Make the wine as warm as possible and bring it in!” she then went on to cry. “Go,” she added, directing the servant-girls, “and fetch the powder, made of green beans, and scented with the leaves of chrysanthemums and the stamens of the olea fragrans; and keep it ready to rinse our hands with.”

Shih Hsiang-Yün had a crab to bear the others company, but no sooner had she done than she retired to a lower seat, from where she helped her guests. When she, however, walked out a second time to give orders to fill two dishes and send them over to Mrs. Chao, she perceived lady Feng come up to her again. “You’re not accustomed to entertaining,” she said, “so go and have your share to eat. I’ll attend to the people for you first, and, when they’ve gone, I’ll have all I want.”

Hsiang-Yün would not agree to her proposal. But giving further directions to the servants to spread two tables under the verandah on the off-side, she pressed Yüan Yang, Hu Po, Ts’ai Hsia, Ts’ai Yün and P’ing Erh to go and seat themselves.

“Lady Secunda,” consequently ventured Yüan Yang, “you’re in here doing the honours, so may I go and have something to eat?”

“You can all go,” replied lady Feng; “leave everything in my charge, and it will be all right.”

While these words were being spoken, Shih Hsiang-Yün resumed her place

at the banquet. Lady Feng and Li Wan then took hurry-scurry something to eat as a matter of form; but lady Feng came down once more to look after things. After a time, she stepped out on the verandah where Yüan Yang and the other girls were having their refreshments in high glee. As soon as they caught sight of her, Yuan Yang and her companions stood up. "What has your ladyship come out again for?" they inquired. "Do let us also enjoy a little peace and quiet!"

"This chit Yüan Yang is worse than ever!" lady Feng laughed. "Here I'm slaving away for you, and, instead of feeling grateful to me, you bear me a grudge! But don't you yet quick pour me a cup of wine?"

Yüan Yang immediately smiled, and filling a cup, she applied it to lady Feng's lips. Lady Feng stretched out her neck and emptied it. But Hu Po and Ts'ai Hsia thereupon likewise replenished a cup and put it to lady Feng's mouth. Lady Feng swallowed the contents of that as well. P'ing Erh had, by this time, brought her some yellow meat which she had picked out from the shell. "Pour plenty of ginger and vinegar!" shouted lady Feng, and, in a moment, she made short work of that too. "You people," she smiled, "had better sit down and have something to eat, for I'm off now."

"You brazen-faced thing," exclaimed YüanYang laughingly, "to eat what was intended for us!"

"Don't be so captious with me!" smiled lady Feng. "Are you aware that your master Secundus, Mr. Lien, has taken such a violent fancy to you that he means to speak to our old lady to let you be his secondary wife!"

Yüan Yang blushed crimson. "Ts'ui!" she shouted. "Are these really words to issue from the mouth of a lady! But if I don't daub your face all over with my filthy hands, I won't feel happy!"

Saying this, she rushed up to her. She was about to besmear her face, when lady Feng pleaded: "My dear child, do let me off this time!"

"Lo, that girl Yüan," laughed Hu Po, "wishes to smear her, and that

hussey P'ing still spares her! Look here, she has scarcely had two crabs, and she has drunk a whole saucerful of vinegar!”

P'ing Erh was holding a crab full of yellow meat, which she was in the act of cleaning. As soon therefore as she heard this taunt, she came, crab in hand, to spatter Hu Po's face, as she laughingly reviled her. “I'll take you minx with that cajoling tongue of yours” she cried, “and....”

But, Hu Po, while also indulging in laughter, drew aside; so P'ing Erh beat the air, and fell forward, daubing, by a strange coincidence, the cheek of lady Feng. Lady Feng was at the moment having a little good-humoured raillery with Yüan Yang, and was taken so much off her guard, that she was quite startled out of her senses. “Ai-yah!” she ejaculated. The bystanders

page 218

found it difficult to keep their countenance, and, with one voice, they exploded into a boisterous fit of laughter. Lady Feng as well could not help feeling amused, and smilingly she upbraided her. “You stupid wench!” she said; “Have you by gorging lost your eyesight that you recklessly smudge your mistress' face?”

P'ing Erh hastily crossed over and wiped her face for her, and then went in person to fetch some water.

“O-mi-to-fu,” ejaculated YüanYang, “this is a distinct retribution!”

Dowager lady Chia, though seated on the other side, overheard their shouts, and she consecutively made inquiries as to what they had seen to tickled their fancy so. “Tell us,” (she urged), “what it is so that we too should have a laugh.”

“Our lady Secunda,” YüanYang and the other maids forthwith laughingly cried, “came to steal our crabs and eat them, and P'ing Erh got angry and daubed her mistress' face all over with yellow meat. So our mistress and that slave-girl are now having a scuffle over it.”

This report filled dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang and the other

inmates with them with much merriment. "Do have pity on her," dowager lady Chia laughed, "and let her have some of those small legs and entrails to eat, and have done!"

Yuan Yang and her companions assented, much amused. "Mistress Secunda," they shouted in a loud tone of voice, "you're at liberty to eat this whole tableful of legs!"

But having washed her face clean, lady Feng approached old lady Chia and the other guests and waited upon them for a time, while they partook of refreshments.

Tai-yü did not, with her weak physique, venture to overload her stomach, so partaking of a little meat from the claws, she left the table. Presently, however, dowager lady Chia too abandoned all idea of having anything more to eat. The company therefore quitted the banquet; and, when they had rinsed their hands, some admired the flowers, some played with the water, others looked at the fish.

After a short stroll, Madame Wang turned round and remarked to old lady Chia: "There's plenty of wind here. Besides, you've just had crabs; so it would be prudent for you, venerable senior, to return home and rest. And if you feel in the humour, we can come again for a turn to-morrow."

"Quite true!" acquiesced dowager lady Chia, in reply to this suggestion. "I was afraid that if I left, now that you're all in exuberant spirits, I mightn't again be spoiling your fun, (so I didn't budge). But as the idea originates from yourselves do go as you please, (while I retire). But," she

page 219

said to Hsiang-Yün, "don't allow your cousin Secundus, Pao-yü, and your cousin Lin to have too much to eat." Then when Hsiang-Yün had signified her obedience, "You two girls," continuing, she recommended Hsiang-Yün and Pao-ch'ai, "must not also have more than is good for you. Those things are, it's true, luscious, but they're not very wholesome; and if you eat immoderately of them, why, you'll get stomachaches."

Both girls promised with alacrity to be careful; and, having escorted her

beyond the confines of the garden, they retraced their steps and ordered the servants to clear the remnants of the banquet and to lay out a new supply of refreshments.

“There's no use of any regular spread out!” Pao-yü interposed. “When you are about to write verses, that big round table can be put in the centre and the wines and eatables laid on it. Neither will there be any need to ceremoniously have any fixed seats. Let those who may want anything to eat, go up to it and take what they like; and if we seat ourselves, scattered all over the place, won't it be far more convenient for us?”

“Your idea is excellent!” Pao-ch'ai answered.

“This is all very well,” Hsiang-Yün observed, “but there are others to be studied besides ourselves!”

Issuing consequently further directions for another table to be laid, and picking out some hot crabs, she asked Hsi Jen, Tzu Chüan, Ssu Ch'i, Shih Shu, Ju Hua, Ying Erh, Ts'ui Mo and the other girls to sit together and form a party. Then having a couple of flowered rugs spread under the olea trees on the hills, she bade the matrons on duty, the waiting-maids and other servants to likewise make themselves comfortable and to eat and drink at their pleasure until they were wanted, when they could come and answer the calls.

Hsiang-Yün next fetched the themes for the verses and pinned them with a needle on the wall. “They're full of originality,” one and all exclaimed after perusal, “we fear we couldn't write anything on them.”

Hsiang-Yün then went onto explain to them the reasons that had prompted her not to determine upon any particular rhymes.

“Yes, quite right!” put in Pao-yü. “I myself don't fancy hard and fast rhymes!”

But Lin Tai-yü, being unable to stand much wine and to take any crabs, told, on her own account, a servant to fetch an embroidered cushion; and, seating herself in such a way as to lean against the railing, she took

up a fishing-rod and began to fish. Pao-ch'ai played for a time with a twig of olea she held in her hand, then resting on the window-sill, she plucked the petals, and threw them into the water, attracting the fish, which went by, to rise to the surface and nibble at them. Hsiang-Yün , after a few moments of abstraction,

page 220

urged Hsi Jen and the other girls to help themselves to anything they wanted, and beckoned to the servants, seated at the foot of the hill, to eat to their heart's content. Tan Ch'un, in company with Li Wan and Hsi Ch'un, stood meanwhile under the shade of the weeping willows, and looked at the widgeons and egrets. Ying Ch'un, on the other hand, was all alone under the shade of some trees, threading double jasmine flowers, with a needle specially adapted for the purpose. Pao-yü too watched Tai-yü fishing for a while. At one time he leant next to Pao-ch'ai and cracked a few jokes with her. And at another, he drank, when he noticed Hsi Jen feasting on crabs with her companions, a few mouthfuls of wine to keep her company. At this, Hsi Jen cleaned the meat out of a shell, and gave it to him to eat.

Tai-yü then put down the fishing-rod, and, approaching the seats, she laid hold of a small black tankard, ornamented with silver plum flowers, and selected a tiny cup, made of transparent stone, red like a begonia, and in the shape of a banana leaf. A servant-girl observed her movements, and, concluding that she felt inclined to have a drink, she drew near with hurried step to pour some wine for her.

“You girls had better go on eating,” Tai-yü remonstrated, “and let me help myself; there'll be some fun in it then!”

So speaking, she filled for herself a cup half full; but discovering that it was yellow wine, “I've eaten only a little bit of crab,” she said, “and yet I feel my mouth slightly sore; so what would do for me now is a mouthful of very hot distilled spirit.”

Pao-yü hastened to take up her remark. “There's some distilled spirit,” he chimed in. “Take some of that wine,” he there and then shouted out to a servant, “scented with acacia flowers, and warm a tankard of it.”

When however it was brought Tai-yü simply took a sip and put it down again.

Pao-ch'ai too then came forward, and picked up a double cup; but, after drinking a mouthful of it, she lay it aside, and, moistening her pen, she walked up to the wall, and marked off the first theme: "longing for chrysanthemums," below which she appended a character "Heng."

"My dear cousin," promptly remarked Pao-yü. "I've already got four lines of the second theme so let me write on it!"

"I managed, after ever so much difficulty, to put a stanza together," Pao-ch'ai smiled, "and are you now in such a hurry to deprive me of it?"

Without so much as a word, Tai-yü took a pen and put a distinctive sign opposite the eighth, consisting of: "ask the chrysanthemums," and, singling out, in quick succession, the eleventh: "dream of chrysanthemums," as well, she too affixed for herself the word "Hsiao" below. But Pao-yü like

page 221

wise got a pen, and marked his choice, the twelfth on the list: "seek for chrysanthemums," by the side of which he wrote the character "Chiang."

T'an Ch'un thereupon rose to her feet. "If there's no one to write on 'Pinning the chrysanthemums'" she observed, while scrutinising the themes, "do let me have it! It has just been ruled," she continued, pointing at Pao-yü with a significant smile, "that it is on no account permissible to introduce any expressions, bearing reference to the inner chambers, so you'd better be on your guard!"

But as she spoke, she perceived Hsiang-Yün come forward, and jointly mark the fourth and fifth, that is: "facing the chrysanthemums," and "putting chrysanthemums in vases," to which she, like the others, appended a word, Hsiang."

"You too should get a style or other!" T'an Ch'un suggested.

“In our home,” smiled Hsiang-Yün , “there exist, it is true, at present several halls and structures, but as I don't live in either, there'll be no fun in it were I to borrow the name of any one of them!”

“Our venerable senior just said,” Pao-ch'ai observed laughingly, “that there was also in your home a water-pavilion called 'leaning on russet clouds hall,' and is it likely that it wasn't yours? But albeit it doesn't exist now-a-days, you were anyhow its mistress of old.”

“She's right!” one and all exclaimed.

Pao-yü therefore allowed Hsiang-Yün no time to make a move, but forthwith rubbed off the character “Hsiang,” for her and substituted that of “Hsia” (russet).

A short time only elapsed before the compositions on the twelve themes had all been completed. After they had each copied out their respective verses, they handed them to Ying Ch'un, who took a separate sheet of snow-white fancy paper, and transcribed them together, affixing distinctly under each stanza the style of the composer. Li Wan and her assistants then began to read, starting from the first on the list, the verses which follow:

“Longing for chrysanthemums,” by the “Princess of Heng Wu.”

*With anguish sore I face the western breeze, and wrapt in grief, I
pine for you!*

*What time the smart weed russet turns, and the reeds white, my heart
is rent in two.*

*When in autumn the hedges thin, and gardens waste, all trace of you is
gone.*

*When the moon waxeth cold, and the dew pure, my dreams then know
something of you.*

*With constant yearnings my heart follows you as far as wild geese
homeward fly.*

*Lonesome I sit and lend an ear, till a late hour to the sound of the
block!*

For you, ye yellow flowers, I've grown haggard and worn, but who doth

*pity me,
And breathe one word of cheer that in the ninth moon I will soon meet
you again?*

page 222

*“Search for chrysanthemums,” by the “Gentleman of I Hung:”
When I have naught to do, I'll seize the first fine day to try and
stroll about.
Neither wine-cups nor cups of medicine will then deter me from my
wish.
Who plants the flowers in all those spots, facing the dew and under
the moon's rays?
Outside the rails they grow and by the hedge; but in autumn where do
they go?
With sandals waxed I come from distant shores; my feelings all
exuberant;
But as on this cold day I can't exhaust my song, my spirits get
depressed.
The yellow flowers, if they but knew how comfort to a poet to afford,
Would not let me this early morn trudge out in vain with my cash-laden
staff.*

“Planting chrysanthemums,” by the Gentleman of “I Hung:”

*When autumn breaks, I take my hoe, and moving them myself out of the
park,
I plant them everywhere near the hedges and in the foreground of the
halls.
Last night, when least expected, they got a good shower, which made
them all revive.
This morn my spirits still rise high, as the buds burst in bloom
bedecked with frost.
Now that it's cool, a thousand stanzas on the autumn scenery I sing.
In ecstasies from drink, I toast their blossom in a cup of cold, and
fragrant wine.
With spring water. I sprinkle them, cover the roots with mould and
well tend them,
So that they may, like the path near the well, be free of every grain*

of dirt.

“Facing the chrysanthemums,” by the “Old friend of the Hall reclining on the russet clouds.”

*From other gardens I transplant them, and I treasure them like gold.
One cluster bears light-coloured bloom; another bears dark shades.
I sit with head uncovered by the sparse-leaved artemesia hedge,
And in their pure and cool fragrance, clasping my knees, I hum my
lays.
In the whole world, methinks, none see the light as peerless as these
flowers.
From all I see you have no other friend more intimate than me.
Such autumn splendour, I must not misuse, as steadily it fleets.
My gaze I fix on you as I am fain each moment to enjoy!*

“Putting chrysanthemums in vases,” by the “Old Friend of the hall reclining on the russet clouds.”

*The lute I thrum, and quaff my wine, joyful at heart that ye are meet
to be my mates.
The various tables, on which ye are laid, adorn with beauteous grace
this quiet nook.
The fragrant dew, next to the spot I sit, is far apart from that by
the three paths.
I fling my book aside and turn my gaze upon a twig full of your autumn
(bloom).
What time the frost is pure, a new dream steals o'er me, as by the
paper screen I rest.
When cold holdeth the park, and the sun's rays do slant, I long and
yearn for you, old friends.
I too differ from others in this world, for my own tastes resemble
those of yours.
The vernal winds do not hinder the peach tree and the pear from
bursting forth in bloom.*

“Singing chrysanthemums,” by the “Hsiao Hsiang consort.”

Eating the bread of idleness, the frenzy of poetry creeps over me both

night and day.

page 223

*Round past the hedge I wend, and, leaning on the rock, I intone verses
gently to myself.*

*From the point of my pencil emanate lines of recondite grace, so near
the frost I write.*

*Some scent I hold by the side of my mouth, and, turning to the moon, I
sing my sentiments.*

*With self-pitying lines pages I fill, so as utterance to give to all
my cares and woes.*

*From these few scanty words, who could fathom the secrets of my heart
about the autumntide?*

*Beginning from the time when T'ao, the magistrate, did criticise the
beauty of your bloom,*

*Yea, from that date remote up to this very day, your high renown has
ever been extolled.*

“Drawing chrysanthemums,” by the “Princess of Heng Wu.”

*Verses I've had enough, so with my pens I play; with no idea that I am
mad.*

*Do I make use of pigments red or green as to involve a task of
toilsome work?*

*To form clusters of leaves, I sprinkle simply here and there a
thousand specks of ink.*

*And when I've drawn the semblance of the flowers, some spots I make
to*

represent the frost.

*The light and dark so life-like harmonise with the figure of those
there in the wind,*

*That when I've done tracing their autumn growth, a fragrant smell
issues under my wrist.*

*Do you not mark how they resemble those, by the east hedge, which
you*

leisurely pluck?

*Upon the screens their image I affix to solace me for those of the
ninth moon.*

“Asking the chrysanthemums,” by the “Hsiao Hsiang consort.”

*Your heart, in autumn, I would like to read, but know it no one could!
While humming with my arms behind my back, on the east hedge I rap.
So peerless and unique are ye that who is meet with you to stay?
Why are you of all flowers the only ones to burst the last in bloom?
Why in such silence plunge the garden dew and the frost in the hall?
When wild geese homeward fly and crickets sicken, do you think of me?
Do not tell me that in the world none of you grow with power of
speech?
But if ye fathom what I say, why not converse with me a while?*

“Pinning the chrysanthemums in the hair,” by the “Visitor under the banana trees.”

*I put some in a vase, and plant some by the hedge, so day by day I
have ample to do.
I pluck them, yet don't fancy they are meant for girls to pin before
the glass in their coiffure.
My mania for these flowers is just as keen as was that of the squire,
who once lived in Ch'ang An.
I rave as much for them as raved Mr. P'eng Tse, when he was under
the
effects of wine.
Cold is the short hair on his temples and moistened with dew, which on
it dripped from the three paths.
His flaxen turban is suffused with the sweet fragrance of the autumn
frost in the ninth moon.
That strong weakness of mine to pin them in my hair is viewed with
sneers by my contemporaries.
They clap their hands, but they are free to laugh at me by the
roadside as much as e'er they list.*

page 224

“The shadow of the chrysanthemums,” by the “Old Friend of the hall reclining on the russet clouds.”

In layers upon layers their autumn splendour grows and e'er thick and thicker.

I make off furtively, and stealthily transplant them from the three crossways.

The distant lamp, inside the window-frame, depicts their shade both far and near.

The hedge riddles the moon's rays, like unto a sieve, but the flowers stop the holes.

As their reflection cold and fragrant tarries here, their soul must too abide.

The dew-dry spot beneath the flowers is so like them that what is said of dreams is trash.

Their precious shadows, full of subtle scent, are trodden down to pieces here and there.

Could any one with eyes half closed from drinking, not mistake the shadow for the flowers.

“Dreaming of chrysanthemums,” by the “Hsiao Hsiang consort.”

What vivid dreams arise as I dose by the hedge amidst those autumn scenes!

Whether clouds bear me company or the moon be my mate, I can't discern.

In fairyland I soar, not that I would become a butterfly like Chang. So long I for my old friend T'ao, the magistrate, that I again seek him.

In a sound sleep I fell; but so soon as the wild geese cried, they broke my rest.

The chirp of the cicadas gave me such a start that I bear them a grudge.

My secret wrongs to whom can I go and divulge, when I wake up from sleep?

The faded flowers and the cold mist make my feelings of anguish know no bounds.

“Fading of the chrysanthemums,” by the “Visitor under the banana trees.”

The dew congeals; the frost waxes in weight; and gradually dwindles their bloom.

*After the feast, with the flower show, follows the season of the
'little snow.'
The stalks retain still some redundant smell, but the flowers' golden
tinge is faint.
The stems do not bear sign of even one whole leaf; their verdure is
all past.
Naught but the chirp of crickets strikes my ear, while the moon shines
on half my bed.
Near the cold clouds, distant a thousand li, a flock of wild geese
slowly fly.
When autumn breaks again next year, I feel certain that we will meet
once more.
We part, but only for a time, so don't let us indulge in anxious
thoughts.*

Each stanza they read they praised; and they heaped upon each other incessant eulogiums.

“Let me now criticise them; I'll do so with all fairness!” Li Wan smiled. “As I glance over the page,” she said, “I find that each of you has some distinct admirable sentiments; but in order to be impartial in my criticism to-day, I must concede the first place to: 'Singing the chrysanthemums;' the second to: 'Asking the chrysanthemums;' and the third to: 'Dreaming of chrysanthemums.' The original nature of the themes makes the verses full of originality, and their conception still more original. But we must allow to the 'Hsiao Hsiang consort' the credit of being the best; next in order following: 'Pinning chrysanthemums in the hair,' 'Facing the chrysanthemums,'

page 225

'Putting the chrysanthemums, in vases,' 'Drawing the chrysanthemums,' and 'Longing for chrysanthemums,' as second best.”

This decision filled Pao-yü with intense gratification. Clapping his hands, “Quite right! it's most just,” he shouted.

“My verses are worth nothing!” Tai-yü remarked. “Their fault, after all, is that they are a little too minutely subtile.”

“They are subtle but good,” Li Wan rejoined; “for there's no artificialness or stiffness about them.”

“According to my views,” Tai-yü observed, “the best line is:

“When cold holdeth the park and the sun's rays do slant, I long and yearn for you, old friends.”

“The metonymy:

“I fling my book aside and turn my gaze upon a twig of autumn.”

is already admirable! She has dealt so exhaustively with 'putting chrysanthemums in a vase' that she has left nothing unsaid that could be said, and has had in consequence to turn her thought back and consider the time anterior to their being plucked and placed in vases. Her sentiments are profound!”

“What you say is certainly so,” explained Li Wan smiling; “but that line of yours:

“Some scent I hold by the side of my mouth,....”

“beats that.”

“After all,” said T'an Ch'un, “we must admit that there's depth of thought in those of the 'Princess of Heng Wu' with:

“...in autumn all trace of you is gone;”

“and

“...my dreams then know something of you!”

“They really make the meaning implied by the words 'long for' stand out clearly.”

“Those passages of yours:

“Cold is the short hair on his temples and moistened....”

“and

“His flaxen turban is suffused with the sweet fragrance....;”

laughingly observed Puo-ch'ai, “likewise bring out the idea of 'pinning the chrysanthemums in the hair' so thoroughly that one couldn't get a loop hole for fault-finding.”

Hsiang-Yün then smiled.

“...who is meet with you to stay?”

she said, “and

“...burst the last in bloom?”

“are questions so straight to the point set to the chrysanthemums, that they are quite at a loss what answer to give.”

page 226

“Were what you say:

“I sit with head uncovered....’

“and

“...clasping my knees, I hum my lays....’

“as if you couldn't, in fact, tear yourself away for even a moment from them,” Li Wan laughed, “to come to the knowledge of the chrysanthemums, why, they would certainly be sick and tired of you.”

This joke made every one laugh.

“I'm last again!” smiled Pao-yü. “Is it likely that:

“Who plants the flowers?....

...in autumn where do they go?

With sandals waxed I come from distant shores;....

...and as on this cold day I can't exhaust my song;....’

“do not all forsooth amount to searching for chrysanthemums? And that

*"Last night they got a shower....
And this morn ... bedecked with frost,'*

"don't both bear on planting them? But unfortunately they can't come up to these lines:

*"Some scent I hold by the side of my mouth and turning to the moon I
sing my sentiments.'
'In their pure and cool fragrance, clasping my knees I hum my lays.'
'...short hair on his temples....'
'His flaxen turban....
...golden tinge is faint.
...verdure is all past.
...in autumn ... all trace of you is gone.
...my dreams then know something of you.'*

"But to-morrow," he proceeded, "if I have got nothing to do, I'll write twelve stanzas my self."

"Yours are also good," Li Wan pursued, "the only thing is that they aren't as full of original conception as those other lines, that's all."

But after a few further criticisms, they asked for some more warm crabs; and, helping themselves, as soon as they were brought, from the large circular table, they regaled themselves for a time.

"With the crabs to-day in one's hand and the olea before one's eyes, one cannot help inditing verses," Pao-yü smiled. "I've already thought of a few; but will any of you again have the pluck to devise any?"

With this challenge, he there and then hastily washed his hands and picking up a pen he wrote out what, his companions found on perusal, to run in this strain:

*When in my hands I clasp a crab what most enchants my heart is the
cassia's cool shade.
While I pour vinegar and ground ginger, I feel from joy as if I would
go mad.
With so much gluttony the prince's grandson eats his crabs that he*

*should have some wine.
The side-walking young gentleman has no intestines in his frame at
all.*

page 227

*I lose sight in my greediness that in my stomach cold accumulates.
To my fingers a strong smell doth adhere and though I wash them yet
the smell clings fast.
The main secret of this is that men in this world make much of food.
The P'o Spirit has laughed at them that all their lives they only seek
to eat.*

“I could readily compose a hundred stanzas with such verses in no time,”
Tai-yü observed with a sarcastic smile.

“Your mental energies are now long ago exhausted,” Pao-yü rejoined
laughingly, “and instead of confessing your inability to devise any, you
still go on heaping invective upon people!”

Tai-yü, upon catching this insinuation, made no reply of any kind; but
slightly raising her head she hummed something to herself for a while,
and then taking up a pen she completed a whole stanza with a few
dashes.

The company then read her lines. They consisted of—

*E'en after death, their armour and their lengthy spears are never cast
away.*

*So nice they look, piled in the plate, that first to taste them I'd
fain be.*

*In every pair of legs they have, the crabs are full of tender
jade-like meat.*

*Each piece of ruddy fat, which in their shell bumps up, emits a
fragrant smell.*

*Besides much meat, they have a greater relish for me still, eight feet
as well.*

*Who bids me drink a thousand cups of wine in order to enhance my joy?
What time I can behold their luscious food, with the fine season doth*

accord

*When cassias wave with fragrance pure, and the chrysanthemums are
decked with frost.*

Pao-yü had just finished conning it over and was beginning to sing its praise, when Tai-yü, with one snatch, tore it to pieces and bade a servant go and burn it.

“As my compositions can't come up to yours,” she then observed, “I'll burn it. Yours is capital, much better than the lines you wrote a little time back on the chrysanthemums, so keep it for the benefit of others.”

“I've likewise succeeded, after much effort, in putting together a stanza,” Pao-ch'ai laughingly remarked. “It cannot, of course, be worth much, but I'll put it down for fun's sake.”

As she spoke, she too wrote down her lines. When they came to look at them, they read—

*On this bright beauteous day, I bask in the dryandra shade, with a cup
in my hand.*

*When I was at Ch'ang An, with drivelling mouth, I longed for the ninth
day of the ninth moon.*

*The road stretches before their very eyes, but they can't tell between
straight and transverse.*

*Under their shells in spring and autumn only reigns a vacuum, yellow
and black.*

At this point, they felt unable to refrain from shouting: “Excellent!” “She abuses in fine style!” Pao-yü shouted. “But my lines should also be committed to the flames.”

The company thereupon scanned the remainder of the stanza, which was

page 228

couched in this wise:

When all the stock of wine is gone, chrysanthemums then use to scour

*away the smell.
So as to counteract their properties of gath'ring cold, fresh ginger
you should take.
Alas! now that they have been dropped into the boiling pot, what good
do they derive?
About the moonlit river banks there but remains the fragrant aroma of
corn.*

At the close of their perusal, they with one voice, explained that this was a first-rate song on crab-eating; that minor themes of this kind should really conceal lofty thoughts, before they could be held to be of any great merit, and that the only thing was that it chaffed people rather too virulently.

But while they were engaged in conversation, P'ing Erh was again seen coming into the garden. What she wanted is not, however, yet known; so, reader, peruse the details given in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

The tongue of the village old dame finds as free vent as a river that has broken its banks.

The affectionate cousin makes up his mind to sift to the very bottom the story told by old goody Liu.

Upon seeing, the story explains, P'ing Erh arrive, they unanimously inquired, "What is your mistress up to? How is it she hasn't come?"

"How ever could she spare the time to get as far as here?" P'ing Erh smiled and replied. "But, she said, she hasn't anything good to eat, so she bade me, as she couldn't possibly run over, come and find out whether there be any more crabs or not; (if there be), she enjoined me to ask for a few to take to her to eat at home."

"There are plenty!" Hsiang-yün rejoined; and directing, with alacrity, a servant to fetch a present box, she put in it ten of the largest crabs.

"I'll take a few more of the female ones," P'ing Erh remarked.

One and all then laid hands upon P'ing Erh and tried to drag her into a seat, but P'ing Erh would not accede to their importunities.

"I insist upon your sitting down," Li Wan laughingly exclaimed, and as she kept pulling her about, and forcing her to sit next to her, she filled a cup of wine and put it to her lips. P'ing Erh hastily swallowed a sip and endeavoured immediately to beat a retreat.

"I won't let you go," shouted Li Wan. "It's so evident that you're only got that woman Feng in your thoughts as you don't listen to any of my words!"

Saying this, she went on to bid the nurses go ahead, and take the box

over. "Tell her," she added, "that I've kept P'ing Erh here."

A matron presently returned with a box. "Lady Secunda," she reported, "says that you, lady Chu, and our young mistresses must not make fun of her for having asked for something to eat; and that in this box you'll find cakes made of water-lily powder, and rolls prepared with chicken fat, which your maternal aunt, on the other side, just sent for your ladyship and for you, young ladies, to taste. That she bids you," (the matron) continued, turning towards P'ing Erh, "come over on duty, but your mind is so set upon pleasure that you loiter behind and don't go back. She advises you, however, not to have too many cups of wine."

"Were I even to have too much," P'ing Erh smiled, "what could she do to me?"

Uttering these words, she went on with her drink; after which she partook of some more crab.

"What a pity it is," interposed Li Wan, caressing her, "that a girl with such good looks as you should have so ordinary a fortune as to simply fall into that room as a menial! But wouldn't any one, who is not acquainted with actual facts, take you for a lady and a mistress?"

While she went on eating and drinking with Pao-ch'ai, Hsiang-yün and the other girls, P'ing Erh turned her head round. "Don't rub me like that!" she laughed, "It makes me feel quite ticklish."

"Ai-yo!" shouted Li Wan. "What's this hard thing?"

"It's a key," P'ing Erh answered.

"What fine things have you got that the fear lest people should take it away, prompts you to carry this about you? I keep on, just for a laugh, telling people the whole day long that when the bonze T'ang was fetching the canons, a white horse came and carried him! That when Liu Chih-yüan was attacking the empire, a melon-spirit appeared and brought him a coat of mail, and that in the same way, where our vixen Feng is, there you are to be found! You are your mistress' general key; and what do you want this other key for?"

"You've primed yourself with wine, my lady," P'ing Erh smiled, "and here you once more chaff me and make a laughing-stock of me."

"This is really quite true," Pao-ch'ai laughed. "Whenever we've got nothing to do, and we talk matters over, (we're quite unanimous) that not one in a hundred could be picked out to equal you girls in here. The beauty is that each one of you possesses her own good qualities!"

"In every thing, whether large or small, a heavenly principle rules alike," Li Wan explained. "Were there, for instance, no Yüan Yang in our venerable

page 230

senior's apartments, how would it ever do? Commencing with Madame Wang herself, who is it who could muster sufficient courage to expostulate with the old lady? Yet she plainly has the pluck to put in her remonstrances with her; and, as it happens, our worthy ancestor lends a patient ear to only what she says and no one else. None of the others can remember what our old senior has in the way of clothes and head-ornaments, but she can remember everything; and, were she not there to look after things, there is no knowing how many would not be swindled away. That child besides is so straightforward at heart, that, despite all this, she often puts in a good word for others, and doesn't rely upon her influence to look down disdainfully upon any one!"

"It was only yesterday," Hsi Ch'un observed with a smile, "that our dear ancestor said that she was ever so much better than the whole lot of us!"

"She's certainly splendid!" P'ing Erh ventured. "How could we rise up to her standard?"

"Ts'ai Hsia," Pao-yü put in, "who is in mother's rooms, is a good sort of girl!"

"Of course she is!" T'an Ch'un assented. "But she's good enough as far as external appearances go, but inwardly she's a sly one! Madame Wang is just like a joss; she does not give her mind to any sort of business; but

this girl is up to everything; and it is she who in all manner of things reminds her mistress what there is to be done. She even knows everything, whether large or small, connected with Mr. Chia Cheng's staying at home or going out of doors; and when at any time Madame Wang forgets, she, from behind the scenes, prompts her how to act."

"Well, never mind about her!" Li Wan suggested. "But were," she pursued, pointing at Pao-yü, "no Hsi Jen in this young gentleman's quarters, just you imagine what a pitch things would reach! That vixen Feng may truly resemble the prince Pa of the Ch'u kingdom; and she may have two arms strong enough to raise a tripod weighing a thousand catties, but had she not this maid (P'ing Erh), would she be able to accomplish everything so thoroughly?"

"In days gone by," P'ing Erh interposed, "four servant-girls came along with her, but what with those who've died and those who've gone, only I remain like a solitary spirit."

"You're, after all, the fortunate one!" Li Wan retorted, "but our hussey Feng too is lucky in having you! Had I not also once, just remember, two girls, when your senior master Chu was alive? Am I not, you've seen for yourselves, a person to bear with people? But in such a surly frame of mind did I find them both day after day that, as soon as your senior master departed this life, I availed myself of their youth (to give them in marriage)

page 231

and to pack both of them out of my place. But had either of them been good for anything and worthy to be kept, I would, in fact, have now had some one to give me a helping hand!"

As she spoke, the very balls of her eyes suddenly became quite red.

"Why need you again distress your mind?" they with one voice, exclaimed. "Isn't it better that we should break up?"

While conversing, they rinsed their hands; and, when they had agreed to go in a company to dowager lady Chia's and Madame Wang's and

inquire after their health, the matrons and servant-maids swept the pavilion and collected and washed the cups and saucers.

Hsi Jen proceeded on her way along with P'ing Erh. "Come into my room," said Hsi Jen to P'ing Erh, "and sit down and have another cup of tea."

"I won't have any tea just now," P'ing Erh answered. "I'll come some other time."

So saying, she was about to go off when Hsi Jen called out to her and stopped her.

"This month's allowances," she asked, "haven't yet been issued, not even to our old mistress and Madame Wang; why is it?"

Upon catching this inquiry, P'ing Erh hastily retraced her steps and drew near Hsi Jen. After looking about to see that no one was in the neighbourhood, she rejoined in a low tone of voice, "Drop these questions at once! They're sure, anyhow, to be issued in a couple of days."

"Why is it," smiled Hsi Jen, "that this gives you such a start?"

"This month's allowances," P'ing Erh explained to her in a whisper, "have long ago been obtained in advance by our mistress Secunda and given to people for their own purposes; and it's when the interest has been brought from here and there that the various sums will be lumped together and payment be effected. I confide this to you, but, mind, you mustn't go and tell any other person about it."

"Is it likely that she hasn't yet enough money for her own requirements?" Hsi Jen smiled. "Or is it that she's still not satisfied? And what's the use of her still going on bothering herself in this way?"

"Isn't it so!" laughed P'ing Erh. "From just handling the funds for this particular item, she has, during these few years, so manipulated them as to turn up several hundreds of taels profit out of them. Nor does she spend that monthly allowance of hers for public expenses. But the

moment she accumulates anything like eight or ten taels odd, she gives them out too. Thus the interest on her own money alone comes up to nearly a thousand taels a year.”

page 232

“You and your mistress take our money,” Hsi Jen observed laughingly, “and get interest on it; fooling us as if we were no better than idiots.”

“Here you are again with your uncharitable words!” P'ing Erh remonstrated. “Can it be that you haven't yet enough to meet your own expenses with?”

“I am, it's true, not short of money,” Hsi Jen replied, “as I have nowhere to go and spend it; but the thing is that I'm making provision for that fellow of ours, (Pao-yü).”

“If you ever find yourself in any great straits and need money,” P'ing Erh resumed, “you're at liberty to take first those few taels I've got over there to suit your own convenience with, and by and bye I can reduce them from what is due to you and we'll be square.”

“I'm not in need of any just now,” retorted Hsi Jen. “But should I not have enough, when I want some, I'll send some one to fetch them, and finish.”

P'ing Erh promised that she would let her have the money at any time she sent for it, and, and taking the shortest cut, she issued out of the garden gate. Here she encountered a servant despatched from the other side by lady Feng. She came in search of P'ing Erh. “Our lady,” she said, “has something for you to do, and is waiting for you.”

“What's up that it's so pressing?” P'ing Erh inquired. “Our senior mistress detained me by force to have a chat, so I couldn't manage to get away. But here she time after time sends people after me in this manner!”

“Whether you go or not is your own look out,” the maid replied. “It isn't worth your while getting angry with me! If you dare, go and tell these things to our mistress!”

P'ing Erh spat at her contemptuously, and rushed back in anxious haste. She discovered, however, that lady Feng was not at home. But unexpectedly she perceived that the old goody Liu, who had paid them a visit on a previous occasion for the purpose of obtaining pecuniary assistance, had come again with Pan Erh, and was seated in the opposite room, along with Chang Ts'ai's wife and Chou Jui's wife, who kept her company. But two or three servant-maids were inside as well emptying on the floor bags containing dates, squash and various wild greens.

As soon as they saw her appear in the room, they promptly stood up in a body. Old goody Liu had, on her last visit, learnt what P'ing Erh's status in the establishment was, so vehemently jumping down, she enquired, "Miss, how do you do? All at home," she pursued, "send you their compliments. I meant to have come earlier and paid my respects to my lady and to look you up, miss; but we've been very busy on the farm. We managed this year

page 233

to reap, after great labour, a few more piculs of grain than usual. But melons, fruits and vegetables have also been plentiful. These things, you see here, are what we picked during the first crop; and as we didn't presume to sell them, we kept the best to present to our lady and the young ladies to taste. The young ladies must, of course, be surfeited with all the delicacies and fine things they daily get, but by having some of our wild greens to eat, they will show some regard for our poor attention."

"Many thanks for all the trouble you have taken!" Ping Erh eagerly rejoined. Then pressing her to resume her place, she sat down herself; and, urging Mrs. Chang and Mrs. Chou to take their seats, she bade a young waiting-maid go and serve the tea.

"There's a joyous air about your face to-day, Miss, and your eye-balls are all red," the wife of Chou Jui and the wife of Chang Ts'ai thereupon smilingly ventured.

"Naturally!" P'ing Erh laughed. "I generally don't take any wine, but our senior mistress, and our young ladies caught hold of me and insisted

upon pouring it down my throat. I had no alternative therefore but to swallow two cups full; so my face at once flushed crimson.”

“I have a longing for wine,” Chang Ts'ai's wife smiled; “but there's no one to offer me any. But when any one by and by invites you, Miss, do take me along with you!”

At these words, one and all burst out laughing.

“Early this morning,” Chou Jui's wife interposed, “I caught a glimpse of those crabs. Only two or three of them would weigh a catty; so in those two or three huge hampers, there must have been, I presume, seventy to eighty catties!”

“If some were intended for those above as well as for those below;” Chou Jui's wife added, “they couldn't, nevertheless, I fear, have been enough.”

“How could every one have had any?” P'ing Erh observed. “Those simply with any name may have tasted a couple of them; but, as for the rest, some may have touched them with the tips of their hands, but many may even not have done as much.”

“Crabs of this kind!” put in old goody Liu, “cost this year five candareens a catty; ten catties for five mace; five times five make two taels five, and three times five make fifteen; and adding what was wanted for wines and eatables, the total must have come to something over twenty taels. O-mi-to-fu! why, this heap of money is ample for us country-people to live on through a whole year!”

“I expect you have seen our lady?” P'ing Erh then asked.

“Yes, I have seen her,” assented old goody Liu. “She bade us wait.”

page 234

As she spoke, she again looked out of the window to see what the time of the day could be. “It's getting quite late,” she afterwards proceeded. “We must be going, or else we mayn't be in time to get out of the city gates; and then we'll be in a nice fix.”

“Quite right,” Chou Jui's wife observed. “I'll go and see what she's up to for you.”

With these words, she straightway left the room. After a long absence, she returned. “Good fortune has, indeed, descended upon you, old dame!” she smiled. “Why, you've won the consideration of those two ladies!”

“What about it?” laughingly inquired P'ing Erh and the others.

“Lady Secunda,” Chou Jui's wife explained with a smile, “was with our venerable lady, so I gently whispered to her: 'old goody Liu wishes to go home; it's getting late and she fears she mightn't be in time to go out of the gates!' 'It's such a long way off!' Our lady Secunda rejoined, 'and she had all the trouble and fatigue of carrying that load of things; so if it's too late, why, let her spend the night here and start on the morrow!' Now isn't this having enlisted our mistress' sympathies? But not to speak of this! Our old lady also happened to overhear what we said, and she inquired: 'who is old goody Liu?' Our lady Secunda forthwith told her all. 'I was just longing,' her venerable ladyship pursued, 'for some one well up in years to have a chat with; ask her in, and let me see her!' So isn't this coming in for consideration, when least unexpected?”

So speaking, she went on to urge old goody Liu to get down and betake herself to the front.

“With a figure like this of mine,” old goody Liu demurred, “how could I very well appear before her? My dear sister-in-law, do tell her that I've gone!”

“Get on! Be quick!” P'ing Erh speedily cried. “What does it matter? Our old lady has the highest regard for old people and the greatest pity for the needy! She's not one you could compare with those haughty and overbearing people! But I fancy you're a little too timid, so I'll accompany you as far as there, along with Mrs. Chou.”

While tendering her services, she and Chou Jui's wife led off old goody Liu and crossed over to dowager lady Chia's apartments on this side of

the mansion. The boy-servants on duty at the second gate stood up when they saw P'ing Erh approach. But two of them also ran up to her, and, keeping close to her heels: "Miss!" they shouted out. "Miss!"

"What have you again got to say?" P'ing Erh asked.

"It's pretty late just now," one of the boys smilingly remarked; "and mother is ill and wants me to go and call the doctor, so I would, dear Miss,

page 235

like to have half a day's leave; may I?"

"Your doings are really fine!" P'ing Erh exclaimed. "You've agreed among yourselves that each day one of you should apply for furlough; but instead of speaking to your lady, you come and bother me! The other day that Chu Erh went, Mr. Secundus happened not to want him, so I assented, though I also added that I was doing it as a favour; but here you too come to-day!"

"It's quite true that his mother is sick," Chou Jui's wife interceded; "so, Miss, do say yes to him also, and let him go!"

"Be back as soon as it dawns to-morrow!" P'ing Erh enjoined. "Wait, I've got something for you to do, for you'll again sleep away, and only turn up after the sun has blazed away on your buttocks. As you go now, give a message to Wang Erh! Tell him that our lady bade you warn him that if he does not hand over the balance of the interest due by to-morrow, she won't have anything to do with him. So he'd better let her have it to meet her requirements and finish."

The servant-lad felt in high glee and exuberant spirits. Expressing his obedience, he walked off.

P'ing Erh and her companions repaired then to old lady Chia's apartments. Here the various young ladies from the Garden of Broad Vista were at the time assembled paying their respects to their grandmother. As soon as old goody Liu put her foot inside, she saw the room thronged with girls (as seductive) as twigs of flowers waving to and

fro, and so richly dressed, as to look enveloped in pearls, and encircled with king-fisher ornaments. But she could not make out who they all were. Her gaze was, however, attracted by an old dame, reclining alone on a divan. Behind her sat a girl, a regular beauty, clothed in gauze, engaged in patting her legs. Lady Feng was on her feet in the act of cracking some joke.

Old goody Liu readily concluded that it must be dowager lady Chia, so promptly pressing forward, she put on a forced smile and made several curtseys. "My obeisance to you, star of longevity!" she said.

Old lady Chia hastened, on her part, to bow and to inquire after her health. Then she asked Chou Jui's wife to bring a chair over for her to take a seat. But Pan Erh was still so very shy that he did not know how to make his obeisance.

"Venerable relative," dowager lady Chia asked, "how old are you this year?"

Old goody Liu immediately rose to her feet. "I'm seventy-five this year," she rejoined.

"So old and yet so hardy!" Old lady Chia remarked, addressing herself

page 236

to the party. "Why she's older than myself by several years! When I reach that age, I wonder whether I shall be able to move!"

"We people have," old goody Liu smilingly resumed, "to put up, from the moment we come into the world, with ever so many hardships; while your venerable ladyship enjoys, from your birth, every kind of blessing! Were we also like this, there'd be no one to carry on that farming work."

"Are your eyes and teeth still good?" Dowager lady Chia went on to inquire.

"They're both still all right," old goody Liu replied. "The left molars, however, have got rather shaky this year."

“As for me, I'm quite an old fossil,” dowager lady Chia observed. “I'm no good whatever. My eyesight is dim; my ears are deaf, my memory is gone. I can't even recollect any of you, old family connections. When therefore any of our relations come on a visit, I don't see them for fear lest I should be ridiculed. All I can manage to eat are a few mouthfuls of anything tender enough for my teeth; and I can just dose a bit or, when I feel in low spirits, I distract myself a little with these grandsons and grand-daughters of mine; that's all I'm good for.”

“This is indeed your venerable ladyship's good fortune!” old goody Liu smiled. “We couldn't enjoy anything of the kind, much though we may long for it.”

“What good fortune!” dowager lady Chia exclaimed. “I'm a useless old thing, no more.”

This remark made every one explode into laughter.

Dowager lady Chia also laughed. “I heard our lady Feng say a little while back,” she added, “that you had brought a lot of squash and vegetables, and I told her to put them by at once. I had just been craving to have newly-grown melons and vegetables; but those one buys outside are not as luscious as those produced in your farms.”

“This is the rustic notion,” old goody Liu laughed, “to entirely subsist on fresh things! Yet, we long to have fish and meat for our fare, but we can't afford it.”

“I've found a relative in you to-day,” dowager lady Chia said, “so you shouldn't go empty-handed! If you don't despise this place as too mean, do stay a day or two before you start! We've also got a garden here; and this garden produces fruits too; you can taste some of them to-morrow and take a few along with you home, in order to make it look like a visit to relatives.”

When lady Feng saw how delighted old lady Chia was with the prospects of the old dame's stay, she too lost no time in doing all she could to induce her to remain. “Our place here,” she urged, “isn't, it's true, as

spacious as

page 237

your threshing-floor; but as we've got two vacant rooms, you'd better put up in them for a couple of days, and choose some of your village news and old stories and recount them to our worthy senior."

"Now you, vixen Feng," smiled dowager lady Chia, "don't raise a laugh at her expense! She's only a country woman; and will an old dame like her stand any chaff from you?"

While remonstrating with her, she bade a servant go, before attending to anything else, and pluck a few fruits. These she handed to Pan Erh to eat. But Pan Erh did not venture to touch them, conscious as he was of the presence of such a number of bystanders. So old lady Chia gave orders that a few cash should be given him, and then directed the pages to take him outside to play.

After sipping a cup of tea, old goody Liu began to relate, for the benefit of dowager lady Chia, a few of the occurrences she had seen or heard of in the country. These had the effect of putting old lady Chia in a more exuberant frame of mind. But in the midst of her narration, a servant, at lady Feng's instance, asked goody Liu to go and have her evening meal. Dowager lady Chia then picked out, as well, several kinds of eatables from her own repast, and charged some one to take them to goody Liu to feast on.

But the consciousness that the old dame had taken her senior's fancy induced lady Feng to send her back again as soon as she had taken some refreshments. On her arrival, Yüan Yang hastily deputed a matron to take goody Liu to have a bath. She herself then went and selected two pieces of ordinary clothes, and these she entrusted to a servant to hand to the old dame to change. Goody Liu had hitherto not set eyes upon any such grand things, so with eagerness she effected the necessary alterations in her costume. This over, she made her appearance outside, and, sitting in front of the divan occupied by dowager lady Chia, she went on to narrate as many stories as she could recall to mind. Pao-yü and his cousins too were, at the time, assembled in the room, and as they had

never before heard anything the like of what she said, they, of course, thought her tales more full of zest than those related by itinerant blind story-tellers.

Old goody Liu was, albeit a rustic person, gifted by nature with a good deal of discrimination. She was besides advanced in years; and had gone through many experiences in her lifetime, so when she, in the first place, saw how extremely delighted old lady Chia was with her, and, in the second, how eager the whole crowd of young lads and lasses were to listen to what fell from her mouth, she even invented, when she found her own stock exhausted, a good many yarns to recount to them.

“What with all the sowing we have to do in our fields and the vegetables we

page 238

have to plant,” she consequently proceeded, “have we ever in our village any leisure to sit with lazy hands from year to year and day to day; no matter whether it's spring, summer, autumn or winter, whether it blows or whether it rains? Yea, day after day all that we can do is to turn the bare road into a kind of pavilion to rest and cool ourselves on! But what strange things don't we see! Last winter, for instance, snow fell for several consecutive days, and it piled up on the ground three or four feet deep. One day, I got up early, but I hadn't as yet gone out of the door of our house when I heard outside the noise of firewood (being moved). I fancied that some one must have come to steal it, so I crept up to a hole in the window; but, lo, I discovered that it was no one from our own village.”

“It must have been,” interposed dowager lady Chia, “some wayfarers, who being smitten with the cold, took some of the firewood, they saw ready at hand, to go and make a fire and warm themselves with! That's highly probable!”

“It was no wayfarers at all,” old goody Liu retorted smiling, “and that's what makes the story so strange. Who do you think it was, venerable star of longevity? It was really a most handsome girl of seventeen or eighteen, whose hair was combed as smooth as if oil had been poured

over it. She was dressed in a deep red jacket, a white silk petticoat....”

When she reached this part of her narrative, suddenly became audible the voices of people bawling outside. “It's nothing much,” they shouted, “don't frighten our old mistress!” Dowager lady Chia and the other inmates caught, however, their cries and hurriedly inquired what had happened. A servant-maid explained in reply that a fire had broken out in the stables in the southern court, but that there was no danger, as the flames had been suppressed.

Their old grandmother was a person with very little nerve. The moment, therefore, the report fell on her ear, she jumped up with all despatch, and leaning on one of the family, she rushed on to the verandah to ascertain the state of things. At the sight of the still brilliant light, shed by the flames, on the south east part of the compound, old lady Chia was plunged in consternation, and invoking Buddha, she went on to shout to the servants to go and burn incense before the god of fire.

Madame Wang and the rest of the members of the household lost no time in crossing over in a body to see how she was getting on. “The fire has been already extinguished,” they too assured her, “please, dear ancestor, repair into your rooms!”

But it was only after old lady Chia had seen the light of the flames entirely subside that she at length led the whole company indoors. “What

page 239

was that girl up to, taking the firewood in that heavy fall of snow?” Pao-yü thereupon vehemently inquired of goody Liu. “What, if she had got frostbitten and fallen ill?”

“It was the reference made recently to the firewood that was being abstracted,” his grandmother Chia said, “that brought about this fire; and do you still go on asking more about it? Leave this story alone, and tell us something else!”

Hearing this reminder, Pao-yü felt constrained to drop the subject, much against his wishes, and old goody Liu forthwith thought of something else

to tell them.

“In our village,” she resumed, “and on the eastern side of our farmstead, there lives an old dame, whose age is this year, over ninety. She goes in daily for fasting, and worshipping Buddha. Who'd have thought it, she so moved the pity of the goddess of mercy that she gave her this message in a dream: 'It was at one time ordained that you should have no posterity, but as you have proved so devout, I have now memorialised the Pearly Emperor to grant you a grandson!' The fact is, this old dame had one son. This son had had too an only son; but he died after they had with great difficulty managed to rear him to the age of seventeen or eighteen. And what tears didn't they shed for him! But, in course of time, another son was actually born to him. He is this year just thirteen or fourteen, resembles a very ball of flower, (so plump is he), and is clever and sharp to an exceptional degree! So this is indeed a clear proof that those spirits and gods do exist!”

This long tirade proved to be in harmony with dowager lady Chia's and Madame Wang's secret convictions on the subject. Even Madame Wang therefore listened to every word with all profound attention. Pao-yü, however, was so pre-occupied with the story about the stolen firewood that he fell in a brown study and gave way to conjectures.

“Yesterday,” T'an Ch'un at this point remarked, “We put cousin Shih to a lot of trouble and inconvenience, so, when we get back, we must consult about convening a meeting, and, while returning her entertainment, we can also invite our venerable ancestor to come and admire the chrysanthemums; what do you think of this?”

“Our worthy senior,” smiled Pao-yü, “has intimated that she means to give a banquet to return cousin Shih's hospitality, and to ask us to do the honours. Let's wait therefore until we partake of grandmother's collation, before we issue our own invitations; there will be ample time then to do so.”

“The later it gets, the cooler the weather becomes,” T'an Ch'un observed, “and our dear senior is not likely to enjoy herself.”

“Grandmother,” added Pao-yü, “is also fond of rain and snow, so wouldn't it be as well to wait until the first fall, and then ask her to come and look at the snow. This will be better, won't it? And were we to recite our verses with snow about us, it will be ever so much more fun!”

“To hum verses in the snow,” Lin Tai-yü speedily demurred with a smile, “won't, in my idea, be half as nice as building up a heap of firewood and then stealing it, with the flakes playing about us. This will be by far more enjoyable!”

This proposal made Pao-ch'ai and the others laugh. Pao-yü cast a glance at her but made no reply.

But, in a short time, the company broke up. Pao-yü eventually gave old goody Liu a tug on the sly and plied her with minute questions as to who the girl was. The old dame was placed under the necessity of fabricating something for his benefit. “The truth is,” she said, “that there stands on the north bank of the ditch in our village a small ancestral hall, in which offerings are made, but not to spirits or gods. There was in former days some official or other...”

“While speaking, she went on to try and recollect his name and surname.

“No matter about names or surnames!” Pao-yü expostulated. “There's no need for you to recall them to memory! Just mention the facts; they'll be enough.”

“This official,” old goody Liu resumed, “had no son. His offspring consisted of one young daughter, who went under the name of Jo Yü, (like Jade). She could read and write, and was doated upon by this official and his consort, just as if she were a precious jewel. But, unfortunately, when this young lady, Jo Yü, grew up to be seventeen, she contracted some disease and died.”

When these words fell on Pao-yü's ears, he stamped his foot and heaved a sigh. “What happened after that?” he then asked.

Old goody Liu pursued her story.

“So incessantly,” she continued, “did this official and his consort think of their child that they raised this ancestral hall, erected a clay image of their young daughter Jo Yü in it, and appointed some one to burn incense and trim the fires. But so many days and years have now elapsed that the people themselves are no more alive, the temple is in decay, and the image itself is become a spirit.”

“It hasn't become a spirit,” remonstrated Pao-yü with vehemence. “Human beings of this kind may, the rule is, die, yet they are not dead.”

“O-mi-to-fu!” ejaculated old goody Liu; “is it really so! Had you, sir, not enlightened us, we would have remained under the impression that she had become a spirit! But she repeatedly transforms herself into a human

page 241

being, and there she roams about in every village, farmstead, inn and roadside. And the one I mentioned just now as having taken the firewood is that very girl! The villagers in our place are still consulting with the idea of breaking this clay image and razing the temple to the ground.”

“Be quick and dissuade them!” eagerly exclaimed Pao-yü. “Were they to raze the temple to the ground, their crime won't be small.”

“It's lucky that you told me, Sir,” old goody Liu added. “When I get back to-morrow, I'll make them relinquish the idea and finish!”

“Our venerable senior and my mother,” Pao-yü pursued, “are both charitable persons. In fact, all the inmates of our family, whether old or young, do, in like manner, delight in good deeds, and take pleasure in distributing alms. Their greatest relish is to repair temples, and to put up images to the spirits; so to-morrow, I'll make a subscription and collect a few donations for you, and you can then act as incense-burner. When sufficient money has been raised, this fane can be repaired, and another clay image put up; and month by month I'll give you incense and fire money to enable you to burn joss-sticks; won't this be A good thing for you?”

“In that case,” old goody Liu rejoined, “I shall, thanks to that young lady's good fortune, have also a few cash to spend.”

Pao-yü thereupon likewise wanted to know what the name of the place was, the name of the village, how far it was there and back, and whereabouts the temple was situated.

Old goody Liu replied to his questions, by telling him every idle thought that came first to her lips. Pao-yü, however, credited the information she gave him and, on his return to his rooms, he exercised, the whole night, his mind with building castles in the air.

On the morrow, as soon as daylight dawned, he speedily stepped out of his room, and, handing Pei Ming several hundreds of cash, he bade him proceed first in the direction and to the place specified by old goody Liu, and clearly ascertain every detail, so as to enable him, on his return from his errand, to arrive at a suitable decision to carry out his purpose. After Pei Ming's departure, Pao-yü continued on pins on needles and on the tiptoe of expectation. Into such a pitch of excitement did he work himself, that he felt like an ant in a burning pan. With suppressed impatience, he waited and waited until sunset. At last then he perceived Pei Ming walk in, in high glee.

“Have you discovered the place?” hastily inquired Pao-yü.

“Master,” Pei Ming laughed, “you didn't catch distinctly the directions given you, and you made me search in a nice way! The name of the place and the bearings can't be those you gave me, Sir; that is why I've had to hunt about the whole day long! I prosecuted my inquiries up to the very

page 242

ditch on the north east side, before I eventually found a ruined temple.”

Upon hearing the result of his researches, Pao-yü was much gratified. His very eyebrows distended. His eyes laughed. “Old goody Liu,” he said with eagerness, “is a person well up in years, and she may at the moment have remembered wrong; it's very likely she did. But recount to

me what you saw.”

“The door of that temple,” Pei Ming explained, “really faces south, and is all in a tumble-down condition. I searched and searched till I was driven to utter despair. As soon, however, as I caught sight of it, 'that's right,' I shouted, and promptly walked in. But I at once discovered a clay figure, which gave me such a fearful start, that I scampered out again; for it looked as much alive as if it were a real living being.”

Pao-yü smiled full of joy. “It can metamorphose itself into a human being,” he observed, “so, of course, it has more or less a life-like appearance.”

“Was it ever a girl?” Pei Ming rejoined clapping his hands. “Why it was, in fact, no more than a green-faced and red-haired god of plagues.”

Pao-yü, at this answer, spat at him contemptuously. “You are, in very truth, a useless fool!” he cried. “Haven't you even enough gumption for such a trifling job as this?”

“What book, I wonder, have you again been reading, master?” Pei Ming continued. “Or you may, perhaps, have heard some one prattle a lot of trash and believed it as true! You send me on this sort of wild goose chase and make me go and knock my head about, and how can you ever say that I'm good for nothing?”

Pao-yü did not fail to notice that he was in a state of exasperation so he lost no time in trying to calm him. “Don't be impatient!” he urged. “You can go again some other day, when you've got nothing to attend to, and institute further inquiries! If it turns out that she has hood-winked us, why, there will, naturally, be no such thing. But if, verily, there is, won't you also lay up for yourself a store of good deeds? I shall feel it my duty to reward you in a most handsome manner.”

As he spoke, he espied a servant-lad, on service at the second gate, approach and report to him: “The young ladies in our venerable ladyship's apartments are standing at the threshold of the second gate and looking out for you, Mr. Secundus.”

But as, reader, you are not aware what they were on the look-out to tell him, the subsequent chapter will explain it for you.

CHAPTER XL.

The venerable lady Shih attends a second banquet in the garden of Broad Vista.

Chin Yüan-yang three times promulgates, by means of dominoes, the order to quote passages from old writers.

As soon as Pao-yü, we will now explain, heard what the lad told him, he rushed with eagerness inside. When he came to look about him, he discovered Hu Po standing in front of the screen. "Be quick and go," she urged. "They're waiting to speak to you."

Pao-yü wended his way into the drawing rooms. Here he found dowager lady Chia, consulting with Madame Wang and the whole body of young ladies, about the return feast to be given to Shih Hsiang-yün.

"I've got a plan to suggest," he consequently interposed. "As there are to be no outside guests, the eatables too should not be limited to any kind or number. A few of such dishes, as have ever been to the liking of any of us, should be fixed upon and prepared for the occasion. Neither should any banquet be spread, but a high teapoy can be placed in front of each, with one or two things to suit our particular tastes. Besides, a painted box with partitions and a decanter. Won't this be an original way?"

"Capital!" shouted old lady Chia. "Go and tell the people in the cook house," she forthwith ordered a servant, "to get ready to-morrow such dishes as we relish, and to put them in as many boxes as there will be people, and bring them over. We can have breakfast too in the garden."

But while they were deliberating, the time came to light the lamps. Nothing of any note transpired the whole night. The next day, they got up at early dawn. The weather, fortunately, was beautifully clear. Li Wan turned out of bed at daybreak. She was engaged in watching the old matrons and servant-girls sweeping the fallen leaves, rubbing the tables and chairs, and preparing the tea and wine vessels, when she perceived Feng Erh usher in old goody Liu and Pan Erh. "You're very busy, our senior lady!" they said.

“I told you that you wouldn't manage to start yesterday,” Li Wan smiled, “but you were in a hurry to get away.”

“Your worthy old lady,” goody Liu replied laughingly, “wouldn't let me go. She wanted me to enjoy myself too for a day before I went.”

Feng Erh then produced several large and small keys. “Our mistress Lien says,” she remarked, “that she fears that the high teapoys which are out are not enough, and she thinks it would be as well to open the loft and take out those that are put away and use them for a day. Our lady should really have come and seen to it in person, but as she has something to tell Madame Wang, she begs your ladyship to open the place, and get a few servants to bring them out.”

Li Wan there and then told Su Yün to take the keys. She also bade a matron go out and call a few servant-boys from those on duty at the second gate. When they came, Li Wan remained in the lower story of the Ta Kuan loft, and looking up, she ordered the servants to go and open the Cho Chin hall and to bring the teapoys one by one. The young servant-lads, matrons and servant-maids then set to work, in a body, and carried down over twenty of them.

“Be careful with them,” shouted Li Wan. “Don't be bustling about just as if you were being pursued by ghosts! Mind you don't break the tenons!” Turning her head round, “old dame,” she observed, addressing herself smilingly to goody Liu, “go upstairs too and have a look!”

Old goody Liu was longing to satisfy her curiosity, so at the bare mention of the permission, she uttered just one word (“come”) and, dragging Pan Erh along, she trudged up the stairs. On her arrival inside, she espied, pile upon pile, a whole heap of screens, tables and chairs, painted lanterns of different sizes, and other similar articles. She could not, it is true, make out the use of the various things, but, at the sight of so many colours, of such finery and of the unusual beauty of each article, she muttered time after time the name of Buddha, and then forthwith wended her way downstairs. Subsequently (the servants) locked the doors and every one of them came down.

“I fancy,” cried Li Wan, “that our dowager lady will feel disposed (to go on the water), so you'd better also get the poles, oars and awnings for the boats and keep them in readiness.”

The servants expressed their obedience. Once more they unlocked the doors, and carried down everything required. She then bade a lad notify the boatwomen go to the dock and punt out two boats. But while all this bustle was going on, they discovered that dowager lady Chia had already arrived at the head of a whole company of people. Li Wan promptly went up to greet them.

“Dear venerable senior,” she smiled, “you must be in good spirits to have come in here! Imagining that you hadn't as yet combed your hair, I just plucked a few chrysanthemums, meaning to send them to you.”

While she spoke, Pi Yüeh at once presented to her a jadite tray, of the size of a lotus leaf, containing twigs cut from every species of chrysanthemum. Old lady Chia selected a cluster of deep red and pinned it in her hair about her temples. But turning round, she noticed old goody Liu. “Come over here,” she vehemently cried with a smile; “and put on a few flowers.”

Scarcely was this remark concluded, than lady Feng dragged goody Liu forward. “Let me deck you up!” she laughed. With these words, she seized a whole plateful of flowers and stuck them three this way, four that way, all over her head. Old lady Chia, and the whole party were greatly amused; so much so, that they could not check themselves.

“I wonder,” shouted goody Liu smiling, “what blessings I have brought upon my head that such honours are conferred upon it to-day!”

“Don't you yet pull them away,” they all laughed, “and chuck them in her face! She has got you up in such a way as to make a regular old elf of you!”

“I'm an old hag, I admit,” goody Liu pursued with a laugh; “but when I was young, I too was pretty and fond of flowers and powder! But the best thing I can do now is to keep to such fineries as befit my advanced age!”

While they bandied words, they reached the Hsin Fang pavilion. The waiting maids brought a large embroidered rug and spread it over the planks of the divan near the balustrade. On this rug dowager lady Chia sat, with her back leaning against the railing; and, inviting goody Liu to also take a seat next to her, "Is this garden nice or not?" she asked her.

Old goody Liu invoked Buddha several times. "We country-people," she rejoined, "do invariably come, at the close of each year, into the city and buy pictures and stick them about. And frequently do we find ourselves in our leisure moments wondering how we too could manage to get into the pictures, and walk about the scenes they represent. I presumed that those pictures were purely and simply fictitious, for how could there be any such places in reality? But, contrary to my expectations, I found, as soon as I entered this garden to-day and had a look about it, that it was, after all, a hundred times better than these very pictures. But if only I could get some one to make me a sketch of this garden, to take home with me and let them see it, so that when we die we may have reaped some benefit!"

Upon catching the wish she expressed, dowager lady Chia pointed at Hsi Ch'un. "Look at that young granddaughter of mine!" she smiled. "She's got the knack of drawing. So what do you say to my asking her to-morrow to make a picture for you?"

This suggestion filled goody Liu with enthusiasm and speedily crossing over, she clasped Hsi Ch'un in her arms. "My dear Miss!" she cried, "so young in years, and yet so pretty, and so accomplished too! Mightn't you be a spirit come to life!"

After old lady Chia had had a little rest, she in person took goody Liu and showed her everything there was to be seen. First, they visited the Hsiao Hsiang lodge. The moment they stepped into the entrance, a narrow avenue, flanked on either side with kingfisher-like green bamboos, met their gaze. The earth below was turfed all over with moss. In the centre, extended a tortuous road, paved with pebbles. Goody Liu left dowager lady Chia and the party walk on the raised road, while she herself stepped on the earth. But Hu Po tugged at her. "Come up, old dame, and walk here!" she exclaimed. "Mind the fresh moss is slippery and you might fall."

"I don't mind it!" answered goody Liu. "We people are accustomed to walking (on such slippery things)! So, young ladies, please proceed. And do look after your embroidered shoes! Don't splash them with mud."

But while bent upon talking with those who kept on the raised road, she unawares reached a spot, which was actually slippery, and with a sound of "ku tang" she tumbled over.

The whole company clapped their hands and laughed boisterously.

"You young wenches," shouted out dowager lady Chia, "don't you yet raise her up, but stand by giggling?"

This reprimand was still being uttered when goody Liu had already crawled up. She too was highly amused. "Just as my mouth was bragging," she observed, "I got a whack on the lips!"

"Have you perchance twisted your waist?" inquired old lady Chia. "Tell the servant-girls to pat it for you!"

"What an idea!" retorted goody Liu, "am I so delicate? What day ever goes by without my tumbling down a couple of times? And if I had to be patted every time wouldn't it be dreadful!"

Tzu Chuan had at an early period raised the speckled bamboo portiere. Dowager lady Chia and her companions entered and seated themselves. Lin Tai-yü with her own hands took a small tray and came to present a covered cup of tea to her grandmother.

"We won't have any tea!" Madame Wang interposed, "so, miss, you needn't pour any."

Lin Tai-yü, hearing this, bade a waiting-maid fetch the chair from under the window where she herself often sat, and moving it to the lower side, she pressed Madame Wang into it. But goody Liu caught sight of the pencils and inkslabs, lying on the table placed next to the window, and espied the bookcase piled up to the utmost with books. "This must surely," the old dame ejaculated, "be some young gentleman's study!"

"This is the room of this granddaughter-in-law of mine," dowager lady Chia explained, smilingly pointing to Tai-yü.

Goody Liu scrutinised Lin Tai-yü with intentness for a while. "Is this anything like a young lady's private room?" she then observed with a smile. "Why, in very deed, it's superior to any first class library!"

"How is it I don't see Pao-yü?" his grandmother Chia went on to inquire.

"He's in the boat, on the pond," the waiting-maids, with one voice, returned for answer.

"Who also got the boats ready?" old lady Chia asked.

"The loft was open just now so they were taken out," Li Wan said, "and as I thought that you might, venerable senior, feel inclined to have a row, I got everything ready."

After listening to this explanation, dowager lady Chia was about to pass some remark, but some one came and reported to her that Mrs. Hsüeh had arrived. No sooner had old lady Chia and the others sprung to their feet than they noticed that Mrs. Hsüeh had already made her appearance. While taking a seat: "Your venerable ladyship," she smiled, "must be in capital spirits to-day to have come at this early hour!"

"It's only this very minute that I proposed that any one who came late, should be fined," dowager lady Chia laughed, "and, who'd have thought it, here you, Mrs. Hsüeh, arrive late!"

After they had indulged in good-humoured raillery for a time, old lady Chia's attention was attracted by the faded colour of the gauze on the windows, and she addressed herself to Madame Wang. "This gauze," she said, "may have been nice enough when it was newly pasted, but after a time nothing remained of kingfisher green. In this court too there are no peach or apricot trees and these bamboos already are green in themselves, so were this shade of green gauze to be put up again, it would, instead of improving matters, not harmonise with the surroundings. I remember that we had at one time four or five kinds of

coloured gauzes for sticking on windows, so give her some to-morrow to change that on there.”

“When I opened the store yesterday,” hastily put in Lady Feng, “I noticed that there were still in those boxes, made of large planks, several rolls of 'cicada wing' gauze of silvery red colour. There were also several rolls with designs of twigs of flowers of every kind, several with 'the rolling clouds and bats' pattern, and several with figures representing hundreds of butterflies, interspersed among flowers. The colours of all these were fresh, and the gauze supple. But I failed to see anything of the kind you speak of. Were two rolls taken (from those I referred to), and a couple of bed-covers of embroidered gauze made out of them, they would, I fancy, be a pretty sight!”

“Pshaw!” laughed old lady Chia, “every one says that there's nothing you haven't gone through and nothing you haven't seen, and don't you even know what this gauze is? Will you again brag by and bye, after this?”

Mrs. Hsüeh and all the others smiled. “She may have gone through a good deal,” they remarked, “but how can she ever presume to pit herself against an old lady like you? So why don't you, venerable senior, tell her what it is so that we too may be edified.”

Lady Feng too gave a smile. “My dear ancestor,” she pleaded, “do tell me what it is like.”

Dowager lady Chia thereupon proceeded to enlighten Mrs. Hsüeh and the whole company. “That gauze is older in years than any one of you,” she said. “It isn't therefore to be wondered, if you make a mistake and take it for 'cicada wing' gauze. But it really bears some resemblance to it; so much so, indeed, that any one, not knowing the difference, would imagine it to be the 'cicada wing' gauze. Its true name, however, is 'soft smoke' silk.”

“This is also a nice sounding name,” lady Feng agreed. “But up to the age I've reached, I have never heard of any such designation, in spite of the many hundreds of specimens of gauzes and silks, I've seen.”

“How long can you have lived?” old lady Chia added smilingly, “and how

many kinds of things can you have met, that you indulge in this tall talk? Of this 'soft smoke' silk, there only exist four kinds of colours. The one is red-blue; the other is russet; the other pine-green; the other silvery-red; and it's because, when made into curtains or stuck on window-frames, it looks from far like smoke or mist, that it is called 'soft smoke' silk. The silvery-red is also called 'russet shadow' gauze. Among the gauzes used in the present day, in the palace above, there are none so supple and rich, light and closely-woven as this!"

"Not to speak of that girl Feng not having seen it," Mrs. Hsüeh laughed, "why, even I have never so much as heard anything of it."

While the conversation proceeded in this strain, lady Feng soon directed a servant to fetch a roll. "Now isn't this the kind!" dowager lady Chia exclaimed. "At first, we simply had it stuck on the window frames, but we subsequently used it for covers and curtains, just for a trial, and really they were splendid! So you had better to-morrow try and find several rolls, and take some of the silvery-red one and have it fixed on the windows for her."

While lady Feng promised to attend to her commission, the party scrutinised it, and unanimously extolled it with effusion. Old goody Liu too strained her eyes and examined it, and her lips incessantly muttered Buddha's name. "We couldn't," she ventured, "afford to make clothes of such stuff, much though we may long to do so; and won't it be a pity to use it for sticking on windows?"

"But it doesn't, after all, look well, when made into clothes," old lady Chia explained.

Lady Feng hastily pulled out the lapel of the deep-red brocaded gauze jacket she had on, and, facing dowager lady Chia and Mrs. Hsüeh, "Look at this jacket of mine," she remarked.

"This is also of first-rate quality!" old lady Chia and Mrs. Hsüeh rejoined. "This is nowadays made in the palace for imperial use, but it can't possibly come up to this!"

"It's such thin stuff," lady Feng observed, "and do you still say that it was

made in the palace for imperial use? Why, it doesn't, in fact, compare favourably with even this, which is worn by officials!"

"You'd better search again!" old lady Chia urged; "I believe there must be more of it! If there be, bring it all out, and give this old relative Liu a couple of rolls! Should there be any red-blue, I'll make a curtain to hang up. What remains can be matched with some lining, and cut into a few double waistcoats for the waiting-maids to wear. It would be sheer waste to keep these things, as they will be spoilt by the damp."

Lady Feng vehemently acquiesced; after which, she told a servant to take the gauze away.

"These rooms are so small!" dowager lady Chia then observed, smiling. "We had better go elsewhere for a stroll."

"Every one says," old goody Liu put in, "that big people live in big houses! When I saw yesterday your main apartments, dowager lady, with all those large boxes, immense presses, big tables, and spacious beds to match, they did, indeed, present an imposing sight! Those presses are larger than our whole house; yea loftier too! But strange to say there were ladders in the back court. 'They don't also,' I thought, 'go up to the house tops to sun things, so what can they keep those ladders in readiness for?' Well, after that, I remembered that they must be required for opening the presses to take out or put in things. And that without those ladders, how could one ever reach that height? But now that I've also seen these small rooms, more luxuriously got up than the large ones, and full of various articles, all so fascinating and hardly even known to me by name, I feel, the more I feast my eyes on them, the more unable to tear myself away from them."

"There are other things still better than this," lady Feng added. "I'll take you to see them all!"

Saying this, they straightway left the Hsiao Hsiang lodge. From a distance, they spied a whole crowd of people punting the boats in the lake.

"As they've got the boats ready," old lady Chia proposed, "we may as

well go and have a row in them!”

As she uttered this suggestion, they wended their steps along the persicary-covered bank of the Purple Lily Isle. But before reaching the lake, they perceived several matrons advancing that way with large multi-coloured boxes in their hands, made all alike of twisted wire and inlaid with gold. Lady Feng hastened to inquire of Madame Wang where breakfast was to be served.

“Ask our venerable senior,” Madame Wang replied, “and let them lay it wherever she pleases.”

Old lady Chia overheard her answer, and turning her head round: “Miss Tertia,” she said, “take the servants, and make them lay breakfast wherever you think best! We’ll get into the boats from here.”

Upon catching her senior's wishes, lady Feng retraced her footsteps, and accompanied by Li Wan, T'an Ch'un, Yüan Yang and Hu Po, she led off the servants, carrying the eatables, and other domestics, and came by the nearest way, to the Ch'iu Shuang library, where they arranged the tables in the Hsiao Ts'ui hall.

“We daily say that whenever the gentlemen outside have anything to drink or eat, they invariably have some one who can raise a laugh and whom they can chaff for fun's sake,” Yuan Yang smiled, “so let's also to-day get a female family-companion.”

Li Wan, being a person full of kindly feelings, did not fathom the insinuation, though it did not escape her ear. Lady Feng, however, thoroughly understood that she alluded to old goody Liu. “Let us too to-day,” she smilingly remarked, “chaff her for a bit of fun!”

These two then began to mature their plans.

Li Wan chided them with a smile. “You people,” she said, “don't know even how to perform the least good act! But you're not small children any more, and are you still up to these pranks? Mind, our venerable ancestor might call you to task!”

“That has nothing whatever to do with you, senior lady,” Yüan Yang laughed, “it's my own look out!”

These words were still on her lips, when she saw dowager lady Chia and the rest of the company arrive. They each sat where and how they pleased. First and foremost, a waiting-maid brought two trays of tea. After tea, lady Feng laid hold of a napkin, made of foreign cloth, in which were wrapped a handful of blackwood chopsticks, encircled with three rings, of inlaid silver, and distributed them on the tables, in the order in which they were placed.

“Bring that small hard-wood table over,” old lady Chia then exclaimed; “and let our relative Liu sit next to me here!”

No sooner did the servants hear her order than they hurried to move the table to where she wanted it. Lady Feng, during this interval, made a sign with her eye to Yüan Yang. Yüan Yang there and then dragged goody Liu out of the hall and began to impress in a low tone of voice various things on her mind. “This is the custom which prevails in our household,” she proceeded, “and if you disregard it we'll have a laugh at your expense!”

Having arranged everything she had in view, they at length returned to their places. Mrs. Hsüeh had come over, after her meal, so she simply seated herself on one side and sipped her tea. Dowager lady Chia with Pao-yü, Hsiang-yün, Tai-yü and Pao-ch'ai sat at one table. Madame Wang took the girls, Ying Ch'un, and her sisters, and occupied one table. Old goody Liu took a seat at a table next to dowager lady Chia. Heretofore, while their old mistress had her repast, a young servant-maid usually stood by her to hold the finger bowl, yak-brush, napkin and other such necessaries, but Yüan Yang did not of late fulfil any of these duties, so when, on this occasion, she deliberately seized the yak-brush and came over and flapped it about, the servant-girls concluded that she was bent upon playing some tricks upon goody Liu, and they readily withdrew and let her have her way.

While Yüan Yang attended to her self-imposed duties, she winked at the old dame.

“Miss,” goody Liu exclaimed, “set your mind at ease!” Goody Liu sat

down at the table and took up the chopsticks, but so heavy and clumsy did she find them that she could not handle them conveniently. The fact is that lady Feng and Yüan Yang had put their heads together and decided to only assign to goody Liu a pair of antiquated four-cornered ivory chopsticks, inlaid with gold.

“These forks,” shouted goody Liu, after scrutinising them, “are heavier than the very iron-lever over at my place. How ever can I move them about?”

This remark had the effect of making every one explode into a fit of laughter. But a married woman standing in the centre of the room, with a box in her hands, attracted their gaze. A waiting-maid went up to her and removed the cover of the box. Its contents were two bowls of eatables. Li Wan took one of these and placed it on dowager lady Chia's table, while lady Feng chose the bowl with pigeon's eggs and put it on goody Liu's table.

“Please (commence),” Dowager lady Chia uttered from the near side, where she sat.

Goody Liu at this speedily sprung to her feet. “Old Liu, old Liu,” she roared with a loud voice, “your eating capacity is as big as that of a buffalo! You've gorged like an old sow and can't raise your head up!” Then puffing out her cheeks, she added not a word.

The whole party was at first taken quite aback. But, as soon as they heard the drift of her remarks, every one, both high as well as low, began to laugh boisterously. Hsiang-yün found it so difficult to restrain herself that she spurted out the tea she had in her mouth. Lin Tai-yü indulged in such laughter that she was quite out of breath, and propping herself up on the table, she kept on ejaculating 'Ai-yo.' Pao-yü rolled into his grandmother's lap. The old lady herself was so amused that she clasped Pao-yü in her embrace, and gave way to endearing epithets. Madame Wang laughed, and pointed at lady Feng with her finger; but as for saying a word, she could not. Mrs. Hsüeh had much difficulty in curbing her mirth, and she sputtered the tea, with which her mouth was full, all over T'an Ch'un's petticoat. T'an Ch'un threw the contents of the teacup, she held in her hand, over Ying Ch'un; while Hsi Ch'un quitted her seat, and,

pulling her nurse away, bade her rub her stomach for her.

Below, among the lower seats, there was not one who was not with bent waist and doubled-up back. Some retired to a corner and, squatting down, laughed away. Others suppressed their laughter and came up and changed the clothes of their young mistresses. Lady Feng and Yuan Yang were the only ones, who kept their countenance. Still they continued helping old goody Liu to food.

Old goody Liu took up the chopsticks. "Even the chickens in this place are fine," she went on to add, pretending, she did not hear what was going on; "the eggs they lay are small, but so dainty! How very pretty they are! Let me help myself to one!"

The company had just managed to check themselves, but, the moment these words fell on their ears, they started again with their laughter. Old lady Chia laughed to such an extent that tears streamed from her eyes. And so little could she bear the strain any longer that Hu Po stood behind her and patted her.

"This must be the work of that vixen Feng!" old lady Chia laughed. "She has ever been up to tricks like a very imp, so be quick and disbelieve all her yarns!"

Goody Liu was in the act of praising the eggs as small yet dainty, when lady Feng interposed with a smile. "They're one tael each, be quick, and taste them;" she said; "they're not nice when they get cold!"

Goody Liu forthwith stretched out the chopsticks with the intent of catching one; but how could she manage to do so? They rolled and rolled in the bowl for ever so long; and, it was only after extreme difficulty that she succeeded in shoving one up. Extending her neck forward, she was about to put it in her mouth, when it slipped down again, and rolled on to the floor. She hastily banged down the chopsticks, and was going herself to pick it up, when a servant, who stood below, got hold of it and took it out of the room.

Old goody Liu heaved a sigh. "A tael!" she soliloquised, "and here it goes without a sound!"

Every one had long ago abandoned all idea of eating, and, gazing at her, they enjoyed the fun.

“Who has now brought out these chopsticks again?” old lady Chia went on to ask. “We haven't invited any strangers or spread any large banquet! It must be that vixen Feng who gave them out! But don't you yet change them!”

The servants, standing on the floor below, had indeed had no hand in getting those ivory chopsticks; they had, in fact, been brought by lady Feng and Yüan Yang; but when they heard these remarks, they hurried to put them away and to change them for a pair similar to those used by the others, made of blackwood inlaid with silver.

“They've taken away the gold ones,” old goody Liu shouted, “and here come silver ones! But, after all, they're not as handy as those we use!”

“Should there be any poison in the viands,” lady Feng observed, “you can detect it, as soon as this silver is dipped into them!”

“If there's poison in such viands as these,” old goody Liu added, “why those of ours must be all arsenic! But though it be the death of me, I'll swallow every morsel!”

Seeing how amusing the old woman was and with what relish she devoured her food, dowager lady Chia took her own dishes and passed them over to her.

She then likewise bade an old matron take various viands and put them in a bowl for Pan Erh. But presently, the repast was concluded, and old lady Chia and all the other inmates adjoined into T'an Ch'un's bedroom for a chat.

The remnants were, meanwhile, cleared away, and fresh tables were laid.

Old goody Liu watched Li Wan and lady Feng sit opposite each other and eat. “Putting everything else aside,” she sighed, “what most takes my

fancy is the way things are done in your mansion. It isn't to be wondered at that the adage has it that: 'propriety originates from great families.'"

"Don't be too touchy," lady Feng hastily smiled, "we all made fun of you just now."

But barely had she done speaking, when Yüan Yang too walked in. "Old goody Liu," she said laughingly, "don't be angry! I tender you my apologies, venerable dame!"

"What are you saying, Miss?" old goody Liu rejoined smiling. "We've coaxed our dowager lady to get a little distraction; and what reason is there to be angry? From the very first moment you spoke to me, I knew at once that it was intended to afford merriment to you all! Had I been angry at heart, I wouldn't have gone so far as to say what I did!"

Yüan Yang then blew up the servants. "Why," she shouted, "don't you pour a cup of tea for the old dame?"

"That sister-in-law," promptly explained old goody Liu, "gave me a cup a little while back. I've had it already. But you, Miss, must also have something to eat."

Lady Feng dragged Yüan Yang into a seat. "Have your meal with us!" she said. "You'll thus save another fuss by and bye."

Yüan Yang readily seated herself. The matrons came up and added to the number of bowls and chopsticks, and the trio went through their meal.

"From all I see," smiled goody Liu, "you people eat just a little and finish. It's lucky you don't feel the pangs of hunger! But it isn't astonishing if a whiff of wind can puff you over!"

"A good many eatables remained over to-day. Where are they all gone to?" Yüan Yang inquired.

"They haven't as yet been apportioned!" the matrons responded. "They're kept in here until they can be given in a lump to them to eat!"

“They can't get through so many things!” Yüan Yang resumed. “You had as well therefore choose two bowls and send them over to that girl P'ing, in your mistress Secundus' rooms.”

“She has had her repast long ago.” lady Feng put in. “There's no need to give her any!”

“With what she can't eat, herself,” Yüan Yang continued, “she can feed the cats.”

At these words, a matron lost no time in selecting two sorts of eatables, and, taking the box, she went to take them over.

“Where's Su Yun gone to?” Yüan Yang asked.

“They're all in here having their meal together.” Li Wan replied. “What do you want her for again?”

“Well, in that case, never mind,” Yüan Yang answered.

“Hsi Jen isn't here,” lady Feng observed, “so tell some one to take her a few things!”

Yuan Yang, hearing this, directed a servant to send her also a few eatables. “Have the partition boxes been filled with wine for by and bye?” Yüan Yang went on to ask the matrons.

“They'll be ready, I think, in a little while,” a matron explained.

“Hurry them up a bit!” Yüan Yang added.

The matron signified her assent.

Lady Feng and her friends then came into T'an Ch'un's apartments, where they found the ladies chatting and laughing.

T'an Ch'un had ever shown an inclination for plenty of room. Hence that suite of three apartments had never been partitioned. In the centre was placed a large table of rosewood and Ta li marble. On this table, were

laid in a heap every kind of copyslips written by persons of note. Several tens of valuable inkslabs and various specimens of tubes and receptacles for pens figured also about; the pens in which were as thickly packed as trees in a forest. On the off side, stood a flower bowl from the 'Ju' kiln, as large as a bushel measure. In it was placed, till it was quite full, a bunch of white chrysanthemums, in appearance like crystal balls. In the middle of the west wall, was suspended a large picture representing vapor and rain; the handiwork of Mi Nang-yang. On the left and right of this picture was hung a pair of antithetical scrolls—the autograph of Yen Lü. The lines on these scrolls were:

*Wild scenes are to the taste of those who leisure love,
And springs and rookeries are their rustic resort.*

On the table, figured a large tripod. On the left, stood on a blackwood cabinet, a huge bowl from a renowned government kiln. This bowl contained about ten “Buddha's hands” of beautiful yellow and fine proportions. On the right, was suspended, on a Japanese-lacquered frame, a white jade sonorous plate. Its shape resembled two eyes, one by the side of the other. Next to it hung a small hammer.

Pan Erh had become a little more confident and was about to seize the hammer and beat the plate, when the waiting-maids hastened to prevent him. Next, he wanted a “Buddha's hand” to eat. T'an Ch'un chose one and let him have it. “You may play with it,” she said, “but you can't eat it.”

On the east side stood a sleeping divan. On a movable bed was hung a leek-green gauze curtain, ornamented with double embroideries, representing flowers, plants and insects. Pan Erh ran up to have a look. “This is a green-cicada,” he shouted; “this a grasshopper!”

But old goody Liu promptly gave him a slap. “You mean scamp!” she cried. “What an awful rumpus you're kicking up! I simply brought you along with me to look at things; and lo, you put on airs;” and she beat Pan Erh until he burst out crying. It was only after every one quickly combined in using their efforts to solace him that he at length desisted.

Old lady Chia then looked through the gauze casement into the back court for some time. “The dryandra trees by the eaves of the covered

passage are growing all right," she remarked. "The only thing is that their foliage is rather sparse."

But while she passed this remark, a sudden gust of wind swept by, and faintly on her ear fell the strains of music. "In whose house is there a wedding?" old lady Chia inquired. "This place must be very near the street!"

"How could one hear what's going on in the street?" Madame Wang and the others smiled. "It's our twelve girls practising on their wind and string instruments!"

"As they're practising," dowager lady Chia eagerly cried, smilingly, "why not ask them to come in here and practise? They'll be able to have a stroll also, while we, on our part, will derive some enjoyment."

Upon hearing this suggestion, lady Feng immediately directed a servant to go out and call them in. She further issued orders to bring a table and spread a red cover over it.

"Let it be put," old lady Chia chimed in, "in the water-pavilion of the Lotus Fragrance Arbour, for (the music) will borrow the ripple of the stream and sound ever so much more pleasant to the ear. We can by and bye drink our wine in the Cho Chin Hall; we'll thus have ample room, and be able to listen from close!"

Every one admitted that the spot was well adapted. Dowager lady Chia turned herself towards Mrs. Hsüeh. "Let's get ahead!" she laughed. "The young ladies don't like any one to come in here, for fear lest their quarters should get contaminated; so don't let us show ourselves disregarding of their wishes! The right thing would be to go and have our wine aboard one of those boats!"

As she spoke, one and all rose to their feet. They were making their way out when T'an Ch'un interposed. "What's this that you're saying?" she smiled. "Please do seat yourselves, venerable senior, and you, Mrs. Hsüeh, and Madame Wang! You can't be going yet?"

"These three girls of mine are really nice! There are only two mistresses

that are simply dreadful.” Dowager lady Chia said smilingly. “When we get drunk shortly, we'll go and sit in their rooms and have a lark!”

These words evoked laughter from every one. In a body they quitted the place. But they had not proceeded far before they reached the bank covered with aquatic plants, to which place the boat-women, who had been brought from Ku Su, had already punted two crab-wood boats. Into one of these boats, they helped old lady Chia, Madame Wang, Mrs. Hsüeh, old goody Liu, Yüan Yang, and Yü Ch'uan-Erh. Last in order Li Wan followed on board. But lady Feng too stepped in, and standing up on the bow, she insisted upon punting.

Dowager lady Chia, however, remonstrated from her seat in the bottom of the boat. “This isn't a joke,” she cried, “we're not on the river, it's true, but there are some very deep places about, so be quick and come in. Do it for my sake.”

“What's there to be afraid of?” lady Feng laughed. “Compose your mind, worthy ancestor.”

Saying this, the boat was pushed off with one shove. When it reached the middle of the lake, lady Feng became nervous, for the craft was small and the occupants many, and hastily handing the pole to a boatwoman, she squatted down at last.

Ying Ch'un, her sisters, their cousins, as well as Pao-yü subsequently got on board the second boat, and followed in their track; while the rest of the company, consisting of old nurses and a bevy of waiting-maids, kept pace with them along the bank of the stream.

“All these broken lotus leaves are dreadful!” Pao-yü shouted. “Why don't you yet tell the servants to pull them off?”

“When was this garden left quiet during all the days of this year?” Pao-ch'ai smiled. “Why, people have come, day after day, to visit it, so was there ever any time to tell the servants to come and clean it?”

“I have the greatest abhorrence,” Lin Tai-yü chimed in, “for Li I's poetical works, but there's only this line in them which I like:

“Leave the dry lotus leaves so as to hear the patter of the rain.’

“and here you people deliberately mean again not to leave the dry lotus stay where they are.”

“This is indeed a fine line!” Pao-yü exclaimed. “We mustn’t hereafter let them pull them away!”

While this conversation continued, they reached the shoaly inlet under the flower-laden beech. They felt a coolness from the shady overgrowth penetrate their very bones. The decaying vegetation and the withered aquatic chestnut plants on the sand-bank enhanced, to a greater degree, the beauty of the autumn scenery.

Dowager lady Chia at this point observed some spotless rooms on the bank, so spick and so span. “Are not these Miss Hsüeh’s quarters,” she asked. “Eh?”

“Yes, they are!” everybody answered.

Old lady Chia promptly bade them go alongside, and wending their way up the marble steps, which seemed to lead to the clouds, they in a body entered the Heng Wu court. Here they felt a peculiar perfume come wafting into their nostrils, for the colder the season got the greener grew that strange vegetation, and those fairy-like creepers. The various plants were laden with seeds, which closely resembled red coral beans, as they drooped in lovely clusters.

The house, as soon as they put their foot into it, presented the aspect of a snow cave. There was a total absence of every object of ornament. On the table figured merely an earthenware vase, in which were placed several chrysanthemums. A few books and teacups were also conspicuous, but no further knickknacks. On the bed was suspended a green gauze curtain, and of equally extreme plainness were the coverlets and mattresses belonging to it.

“This child,” dowager lady Chia sighed, “is too simple! If you’ve got nothing to lay about, why not ask your aunt for a few articles? I would

never raise any objection. I never thought about them. Your things, of course, have been left at home, and have not been brought over."

So saying, she told Yuan Yang to go and fetch several bric-a-brac. She next went on to call lady Feng to task.

"She herself wouldn't have them," (lady Feng) rejoined. "We really sent over a few, but she refused every one of them and returned them."

"In her home also," smiled Mrs. Hsüeh, "she does not go in very much for such sort of things."

Old lady Chia nodded her head. "It will never do!" she added. "It does, it's true, save trouble; but were some relative to come on a visit, she'll find things in an impossible way. In the second place, such simplicity in the apartments of young ladies of tender age is quite unpropitious! Why, if you young people go on in this way, we old fogies should go further and live in stables! You've all heard what is said in those books and plays about the dreadful luxury, with which young ladies' quarters are got up. And though these girls of ours could not presume to place themselves on the same footing as those young ladies, they shouldn't nevertheless exceed too much the bounds of what constitutes the right thing. If they have any objects ready at hand, why shouldn't they lay them out? And if they have any strong predilection for simplicity, a few things less will do quite as well. I've always had the greatest knack for titifying a room, but being an old woman now I haven't the ease and inclination to attend to such things! These girls are, however, learning how to do things very nicely. I was afraid that there would be an appearance of vulgarity in what they did, and that, even had they anything worth having, they'd so place them about as to spoil them; but from what I can see there's nothing vulgar about them. But let me now put things right for you, and I'll wager that everything will look grand as well as plain. I've got a couple of my own knickknacks, which I've managed to keep to this day, by not allowing Pao-yü to get a glimpse of them; for had he ever seen them, they too would have long ago disappeared!" Continuing, she called Yüan Yang. "Fetch that marble pot with scenery on it," she said to her; "that gauze screen, and that tripod of transparent stone with black streaks, which you'll find in there, and lay out all three on this table. They'll be ample! Bring likewise those ink pictures and white silk curtains, and change

these curtains.”

Yüan Yang expressed her obedience. “All these articles have been put away in the eastern loft,” she smiled. “In what boxes they've been put, I couldn't tell; I must therefore go and find them quietly and if I bring them over to-morrow, it will be time enough.”

“To-morrow or the day after will do very well; but don't forget, that's all,” dowager lady Chia urged.

While conversing, they sat for a while. Presently, they left the rooms and repaired straightway into the Cho Chin hall. Wen Kuan and the other girls came up and paid their obeisance. They next inquired what songs they were to practise.

“You'd better choose a few pieces to rehearse out of those you know best,” old lady Chia rejoined.

Wen Kuan and her companions then withdrew and betook themselves to the Lotus Fragrance Pavilion. But we will leave them there without further allusion to them.

During this while, lady Feng had already, with the help of servants, got everything in perfect order. On the left and right of the side of honour were placed two divans. These divans were completely covered with embroidered covers and fine variegated mats. In front of each divan stood two lacquer teapoys, inlaid, some with designs of crab-apple flowers; others of plum blossom, some of lotus leaves, others of sun-flowers. Some of these teapoys were square, others round. Their shapes were all different. On each was placed a set consisting of a stove and a bottle, also a box with partitions. The two divans and four teapoys, in the place of honour, were used by dowager lady Chia and Mrs. Hsüeh. The chair and two teapoys in the next best place, by Madame Wang. The rest of the inmates had, all alike, a chair and a teapoy. On the east side sat old goody Liu. Below old goody Liu came Madame Wang. On the west was seated Shih Hsiang-yün. The second place was occupied by Pao-ch'ai; the third by Tai-yü; the fourth by Ying Ch'un. T'an Ch'un and Hsi Ch'un filled the lower seats, in their proper order; Pao-yü sat in the last place. The two teapoys assigned to Li Wan and lady Feng stood within

the third line of railings, and beyond the second row of gauze frames. The pattern of the partition-boxes corresponded likewise with the pattern on the teapots. Each inmate had a black decanter, with silver, inlaid in foreign designs; as well as an ornamented, enamelled cup.

After they had all occupied the seats assigned to them, dowager lady Chia took the initiative and smilingly suggested: "Let's begin by drinking a couple of cups of wine. But we should also have a game of forfeits to-day, we'll have plenty of fun then."

"You, venerable senior, must certainly have a good wine order to impose," Mrs. Hsüeh laughingly observed, "but how could we ever comply with it? But if your aim be to intoxicate us, why, we'll all straightway drink one or two cups more than is good for us and finish!"

"Here's Mrs. Hsüeh beginning to be modest again to-day!" old lady Chia smiled. "But I expect it's because she looks down upon me as being an old hag!"

"It isn't modesty!" Mrs. Hsüeh replied smiling. "It's all a dread lest I shouldn't be able to observe the order and thus incur ridicule."

"If you don't give the right answer," Madame Wang promptly interposed with a smile, "you'll only have to drink a cup or two more of wine, and should we get drunk, we can go to sleep; and who'll, pray laugh at us?"

Mrs. Hsüeh nodded her head. "I'll agree to the order," she laughed, "but, dear senior, you must, after all, do the right thing and have a cup of wine to start it."

"This is quite natural!" old lady Chia answered laughingly; and with these words, she forthwith emptied a cup.

Lady Feng with hurried steps advanced to the centre of the room. "If we are to play at forfeits," she smilingly proposed, "we'd better invite sister Yüan Yang to come and join us."

The whole company was perfectly aware that if dowager lady Chia had to give out the rule of forfeits, Yüan Yang would necessarily have to suggest

it, so the moment they heard the proposal they, with common consent, approved it as excellent. Lady Feng therefore there and then dragged Yüan Yang over.

“As you're to take a part in the game of forfeits,” Madame Wang smilingly observed, “there's no reason why you should stand up.” And turning her head round, “Bring over,” she bade a young waiting-maid, “a chair and place it at your Mistress Secunda's table.”

Yüan Yang, half refusing and half assenting, expressed her thanks, and took the seat. After partaking also of a cup of wine, “Drinking rules,” she smiled, “resemble very much martial law; so irrespective of high or low, I alone will preside. Any one therefore who disobeys my words will have to suffer a penalty.”

“Of course, it should be so!” Madame Wang and the others laughed, “so be quick and give out the rule!”

But before Yüan Yang had as yet opened her lips to speak, old goody Liu left the table, and waving her hand: “Don't,” she said, “make fun of people in this way, for I'll go home.”

“This will never do!” One and all smilingly protested.

Yüan Yang shouted to the young waiting-maids to drag her back to her table; and the maids, while also indulging in laughter, actually pulled her and compelled her to rejoin the banquet.

“Spare me!” old goody Liu kept on crying, “spare me!”

“Any one who says one word more,” Yüan Yang exclaimed, “will be fined a whole decanter full.”

Old goody Liu then at length observed silence.

“I'll now give out the set of dominoes.” Yüan Yang proceeded. “I'll begin from our venerable mistress and follow down in proper order until I come to old goody Liu, when I shall stop. So as to illustrate what I meant just now by giving out a set, I'll take these three dominoes and place them

apart; you have to begin by saying something on the first, next, to allude to the second, and, after finishing with all three, to take the name of the whole set and match it with a line, no matter whether it be from some stanza or roundelay, song or idyl, set phrases or proverbs. But they must rhyme. And any one making a mistake will be mulcted in one cup."

"This rule is splendid; begin at once!" they all exclaimed.

"I've got a set," Yüan Yang pursued; "on the left, is the piece 'heaven,' (twelve dots)."

"Above head stretches the blue heaven,"

dowager lady Chia said.

"Good!" shouted every one.

"In the centre is a five and six," Yüan Yang resumed.

The fragrance of the plum blossom pierces the bones on the bridge
"Six,"

old lady Chia added.

"There now remains," Yüan Yang explained, "one piece, the six and one."

"From among the fleecy clouds issues the wheel-like russet sun."

dowager lady Chia continued.

"The whole combined," Yuan Yang observed "forms 'the devil with dishevelled hair.'"

"This devil clasps the leg of the 'Chung Pa' devil,"

old lady Chia observed.

At the conclusion of her recitation, they all burst out laughing. "Capital!" they shouted. Old lady Chia drained a cup. Yüan Yang then went on to

remark, "I've got another set; the one on the left is a double five."

"Bud after bud of the plum bloom dances in the wind,"

Mrs. Hsüeh replied.

"The one on the right is a ten spot," Yüan Yang pursued.

"In the tenth moon the plum bloom on the hills emits its fragrant smell,"

Mrs. Hsüeh added.

"The middle piece is the two and five, making the 'unlike seven;'" Yüan Yang observed.

"The 'spinning damsel' star meets the 'cow-herd' on the eve of the seventh day of the seventh moon,"

Miss Hsüeh said.

"Together they form: 'Erh Lang strolls on the five mounds;'" Yüan Yang continued.

"Mortals cannot be happy as immortals,"

Mrs. Hsüeh rejoined.

Her answers over, the whole company extolled them and had a drink. "I've got another set!" Yüan Yang once more exclaimed. "On the left, are distinctly the distant dots of the double ace."

"Both sun and moon are so suspended as to shine on heaven and earth,"

Hsiang-yün ventured.

"On the right, are a couple of spots, far apart, which clearly form a one and one." Yüan Yang pursued.

“What time a lonesome flower falls to the ground, no sound is audible,”

Hsiang-yün rejoined.

“In the middle, there is the one and four,” Yüan Yang added.

“The red apricot tree is planted by the sun, and leans against the clouds;”

Hsiang-yün answered.

“Together they form the 'cherry fruit ripens for the ninth time,'“ Yüan Yang said.

“In the imperial garden it is pecked by birds.”

Hsiang-yün replied.

When she had done with her part, she drank a cup of wine. “I've got another set,” Yüan Yang began, “the one on the left is a double three.”

“The swallows, pair by pair, chatter on the beams;”

Pao-ch'ai remarked.

“The right piece is a six,” Yüan Yang added.

“The marsh flower is stretched by the breeze e'en to the length of a green sash,”

Pao-ch'ai returned.

“The centre piece is a three and six, making a nine spot,” Yüan Yang pursued.

“The three hills tower half beyond the azure skies;”

Pao-ch'ai rejoined.

“Lumped together they form: a 'chain-bound solitary boat,” Yüan Yang resumed.

“Where there are wind and waves, there I feel sad;”

Pao-ch'ai answered.

When she had finished her turn and drained her cup, Yüan Yang went on again. “On the left,” she said, “there's a 'heaven.”

“A morning fine and beauteous scenery, but, alas, what a day for me!”

Tai-yü replied.

When this line fell on Pao-chai's ear, she turned her head round and cast a glance at her, but Tai-yü was so nervous lest she should have to pay a forfeit that she did not so much as notice her.

“In the middle there's the 'colour of the embroidered screen, (ten spots, four and six), is beautiful,” Yüan Yang proceeded.

“Not e'en Hung Niang to the gauze window comes, any message to bring.”

Tai-yü responded.

“There now remains a two and six, eight in all,” Yüan Yang resumed.

“Twice see the jady throne when led in to perform the court ritual,”

Tai-yü replied.

“Together they form 'a basket suitable for putting plucked flowers in,” Yüan Yang continued.

“The fairy wand smells nice as on it hangs a peony.”

Tai-yü retorted.

At the close of her replies, she took a sip of wine. Yüan Yang then resumed. "On the left," she said, "there's a four and five, making a 'different-combined nine.'"

"The peach blossoms bear heavy drops of rain;"

Ying Ch'un remarked.

The company laughed. "She must be fined!" they exclaimed. "She has made a mistake in the rhyme. Besides, it isn't right!"

Ying Ch'un smiled and drank a sip. The fact is that both lady Feng and Yüan Yang were so eager to hear the funny things that would be uttered by old goody Liu, that they with one voice purposely ruled that every one answered wrong and fined them. When it came to Madame Wang's turn, Yüan Yang recited something for her. Next followed old goody Liu.

"When we country-people have got nothing to do," old goody Liu said, "a few of us too often come together and play this sort of game; but the answers we give are not so high-flown; yet, as I can't get out of it, I'll likewise make a try!"

"It's easy enough to say what there is," one and all laughed, "so just you go on and don't mind!"

"On the left," Yüan Yang smiled, "there's a double four, i.e. 'man.'"

Goody Liu listened intently. After considerable reflection,

"It's a peasant!"

she cried.

One and all in the room blurted out laughing.

"Well-said!" dowager lady Chia observed with a laugh, "that's the way."

"All we country-people know," old goody Liu proceeded, also laughing, "is

just what comes within our own rough-and-ready wits, so young ladies and ladies pray don't poke fun at me!"

"In the centre there's the three and four, green matched with red," Yüan Yang pursued.

"The large fire burnt the hairy caterpillar;"

old goody Liu ventured.

"This will do very well!", the party laughed, "go on with what is in your line."

"On the right," Yüan Yang smilingly continued, "there's a one and four, and is really pretty."

"A turnip and a head of garlic."

old goody Liu answered.

This reply evoked further laughter from the whole company.

"Altogether, it's a twig of flowers," Yüan Yang added laughing.

"The flower dropped, and a huge melon formed."

old goody Liu observed, while gesticulating with both her hands by way of illustration.

The party once more exploded in loud merriment.

But, reader, if you entertain any curiosity to hear what else was said during the banquet, listen to the explanation given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XLI.

Chia Pao-yü tastes tea in the Lung Ts'ui monastery.

Old goody Liu gets drunk and falls asleep in the I Hung court.

Old goody Liu, so the story goes, exclaimed, while making signs with both hands,

“The flower dropped and a huge melon formed;”

to the intense amusement of all the inmates, who burst into a boisterous fit of laughter. In due course, however, she drank the closing cup. Then she made another effort to evoke merriment. “To speak the truth to-day,” she smilingly observed, “my hands and my feet are so rough, and I've had so much wine that I must be careful; or else I might, by a slip of the hand, break the porcelain cups. If you have got any wooden cups, you'd better produce them. It wouldn't matter then if even they were to slip out of my hands and drop on the ground!”

This joke excited some more mirth. But lady Feng, upon hearing this speedily put on a smile. “Well,” she said, “if you really want a wooden one, I'll fetch you one at once! But there's just one word I'd like to tell you beforehand. Wooden cups are not like porcelain ones. They go in sets; so you'll have to do the right thing and drink from every cup of the set.”

“I just now simply spoke in jest about those cups in order to induce them to laugh,” old goody Liu at these words, mused within herself, “but, who would have thought that she actually has some of the kind. I've often been to the large households of village gentry on a visit, and even been to banquets there and seen both gold cups and silver cups; but never have I beheld any wooden ones about! Ah, of course! They must, I expect, be the wooden

page 265

bowls used by the young children. Their object must be to inveigle me to have a couple of bowlfuls more than is good for me! But I don't mind it.

This wine is, verily, like honey, so if I drink a little more, it won't do me any harm."

Bringing this train of thought to a close, "Fetch them!" she said aloud. "We'll talk about them by and bye."

Lady Feng then directed Feng Erh to go and bring the set of ten cups, made of bamboo roots, from the book-case in the front inner room. Upon hearing her orders, Feng Erh was about to go and execute them, when Yüan Yang smilingly interposed. "I know those ten cups of yours," she remarked, "they're small. What's more, a while back you mentioned wooden ones, and if you have bamboo ones brought now, it won't look well; so we'd better get from our place that set of ten large cups, scooped out of whole blocks of aspen roots, and pour the contents of all ten of them down her throat?"

"Yes, that would be much better," lady Feng smiled.

The cups were then actually brought by a servant, at the direction of Yüan Yang. At the sight of them, old goody Liu was filled with surprise as well as with admiration. Surprise, as the ten formed one set going in gradation from large to small; the largest being amply of the size of a small basin, the smallest even measuring two of those she held in her hand. Admiration, as they were all alike, engraved, in perfect style, with scenery, trees, and human beings, and bore inscriptions in the 'grass' character as well as the seal of the writer.

"It will be enough," she consequently shouted with alacrity, "if you give me that small one."

"There's no one," lady Feng laughingly insinuated, "with the capacity to tackle these! Hence it is that not a soul can pluck up courage enough to use them! But as you, old dame, asked for them, and they were fished out, after ever so much trouble, you're bound to do the proper thing and drink out of each, one after the other."

Old goody Liu was quite taken aback. "I daren't!" she promptly demurred. "My dear lady, do let me off!"

Dowager lady Chia, Mrs. Hsüeh and Madame Wang were quite alive to the fact that a person advanced in years as she was could not be gifted with such powers of endurance, and they hastened to smilingly expostulate. "To speak is to speak, and a joke is a joke, but she mayn't take too much," they said; "let her just empty this first cup, and have done."

page 266

"O-mi-to-fu!" ejaculated old goody Liu. "I'll only have a small cupful, and put this huge fellow away, and take it home and drink at my leisure."

At this remark, the whole company once more gave way to laughter. Yüan Yang had no alternative but to give in and she had to bid a servant fill a large cup full of wine. Old goody Liu laid hold of it with both hands and raised it to her mouth.

"Gently a bit!" old lady Chia and Mrs. Hsüeh shouted. "Mind you don't choke!"

Mrs. Hsüeh then told lady Feng to put some viands before her. "Goody Liu!" smiled lady Feng, "tell me the name of anything you fancy, and I'll bring it and feed you."

"What names can I know?" old goody Liu rejoined. "Everything is good!"

"Bring some egg-plant and salt-fish for her!" dowager lady Chia suggested with a smile.

Lady Feng, upon hearing this suggestion, complied with it by catching some egg-plant and salt-fish with two chopsticks and putting them into old goody Liu's mouth. "You people," she smiled, "daily feed on egg-plants; so taste these of ours and see whether they've been nicely prepared or not."

"Don't be making a fool of me!" old goody Liu answered smilingly. "If egg-plants can have such flavour, we ourselves needn't sow any cereals, but confine ourselves to growing nothing but egg-plants!"

“They're really egg-plants!” one and all protested. “She's not pulling your leg!”

Old goody Liu was amazed. “If these be actually egg-plants,” she said, “I've uselessly eaten them so long! But, my lady, do give me a few more; I'd like to taste the next mouthful carefully!”

Lady Feng brought her, in very deed, another lot, and put it in her mouth. Old goody Liu munched for long with particular care. “There is, it's true, something about them of the flavour of egg-plant,” she laughingly remarked, “yet they don't quite taste like egg-plants. But tell me how they're cooked, so that I may prepare them in the same way for myself .”

“There's nothing hard about it!” lady Feng answered smiling. “You take the newly cut egg-plants and pare the skin off. All you want then is some fresh meat. You hash it into fine mince, and fry it in chicken fat. Then you take some dry chicken meat, and mix it with mushrooms, new bamboo shoots, sweet mushrooms, dry beancurd paste, flavoured with five spices, and every kind of dry fruits, and you chop the whole lot into fine pieces. You then bake all these things in chicken broth, until it's absorbed, when you fry them, to finish, in sweet oil, and adding some oil, made of the grains of wine, you place them in a porcelain jar, and close it hermetically. At any time that you want any to eat, all you have to do is to take out some,

page 267

and mix it with some roasted chicken, and there it is all ready.”

Old goody Liu a shook her head and put out her tongue. “My Buddha's ancestor!” she shouted. “One wants about ten chickens to prepare this dish! It isn't strange then that it has this flavour!”

Saying this, she quietly finished her wine. But still she kept on minutely scrutinizing the cup.

“Haven't you yet had enough to satisfy you?” lady Feng smiled. “If you haven't, well, then drink another cup.”

“Dreadful!” eagerly exclaimed old goody Liu. “I shall be soon getting so drunk that it will be the very death of me. I was only looking at it as I admire pretty things like this! But what a trouble it must have cost to turn out!”

“Have you done with your wine?” Yuan Yang laughingly inquired. “But, after all, what kind of wood is this cup made of?”

“It isn't to be wondered at,” old goody Liu smiled, “that you can't make it out Miss! How ever could you people, who live inside golden doors and embroidered apartments, know anything of wood! We have the whole day long the trees in the woods as our neighbours. When weary, we use them as our pillows and go to sleep on them. When exhausted, we sit with our backs leaning against them. When, in years of dearth, we feel the pangs of hunger, we also feed on them. Day after day, we see them with our eyes; day after day we listen to them with our ears; day after day, we talk of them with our mouths. I am therefore well able to tell whether any wood be good or bad, genuine or false. Do let me then see what it is!”

As she spoke, she intently scanned the cup for a considerable length of time. “Such a family as yours,” she then said, “could on no account own mean things! Any wood that is easily procured, wouldn't even find a place in here. This feels so heavy, as I weigh it in my hands, that if it isn't aspen, it must, for a certainty, be yellow cedar.”

Her rejoinder amused every one in the room. But they then perceived an old matron come up. After asking permission of dowager lady Chia to speak: “The young ladies,” she said, “have got to the Lotus Fragrance pavilion, and they request your commands, as to whether they should start with the rehearsal at once or tarry a while.”

“I forgot all about them!” old lady Chia promptly cried with a smile. “Tell them to begin rehearsing at once!”

The matron expressed her obedience and walked away. Presently, became audible the notes of the pan-pipe and double flute, now soft, now loud, and the blended accents of the pipe and fife. So balmy did the breeze happen to be and the weather so fine that the strains of music

came wafted across the

page 268

arbours and over the stream, and, needless to say, conduced to exhilarate their spirits and to cheer their hearts. Unable to resist the temptation, Pao-yü was the first to snatch a decanter and to fill a cup for himself. He quaffed it with one breath. Then pouring another cup, he was about to drain it, when he noticed that Madame Wang too was anxious for a drink, and that she bade a servant bring a warm supply of wine. "With alacrity, Pao-yü crossed over to her, and, presenting his own cup, he applied it to Madame Wang's lips. His mother drank two sips while he held it in his hands, but on the arrival of the warm wine, Pao-yü resumed his seat. Madame Wang laid hold of the warm decanter, and left the table, while the whole party quitted their places at the banquet; and Mrs. Hsüeh too rose to her feet.

"Take over that decanter from her," dowager lady Chia promptly shouted to Li Wan and lady Feng, "and press your aunt into a seat. We shall all then feel at ease!"

Hearing this, Madame Wang surrendered the decanter to lady Feng and returned to her seat.

"Let's all have a couple of cups of wine!" old lady Chia laughingly cried. "It's capital fun to-day!"

With this proposal, she laid hold of a cup and offered it to Mrs. Hsüeh. Turning also towards Hsiang-yün and Pao-ch'ai: "You two cousins!" she added, "must also have a cup. Your cousin Lin can't take much wine, but even she mustn't be let off."

While pressing them, she drained her cup. Hsiang-yün, Pao-ch'ai and Tai-yü then had their drink. But about this time old goody Liu caught the strains of music, and, being already under the influence of liquor, her spirits became more and more exuberant, and she began to gesticulate and skip about. Her pranks amused Pao-yü to such a degree that leaving the table, he crossed over to where Tai-yü was seated and observed laughingly: "Just you look at the way old goody Liu is going on!"

“In days of yore,” Tai-yü smiled, “every species of animal commenced to dance the moment the sounds of music broke forth. She's like a buffalo now.”

This simile made her cousins laugh. But shortly the music ceased. “We've all had our wine,” Mrs. Hsüeh smilingly proposed, “so let's go and stroll about for a time; we can after that sit down again!”

Dowager lady Chia herself was at the moment feeling a strong inclination to have a ramble. In due course, therefore, they all left the banquet and went with their old senior, for a walk. Dowager lady Chia, however, longed to take goody Liu along with her to help her dispel her ennui, so promptly seizing the old dame's hand in hers, they threaded their way as far as

page 269

the trees, which stood facing the hill. After lolling about with her for a few minutes, “What kind of tree is this?” she went on to inquire of her. “What kind of stone is this? What species of flower is that?”

Old goody Liu gave suitable reply to each of her questions. “Who'd ever have imagined it,” she proceeded to tell dowager lady Chia; “not only are the human beings in the city grand, but even the birds are grand. Why, the moment these birds fly into your mansion, they also become beautiful things, and acquire the gift of speech as well!”

The company could not make out the drift of her observations. “What birds get transformed into beautiful things and become able to speak?” they felt impelled to ask.

“Those perched on those gold stands, under the verandah, with green plumage and red beaks are parrots. I know them well enough!” Goody Liu replied. “But those old black crows in the cages there have crests like phoenixes! They can talk too!”

One and all laughed. But not long elapsed before they caught sight of several waiting-maids, who came to invite them to a collation.

“After the number of cups of wine I've had,” old lady Chia said, “I don't feel hungry. But never mind, bring the things here. We can nibble something at our leisure.”

The maids speedily went off and fetched two teapots; but they also brought a couple of small boxes with partitions. When they came to be opened and to be examined, the contents of each were found to consist of two kinds of viands. In the one, were two sorts of steamed eatables. One of these was a sweet cake, made of lotus powder, scented with sunflower. The other being rolls with goose fat and fir cone seeds. The second box contained two kinds of fried eatables; one of which was small dumplings, about an inch in size.

“What stuffing have they put in them?” dowager lady Chia asked.

“They're with crabs inside,” hastily rejoined the matrons.

Their old mistress, at this reply, knitted her eyebrows. “These fat, greasy viands for such a time!” she observed. “Who'll ever eat these things?”

But finding, when she came to inspect the other kind, that it consisted of small fruits of flour, fashioned in every shape, and fried in butter, she did not fancy these either. She then however pressed Mrs. Hsüeh to have something to eat, but Mrs. Hsüeh merely took a piece of cake, while dowager lady Chia helped herself to a roll; but after tasting a bit, she gave the remaining half to a servant girl.

Goody Liu saw how beautifully worked those small flour fruits were, made as they were in various colours and designs, and she took, after picking and choosing, one which looked like a peony. “The most ingenious girls in our

page 270}

village could not, even with a pair of scissors, cut out anything like this in paper!” she exclaimed. “I would like to eat it, but I can't make up my mind to! I had better pack up a few and take them home and give them to them as specimens!”

Her remarks amused every one.

“When you start for home,” dowager lady Chia said, “I'll give you a whole porcelain jar full of them; so you may as well eat these first, while they are hot!”

The rest of the inmates selected such of the fruits as took their fancy, but after they had helped themselves to one or two, they felt satisfied. Goody Liu, however, had never before touched such delicacies. These were, in addition, made small, dainty, and without the least semblance of clumsiness, so when she and Pan Erh had served themselves to a few of each sort, half the contents of the dish vanished. But what remained of them were then, at the instance of lady Feng, put into two plates, and sent, together with a partition-box, to Wen Kuan and the other singing girls as their share.

At an unexpected moment, they perceived the nurse come in with Ta Chieh-erh in her arms, and they all induced her to have a romp with them for a time. But while Ta Chieh-erh was holding a large pumelo and amusing herself with it, she casually caught sight of Pan Erh with a 'Buddha's hand.' Ta Chieh would have it. A servant-girl endeavoured to coax (Pan-Erh) to surrender it to her, but Ta Chieh-erh, unable to curb her impatience, burst out crying. It was only after the pumelo had been given to Pan-Erh, and that the 'Buddha's hand' had, by dint of much humouring, been got from Pan Erh and given to her, that she stopped crying.

Pan Erh had played quite long enough with the 'Buddha's hand,' and had, at the moment, his two hands laden with fruits, which he was in the course of eating. When he suddenly besides saw how scented and round the pumelo was, the idea dawned on him that it was more handy for play, and, using it as a ball, he kicked it along and went off to have some fun, relinquishing at once every thought of the 'Buddha's hand.'

By this time dowager lady Chia and the other members had had tea, so leading off again goody Liu, they threaded their way to the Lung Ts'ui monastery. Miao Yü hastened to usher them in. On their arrival in the interior of the court, they saw the flowers and trees in luxuriant blossom.

“Really,” smiled old lady Chia, “it's those people, who devote themselves to an ascetic life and have nothing to do, who manage, by constant repairs, to make their places much nicer than those of others!”

As she spoke, she wended her steps towards the Eastern hall. Miao Yü, with a face beaming with smiles, made way for her to walk in. “We've

page 271

just been filling ourselves with wines and meats,” dowager lady Chia observed, “and with the josses you've got in here, we shall be guilty of profanity. We'd better therefore sit here! But give us some of that good tea of yours; and we'll get off so soon as we have had a cup of it.”

Pao-yü watched Miao Yü's movements intently, when he noticed her lay hold of a small tea-tray, fashioned in the shape of a peony, made of red carved lacquer, and inlaid with designs in gold representing a dragon ensconced in the clouds with the character 'longevity' clasped in its jaws, a tray, which contained a small multicoloured cup with cover, fabricated at the 'Ch'eng' Kiln, and present it to his grandmother.

“I don't care for 'Liu An' tea!” old lady Chia exclaimed.

“I know it; but this is old 'Chün Mei,’” Miao Yü answered with a smile.

Dowager lady Chia received the cup. “What water is this?” she went on to inquire.

“It's rain water collected last year;” Miao Yü added by way of reply.

Old lady Chia readily drank half a cup of the tea; and smiling, she proffered it to goody Liu. “Just you taste this tea!” she said.

Goody Liu drained the remainder with one draught. “It's good, of course,” she remarked laughingly, “but it's rather weak! It would be far better were it brewed a little stronger!”

Dowager lady Chia and all the inmates laughed. But subsequently, each

of them was handed a thin, pure white covered cup, all of the same make, originating from the 'Kuan' kiln. Miao Yü, however, soon gave a tug at Pao-ch'ai's and Tai-yü's lapels, and both quitted the apartment along with her. But Pao-yü too quietly followed at their heels. Spying Miao Yü show his two cousins into a side-room, Pao-ch'ai take a seat in the court, Tai-yü seat herself on Miao Yü's rush mat, and Miao Yü herself approach a stove, fan the fire and boil some water, with which she brewed another pot of tea, Pao-yü walked in. "Are you bent upon drinking your own private tea?" he smiled.

"Here you rush again to steal our tea," the two girls laughed with one accord. "There's none for you!"

But just as Miao Yü was going to fetch a cup, she perceived an old taoist matron bring away the tea things, which had been used in the upper rooms. "Don't put that 'Ch'eng' kiln tea-cup by!" Miao Yü hastily shouted. "Go and put it outside!"

Pao-yü understood that it must be because old goody Liu had drunk out of it that she considered it too dirty to keep. He then saw Miao Yü produce two other cups. The one had an ear on the side. On the bowl itself were engraved in three characters: 'calabash cup,' in the plain 'square' writing.

page 272

After these, followed a row of small characters in the 'true' style, to the effect that the cup had been an article much treasured by Wang K'ai. Next came a second row of small characters stating: 'that in the course of the fourth moon of the fifth year of Yuan Feng, of the Sung dynasty, Su Shih of Mei Shan had seen it in the 'Secret' palace.

This cup, Miao Yü filled, and handed to Pao-ch'ai.

The other cup was, in appearance, as clumsy as it was small; yet on it figured an engraved inscription, consisting of 'spotted rhinoceros cup,' in three 'seal' characters, which bore the semblance of pendent pearls. Miao Yü replenished this cup and gave it to Tai-yü; and taking the green jade cup, which she had, on previous occasions, often used for her own

tea, she filled it and presented it to Pao-yü.

“The rules observed in the world,' the adage says, 'must be impartial,'” Pao-yü smiled. “But while my two cousins are handling those antique and rare gems, here am I with this coarse object!”

“Is this a coarse thing?” Miao Yü exclaimed. “Why, I'm making no outrageous statement when I say that I'm inclined to think that it is by no means certain that you could lay your hand upon any such coarse thing as this in your home!”

“Do in the country as country people do,' the proverb says,” Pao-yü laughingly rejoined. “So when one gets in a place like this of yours, one must naturally look down upon every thing in the way of gold, pearls, jade and precious stones, as coarse rubbish!”

This sentiment highly delighted Miao Yü. So much so, that producing another capacious cup, carved out of a whole bamboo root, which with its nine curves and ten rings, with twenty knots in each ring, resembled a coiled dragon, “Here,” she said with a face beaming with smiles, “there only remains this one! Can you manage this large cup?”

“I can!” Pao-yü vehemently replied, with high glee.

“Albeit you have the stomach to tackle all it holds,” Miao Yü laughed, “I haven't got so much tea for you to waste! Have you not heard how that the first cup is the 'taste'-cup; the second 'the stupid-thing-for- quenching-one's-thirst,' and the third 'the drink-mule' cup? But were you now to go in for this huge cup, why what more wouldn't that be?”

At these words, Pao-ch'ai, Tai-yü and Pao-yü simultaneously indulged in laughter. But Miao Yü seized the teapot, and poured well-nigh a whole cupful of tea into the big cup. Pao-yü tasted some carefully, and found it, in real truth, so exceptionally soft and pure that he extolled it with incessant praise.

“If you've had any tea this time,” Miao Yü pursued with a serious

expression about her face, "it's thanks to these two young ladies; for had you come alone, I wouldn't have given you any."

"I'm well aware of this," Pao-yü laughingly rejoined, "so I too will receive no favour from your hands, but simply express my thanks to these two cousins of mine, and have done!"

"What you say makes your meaning clear enough!" Miao Yü said, when she heard his reply.

"Is this rain water from last year?" Tai-yü then inquired.

"How is it," smiled Miao Yü sardonically, "that a person like you can be such a boor as not to be able to discriminate water, when you taste it? This is snow collected from the plum blossom, five years back, when I was in the P'an Hsiang temple at Hsüan Mu. All I got was that flower jar, green as the devil's face, full, and as I couldn't make up my mind to part with it and drink it, I interred it in the ground, and only opened it this summer. I've had some of it once before, and this is the second time. But how is it you didn't detect it, when you put it to your lips? Has rain water, obtained a year back, ever got such a soft and pure flavour? and how possibly could it be drunk at all?"

Tai-yü knew perfectly what a curious disposition she naturally had, and she did not think it advisable to start any lengthy discussion with her. Nor did she feel justified to protract her stay, so after sipping her tea, she intimated to Pao-ch'ai her intention to go, and they quitted the apartment. Pao-yü gave a forced smile to Miao Yü. "That cup," he said, "is, of course, dirty; but is it not a pity to put it away for no valid reason? To my idea it would be preferable, wouldn't it? to give it to that poor old woman; for were she to sell it, she could have the means of subsistence! What do you say, will it do?"

Miao Yü listened to his suggestion, and then nodded her head, after some reflection. "Yes, that will be all right!" she answered. "Lucky for her I've never drunk a drop out of that cup, for had I, I would rather have smashed it to atoms than have let her have it! If you want to give it to her, I don't mind a bit about it; but you yourself must hand it to her! Now, be

quick and clear it away at once!”

“Of course; quite so!” Pao-yü continued. “How could you ever go and speak to her? Things would then come to a worse pass. You too would be contaminated! If you give it to me, it will be all right.”

Miao Yü there and then directed some one to fetch it and to give it to Pao-yü. When it was brought, Pao-yü took charge of it. “Wait until we've gone out,” he proceeded, “and I'll call a few servant-boys and bid them carry several buckets of water from the stream and wash the floors; eh, shall I?”

“Yes, that would be better!” Miao Yü smiled. “The only thing is that

page 274

you must tell them to bring the water, and place it outside the entrance door by the foot of the wall; for they mustn't come in.”

“This goes without saying!” Pao-yü said; and, while replying, he produced the cup from inside his sleeve, and handed it to a young waiting-maid from dowager lady Chia's apartments to hold. “To-morrow,” he told her, “give this to goody Liu to take with her, when she starts on her way homewards!”

By the time he made (the girl) understand the charge he entrusted her with, his old grandmother issued out and was anxious to return home. Miao Yü did not exert herself very much to induce her to prolong her visit; but seeing her as far the main gate, she turned round and bolted the doors. But without devoting any further attention to her, we will now allude to dowager lady Chia.

She felt thoroughly tired and exhausted. To such a degree, that she desired Madame Wang, Ying Ch'un and her sisters to see that Mrs. Hsüeh had some wine, while she herself retired to the Tao Hsiang village to rest. Lady Feng immediately bade some servants fetch a bamboo chair. On its arrival, dowager lady Chia seated herself in it, and two matrons carried her off hemmed in by lady Feng, Li Wan and a bevy of servant-girls, and matrons. But let us now leave her to herself, without

any additional explanations.

During this while, Mrs. Hsüeh too said good bye and departed. Madame Wang then dismissed Wen Kuan and the other girls, and, distributing the eatables, that had been collected in the partition-boxes, to the servant-maids to go and feast on, she availed herself of the leisure moments to lie off; so reclining as she was, on the couch, which had been occupied by her old relative a few minutes back, she bade a young maid lower the portiere; after which, she asked her to massage her legs.

“Should our old lady yonder send any message, mind you call me at once,” she proceeded to impress on her mind, and, laying herself down, she went to sleep.

Pao-yü, Hsiang-yün and the rest watched the servant-girls take the partition-boxes and place them among the rocks, and seat themselves some on boulders, others on the turf-covered ground, some lean against the trees, others squat down besides the pool, and thoroughly enjoy themselves. But in a little time, they also perceived Yüan Yang arrive. Her object in coming was to carry off goody Liu for a stroll, so in a body they followed in their track, with a view of deriving some fun. Shortly, they got under the honorary gateway put up in the additional grounds, reserved for the imperial consort's visits to her parents, and old goody Liu shouted aloud: “Ai-yoh! What!

page 275

Is there another big temple here!”

While speaking, she prostrated herself and knocked her head, to the intense amusement of the company, who were quite doubled up with laughter.

“What are you laughing at?” goody Liu inquired. “I can decipher the characters on this honorary gateway. Over at our place temples of this kind are exceedingly plentiful; and they've all got archways like this! These characters give the name of the temple.”

“Can you make out from those characters what temple this is?” they

laughingly asked.

Goody Liu quickly raised her head, and, pointing at the inscription, "Are'nt these," she said, "the four characters 'Pearly Emperor's Precious Hall?'"

Everybody laughed. They clapped their hands and applauded. But when about to chaff her again, goody Liu experienced a rumbling noise in her stomach, and vehemently pulling a young servant-girl, and asking her for a couple of sheets of paper, she began immediately to loosen her garments. "It won't do in here!" one and all laughingly shouted out to her, and quickly they directed a matron to lead her away. When they got at the north-east corner, the matron pointed the proper place out to her, and in high spirits she walked off and went to have some rest.

Goody Liu had taken plenty of wine; she could not too touch yellow wine; she had, what is more, drunk and eaten so many fat things that in the thirst, which supervened, she had emptied several cups of tea; the result was that she unavoidably got looseness of the bowels. She therefore squatted for ever so long before she felt any relief. But on her exit from the private chamber, the wind blew the wine to her head. Besides, being a woman well up in years, she felt, upon suddenly rising from a long squatting position, her eyes grow so dim and her head so giddy that she could not make out the way. She gazed on all four quarters, but the whole place being covered with trees, rockeries, towers, terraces, and houses, she was quite at a loss how to determine her whereabouts, and where each road led to. She had no alternative but to follow a stone road, and to toddle on her way with leisurely step. But when she drew near a building, she could not make out where the door could be. After searching and searching, she accidentally caught sight of a bamboo fence. "Here's another trellis with flat bean plants creeping on it!" Goody Liu communed within herself. While giving way to reflection, she skirted the flower-laden hedge, and discovering a moonlike, cavelike, entrance, she stepped in. Here she discerned, stretching before her eyes a sheet of water, forming a pond, which measured no more than seven or eight feet in breadth. Its banks were paved with slabs of stone. Its jadelike waves flowed in a limpid stream

towards the opposite direction. At the upper end, figured a slab of white marble, laid horizontally over the surface. Goody Liu wended her steps over the slab and followed the raised stone-road; then turning two bends, in the lake, an entrance into a house struck her gaze. Forthwith, she crossed the doorway, but her eyes were soon attracted by a young girl, who advanced to greet her with a smile playing upon her lips.

“The young ladies,” goody Liu speedily remarked laughing, “have cast me adrift; they made me knock about, until I found my way in here.”

But seeing, after addressing her, that the girl said nothing by way of reply, goody Liu approached her and seized her by the hand, when, with a crash, she fell against the wooden partition wall and bumped her head so that it felt quite sore. Upon close examination, she discovered that it was a picture. “Do pictures really so bulge out!” Goody Liu mused within herself, and, as she exercised her mind with these cogitations, she scanned it and rubbed her hand over it. It was perfectly even all over. She nodded her head, and heaved a couple of sighs. But the moment she turned round, she espied a small door over which hung a soft portiere, of leek-green colour, bestrewn with embroidered flowers. Goody Liu lifted the portiere and walked in. Upon raising her head, and casting a glance round, she saw the walls, artistically carved in fretwork. On all four sides, lutes, double-edged swords, vases and censers were stuck everywhere over the walls; and embroidered covers and gauze nets, glistened as brightly as gold, and shed a lustre vying with that of pearls. Even the bricks, on the ground, on which she trod, were jadelike green, inlaid with designs, so that her eyes got more and more dazzled. She tried to discover an exit, but where could she find a doorway? On the left, was a bookcase. On the right, a screen. As soon as she repaired behind the screen, she faced a door; but, she then caught sight of another old dame stepping in from outside, and advancing towards her. Goody Liu was wonderstruck. Her mind was full of uncertainty as to whether it might not be her son-in-law's mother. “I expect,” she felt prompted to ask with vehemence, “you went to the trouble of coming to hunt for me, as you didn't see me turn up at home for several days, eh? But what young lady introduced you in here?” Then noticing that her whole head was bedecked with flowers, old goody Liu laughed. “How ignorant of the ways of the world you are!” she said. “Seeing the nice flowers in this garden, you at once set to work, forgetful of all consequences, and loaded your

pate with them!”

However, while she derided her, the other old dame simply laughed, without making any rejoinder. But the recollection suddenly flashed to her memory that she had often heard of some kind of cheval-glasses, found in wealthy and well-to-do families, and, “May it not be,” (she wondered), “my

page 277

own self reflected in this glass!” After concluding this train of thoughts, she put out her hands, and feeling it and then minutely scrutinising it, she realised that the four wooden partition walls were made of carved blackwood, into which mirrors had been inserted. “These have so far impeded my progress,” she consequently exclaimed, “and how am I to manage to get out?”

As she soliloquised, she kept on rubbing the mirror. This mirror was, in fact, provided with some western mechanism, which enabled it to open and shut, so while goody Liu inadvertently passed her hands, quite at random over its surface, the pressure happily fell on the right spot, and opening the contrivance, the mirror flung round, exposing a door to view. Old goody Liu was full of amazement as well as of admiration. With hasty step, she egressed. Her eyes unexpectedly fell on a most handsome set of bed-curtains. But being at the time still seven or eight tenths in the wind, and quite tired out from her tramp, she with one jump squatted down on the bed, saying to herself: “I’ll just have a little rest.” So little, however, did she, contrary to her expectations, have any control over herself, that, as she reeled backwards and forwards, her eyes got quite drowsy, and then the moment she threw herself in a recumbent position, she dropped into a sound sleep.

But let us now see what the others were up to. They waited for her and waited; but they saw nothing of her. Pan Erh got, in the absence of his grandmother, so distressed that he melted into tears. “May she not have fallen into the place?” one and all laughingly observed. “Be quick and tell some one to go and have a look!”

Two matrons were directed to go in search of her; but they returned and

reported that she was not to be found. The whole party instituted a search in every nook and corner, but nothing could be seen of her.

“She was so drunk,” Hsi Jen suggested, “that she's sure to have lost her way, and following this road, got into our back-rooms. Should she have crossed to the inner side of the hedge, she must have come to the door of the backhouse and got in. Nevertheless, the young maids, she must have come across, must know something about her. If she did not get inside the hedge, but continued in a south westerly direction, she's all right, if she made a detour and walked out. But if she hasn't done so, why, she'll have enough of roaming for a good long while! I had better therefore go and see what she's up to.”

With these words still on her lips, she retraced her footsteps and repaired into the I Hung court. She called out to the servants, but, who would have thought it, the whole bevy of young maids, attached to those rooms, had seized the opportunity to go and have a romp, so Hsi Jen straightway entered the door of the house. As soon as she turned the multicoloured embroidered

page 278

screen, the sound of snoring as loud as peals of thunder, fell on her ear. Hastily she betook herself inside, but her nostrils were overpowered by the foul air of wine and w..d, which infected the apartment. At a glance, she discovered old goody Liu lying on the bed, face downwards, with hands sprawled out and feet knocking about all over the place. Hsi Jen sustained no small shock. With precipitate hurry, she rushed up to her, and, laying hold of her, lying as she was more dead than alive, she pushed her about until she succeeded in rousing her to her senses. Old goody Liu was startled out of her sleep. She opened wide her eyes, and, realising that Hsi Jen stood before her, she speedily crawled up. “Miss!” she pleaded. “I do deserve death! I have done what I shouldn't; but I haven't in any way soiled the bed.”

So saying, she swept her hands over it. But Hsi Jen was in fear and trembling lest the suspicions of any inmate should be aroused, and lest Pao-yü should come to know of it, so all she did was to wave her hand towards her, bidding her not utter a word. Then with alacrity grasping

three or four handfuls of 'Pai Ho' incense, she heaped it on the large tripod, which stood in the centre of the room, and put the lid back again; delighted at the idea that she had not been so upset as to be sick.

"It doesn't matter!" she quickly rejoined in a low tone of voice with a smile, "I'm here to answer for this. Come along with me!"

While old goody Liu expressed her readiness to comply with her wishes, she followed Hsi Jen out into the quarters occupied by the young maids. Here (Hsi Jen) desired her to take a seat. "Mind you say," she enjoined her, "that you were so drunk that you stretched on a boulder and had a snooze!"

"All right! I will!" old goody Liu promised.

Hsi Jen afterwards helped her to two cups of tea, when she, at length, got over the effects of the wine. "What young lady's room is this that it is so beautiful?" she then inquired. "It seemed to me just as if I had gone to the very heavenly palace."

Hsi Jen gave a faint smile. "This one?" she asked. "Why, it's our master Secundus', Mr. Pao's bedroom."

Old goody Liu was quite taken aback, and could not even presume to utter a sound. But Hsi Jen led her out across the front compound; and, when they met the inmates of the family, she simply explained to them that she had found her fast asleep on the grass, and brought her along. No one paid any heed to the excuse she gave, and the subject was dropped.

Presently, dowager lady Chia awoke, and the evening meal was at once served in the Tao Hsiang Ts'un. Dowager lady Chia was however quite listless, and felt so little inclined to eat anything that she forthwith got into a small open chair, with bamboo seat, and returned to her suite of rooms to

rest. But she insisted that lady Feng and her companions should go and

have their repast, so the young ladies eventually adjourned once more into the garden.

But, reader, you do not know the sequel, so peruse the circumstances given in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XLII.

The Princess of Heng Wu dispels, with sweet words, some insane suspicions.

The inmate of Hsiao Hsiang puts, with excellent repartee, the final touch to the jokes made about goody Liu.

We will now resume our story by adding that, on the return of the young ladies into the garden, they had their meal. This over, they parted company, and nothing more need be said about them. We will notice, however, that old goody Liu took Pan Erh along with her, and came first and paid a visit to lady Feng. "We must certainly start for home to-morrow, as soon as it is daylight," she said. "I've stayed here, it's true, only two or three days, but in these few days I have reaped experience in everything that I had not seen from old till now. It would be difficult to find any one as compassionate of the poor and considerate to the old as your venerable dame, your Madame Wang, your young ladies, and the girls too attached to the various rooms, have all shown themselves in their treatment of me! When I get home now, I shall have no other means of showing how grateful I am to you than by purchasing a lot of huge joss-sticks and saying daily prayers to Buddha on your behalf; and if he spares you all to enjoy a long life of a hundred years my wishes will be accomplished."

"Don't be so exultant!" lady Feng smilingly replied. "It's all on account of you that our old ancestor has fallen ill, by exposing herself to draughts and that she suffers from disturbed sleep; also that our Ta Chieh-erh has caught a chill and is laid up at home with fever."

Goody Liu, at these words, speedily heaved a sigh. "Her venerable ladyship," she said, "is a person advanced in years and not accustomed to any intense fatigue!"

"She has never before been in such high spirits as yesterday!" lady Feng observed. "As you were here, so anxious was she to let you see everything, that she trudged over the greater part of the garden. And Ta Chieh-erh was given a piece of cake by Madame Wang, when I came to hunt you up, and she ate it, who knows in what windy place, and began at once to get feverish."

“Ta Chieh-erh,” goody Liu remarked, “hasn't, I fancy, often put her foot into the garden; and young people like her mustn't really go into strange places, for she's not like our children, who are able to use their legs! In what graveyards don't they ramble about! A puff of wind may, on the one hand, have struck her, it's not at all unlikely; or being, on the other, so chaste in body, and her eyes also so pure she may, it is to be feared, have come across some spirit or other. I can't help thinking therefore that you should consult some book of exorcisms on her behalf; for mind she may have run up against some evil influence.”

This remark suggested the idea to lady Feng. There and then she called P'ing Erh to fetch the 'Jade Box Record.' When brought, she desired Ts'ai Ming to look over it for her. Ts'ai Ming turned over the pages for a time, and then read: 'Those who fall ill on the 25th day of the 8th moon have come across, in a due westerly quarter, of some flower spirit; they feel heavy, with no inclination for drink or food. Take seven sheets of white paper money, and, advancing forty steps due west, burn them and exorcise the spirit; recovery will follow at once!'

“There's really no mistake about that!” lady Feng smiled. “Are there not flower spirits in the garden? But what I dread is that our old lady mayn't have come across one too.”

Saying this, she bade a servant purchase two lots of paper money. On their arrival, she sent for two proper persons, the one to exorcise the spirits for dowager lady Chia and the other to expel them from Ta Chieh-erh; and these observances over, Ta Chieh-erh did, in effect, drop quietly to sleep.

“It's verily people advanced in years like you,” lady Feng smilingly exclaimed; “who've gone through many experiences! This Ta Chieh-erh of mine has often been inclined to ail, and it has quite puzzled me to make out how and why it was.”

“This isn't anything out of the way!” goody Liu said. “Affluent and honourable people bring up their offspring to be delicate. So naturally, they are not able to endure the least hardship! Moreover, that young child of yours is so excessively cuddled that she can't stand it. Were you, therefore, my lady, to pamper her less from henceforth, she'll steadily improve.”

“There's plenty of reason in that too!” lady Feng observed. “But it strikes me that she hasn't as yet got a name, so do give her one in order that she may borrow your long life! In the next place, you are country-people, and are, after all,—I don't expect you'll get angry when I mention it,—somewhat in poor circumstances. Were a person then as poor as you are to suggest a name for her, you may, I trust, have the effect of counteracting this influence for her.”

page 281

When old goody Liu heard this proposal, she immediately gave herself up to reflection. “I've no idea of the date of her birth!” she smiled after a time.

“She really was born on no propitious date!” lady Feng replied. “By a remarkable coincidence she came into the world on the seventh day of the seventh moon!”

“This is certainly splendid!” old goody Lin laughed with alacrity. “You had better name her at once Ch'iao Chieh-erh (seventh moon and ingenuity). This is what's generally called: combating poison by poison and attacking fire by fire. If therefore your ladyship fixes upon this name of mine, she will, for a surety, attain a long life of a hundred years; and when she by and bye grows up to be a big girl, every one of you will be able to have a home and get a patrimony! Or if, at any time, there occur anything inauspicious and she has to face adversity, why it will inevitably change into prosperity; and if she comes across any evil fortune, it will turn into good fortune. And this will all arise from this one word, 'Ch'iao' (ingenuity.)”

Lady Feng was, needless to say, delighted by what she heard, and she lost no time in expressing her gratitude. “If she be preserved,” she exclaimed, “to accomplish your good wishes, it will be such a good thing!” Saying this, she called P'ing Erh. “As you and I are bound to be busy to-morrow,” she said, “and won't, I fear, be able to spare any leisure moments, you'd better, if you have nothing to do now, get ready the presents for old goody Liu, so as to enable her to conveniently start at early dawn to-morrow.”

“How could I presume to be the cause of such reckless waste?” goody Liu interposed. “I've already disturbed your peace and quiet for several days, and were I to also take your things away, I'd feel still less at ease in my heart!”

“There's nothing much!” lady Feng protested. “They consist simply of a few ordinary things. But, whether good or bad, do take them along, so that the people in the same street as yourselves and your next-door neighbours may have some little excitement, and that it may look as if you had been on a visit to the city!”

But while she endeavoured to induce the old dame to accept the presents, she noticed P'ing Erh approach. “Goody Liu,” she remarked, “come over here and see!”

Old goody Liu precipitately followed P'ing Erh into the room on the off side. Here she saw the stove-couch half full with piles of things. P'ing Erh took these up one by one and let her have a look at them. “This,” she explained, “is a roll of that green gauze you asked for yesterday. Besides this, our lady Feng gives you a piece of thick bluish-white gauze to use as lining. These are two pieces of pongee, which will do for wadded coats and jupes as well. In this bundle

page 282

are two pieces of silk, for you to make clothes with, for the end of the year. This is a box containing various home-made cakes. Among them are some you've already tasted and some you haven't; so take them along, and put them in plates and invite your friends; they'll be ever so much better than any that you could buy! These two bags are those in which the melons and fruit were packed up yesterday. This one has been filled with two bushels of fine rice, grown in the imperial fields, the like of which for congee, it would not be easy to get. This one contains fruits from our garden and all kinds of dry fruits. In this packet, you'll find eight taels of silver. These various things are presents for you from our Mistress Secunda. Each of these packets contains fifty taels so that there are in all a hundred taels; they're the gift of Madame Wang. She bids you accept them so as to either carry on any trade, for which no big capital is required, or to purchase several acres of land, in order that you mayn't henceforward have any more to beg favours of relatives, or to depend upon friends.” Continuing, she added smilingly, in a low tone of voice, “These two jackets, two jupes, four head bands, and a bundle of velvet and thread are what I give you, worthy dame, as my share. These clothes are, it is true, the worse for use, yet I haven't worn them very much. But if you disdain them, I won't be so presuming as to say anything.”

After mention of each article by P'ing Erh, goody Liu muttered the name of

Buddha, so already she had repeated Buddha's name several thousands of times. But when she saw the heap of presents which P'ing Erh too bestowed on her, and the little ostentation with which she did it, she promptly smiled. "Miss!" she said, "what are you saying? Could I ever disdain such nice gifts as these! Had I even the money, I couldn't buy them anywhere. The only thing is that I feel overpowered with shame. If I keep them, it won't be nice, and if I don't accept them, I shall be showing myself ungrateful for your kind attention."

"Don't utter all this irrelevant talk!" P'ing Erh laughed. "You and I are friends; so compose your mind and take the things I gave you just now! Besides, I have, on my part, something to ask of you. When the close of the year comes, select a few of your cabbages, dipped in lime, and dried in the sun, as well as some lentils, flat beans, tomatoes and pumpkin strips, and various sorts of dry vegetables and bring them over. We're all, both high or low, fond of such things. These will be quite enough! We don't want anything else, so don't go to any useless trouble!"

Goody Liu gave utterance to profuse expressions of gratitude and signified her readiness to comply with her wishes.

page 283

"Just you go to sleep," P'ing Erh urged, "and I'll get the things ready for you and put them in here. As soon as the day breaks to-morrow, I'll send the servant-lads to hire a cart and pack them in; don't you therefore worry yourself in the least on that score!"

Goody Liu felt more and more ineffably grateful. So crossing over, she again said, with warm protestations of thankfulness, good bye to lady Feng; after which, she repaired to dowager lady Chia's quarters on this side, where she slept, with one sleep, during the whole night. Early the next day, as soon as she had combed her hair and performed her ablutions, she asked to go and pay her adieus to lady Chia. But as old lady Chia was unwell, the various members of the family came to see how she was getting on. On their reappearance outside, they transmitted orders that the doctor should be sent for. In a little time, a matron reported that the doctor had arrived, and an old nurse invited dowager lady Chia to ensconce herself under the curtain.

"I'm an old woman!" lady Chia remonstrated. "Am I not aged enough to be a mother to that fellow? and am I, pray, to still stand on any ceremonies with him?"

There's no need to drop the curtain; I'll see him as I am, and have done."

Hearing her objections, the matrons fetched a small table, and, laying a small pillow on it, they directed a servant to ask the doctor in.

Presently, they perceived the trio Chia Chen, Chia Lien, and Chia Jung, bringing Dr. Wang. Dr. Wang did not presume to use the raised road, but confining himself to the side steps, he kept pace with Chia Chen until they reached the platform. Two matrons, who had been standing, one on either side from an early hour, raised the portiere. A couple of old women servants then took the lead and showed the way in. But Pao-yü too appeared on the scene to meet them.

They found old lady Chia seated bolt upright on the couch, dressed in a blue crape jacket, lined with sheep skin, every curl of which resembled a pearl. On the right and left stood four young maids, whose hair had not as yet been allowed to grow, with fly-brushes, finger-bowls, and other such articles in their hands. Five or six old nurses were also drawn up on both sides like wings. At the back of the jade-green gauze mosquito-house were faintly visible several persons in red and green habiliments, with gems on their heads, and gold trinkets in their coiffures.

Dr. Wang could not muster the courage to raise his head. With speedy step, he advanced and paid his obeisance. Dowager lady Chia noticed that he wore the official dress of the sixth grade, and she accordingly concluded that he must be an imperial physician. "How are you noble doctor?" she inquired, forcing a smile. "What is the worthy surname of this noble doctor?" she then

page 284

asked Chia Chen.

Chia Chen and his companions made prompt reply. "His surname is Wang," they said.

"There was once a certain Wang Chün-hsiao who filled the chair of President of the College of Imperial Physicians," dowager lady smilingly proceeded. "He excelled in feeling the pulse."

Dr. Wang bent his body, and with alacrity he lowered his head and returned her

smile. "That was," he explained, "my grand uncle."

"Is it really so!" laughingly pursued dowager lady Chia, upon catching this reply. "We can then call ourselves old friends!"

So speaking, she quietly put out her hand and rested it on the small pillow. A nurse laid hold of a small stool and placed it before the small table, slightly to the side of it. Dr. Wang bent one knee and took a seat on the stool. Drooping his head, he felt the pulse of the one hand for a long while; next, he examined that of the other; after which, hastily making a curtsy, he bent his head and started on his way out of the apartment.

"Excuse me for the trouble I've put you to!" dowager lady Chia smiled. "Chen Erh, escort him outside, and do see that he has a cup of tea."

Chia Chen, Chia Lien and the rest of their companions immediately acquiesced by uttering several yes's, and once more they led Dr. Wang into the outer study.

"Your worthy senior," Dr. Wang explained, "has nothing else the matter with her than a slight chill, which she must have inadvertently contracted. She needn't, after all, take any medicines; all she need do is to diet herself and keep warm a little; and she'll get all right. But I'll now write a prescription, in here. Should her venerable ladyship care to take any of the medicine, then prepare a dose, according to the prescription, and let her have it. But should she be loth to have any, well, never mind, it won't be of any consequence."

Saying this, he wrote the prescription, as he sipped his tea. But when about to take his leave, he saw a nurse bring Ta Chieh-erh into the room. "Mr. Wang," she said, "do also have a look at our Chieh Erh!"

Upon hearing her appeal, Dr. Wang immediately rose to his feet. While she was clasped in her nurse's arms, he rested Ta Chieh-erh's hand on his left hand and felt her pulse with his right, and rubbing her forehead, he asked her to put out her tongue and let him see it. "Were I to express my views about Chieh Erh, you would again abuse me! If she's, however, kept quiet and allowed to go hungry for a couple of meals, she'll get over this. There's no necessity for her to take any decocted medicines. I'll just send her some pills, which you'll have to dissolve in a preparation of

ginger, and give them to her before she goes to sleep; when she has had these, there will be nothing more the matter with her.”

At the conclusion of these recommendations, he bade them goodbye and took his departure. Chia Chen and his companions then took the prescription and came and explained to old lady Chia the nature of her indisposition, and, depositing on the table, the paper given to them by the doctor, they quitted her presence. But nothing more need be said about them.

Madame Wang and Li Wan, lady Feng, Pao Ch'ai and the other young ladies noticed, meanwhile, that the doctor had gone, and they eventually egressed from the back of the mosquito-house. After a short stay, Madame Wang returned to her quarters. Goody Liu repaired, when she perceived everything quiet again, into the upper rooms and made her adieus to dowager lady Chia.

“When you've got any leisure, do pay us another visit,” old lady Chia urged, and bidding Yuan Yang come to her, “Do be careful,” she added, “and see dame Liu safely on her way out; for not being well I can't escort you myself.”

Goody Liu expressed her thanks, and saying good bye a second time, she betook herself, along with Yüan Yang, into the servants' quarters. Here Yüan Yang pointed at a bundle on the stove-couch. “These are,” she said, “several articles of clothing, belonging to our old mistress; they were presented to her in years gone by, by members of our family on her birthdays and various festivals; her ladyship never wears anything made by people outside; yet to hoard these would be a downright pity! Indeed, she hasn't worn them even once. It was yesterday that she told me to get out two costumes and hand them to you to take along with you, either to give as presents, or to be worn by some one in your home; but don't make fun of us! In the box you'll find the flour-fruits, for which you asked. This bundle contains the medicines to which you alluded the other day. There are 'plum-blossom-spotted-tongue pills,' and 'purple-gold- ingot-pills,' also 'vivifying-blood-vessels-pills,' as well as 'driving-offspring and preserving-life pills;' each kind being rolled up in a sheet bearing the prescription; and the whole lot of them are packed up in here. While these two are purses for you to wear in the way of ornaments.” So saying, she forthwith loosened the cord, and, producing two ingots representing pencils, and with 'ju i' on them, implying 'your wishes will surely be fulfilled,' she drew near and showed them to her,

“Take the purses,” she pursued smiling, “but do leave these behind and give them to me.”

Goody Liu was so overjoyed that she had, from an early period, come out afresh with several thousands of invocations of Buddha's names. When she therefore heard Yüan Yang's suggestion, “Miss,” she quickly rejoined, “you're at perfect liberty to keep them!”

page 286

Yüan Yang perceived that her words were believed by her; so smiling she once more dropped the ingots into the purse. “I was only joking with you for fun!” she observed. “I've got a good many like these; keep them therefore and give them, at the close of the year, to your young children.”

Speaking the while, she espied a young maid walk in with a cup from the 'Ch'eng' kiln, and hand it to old goody Liu. “This,” (she said,) “our master Secundus, Mr. Pao, gives you.”

“Whence could I begin enumerating the things I got!” Goody Liu exclaimed. “In what previous existence did I accomplish anything so meritorious as to bring to-day this heap of blessings upon me!”

With these words, she eagerly took possession of the cup.

“The clothes I gave you the other day, when I asked you to have a bath, were my own,” Yüan Yang resumed, “and if you don't think them too mean, I've got a few more, which I would also like to let you have.”

Goody Liu thanked her with vehemence, so Yüan Yang, in point of fact, produced several more articles of clothing, and these she packed up for her. Goody Liu thereupon expressed a desire to also go into the garden and take leave of Pao-yü and the young ladies, Madame Wang and the other inmates and to thank them for all they did for her, but Yüan Yang raised objections. “You can dispense with going!” she remarked. “They don't see any one just now! But I'll deliver the message for you by and bye! When you've got any leisure, do come again. Go to the second gate,” she went on to direct an old matron, “and call two servant-lads to come here, and help this old dame to take her things away!”

After the matron had signified her obedience, Yüan Yang returned with goody Liu to lady Feng's quarters, on the off part of the mansion, and, taking the presents as far as the side gate, she bade the servant-lads carry them out. She herself then saw goody Liu into her curricule and start on her journey homewards.

But without commenting further on this topic, let us revert to Pao-ch'ai and the other girls. After breakfast, they recrossed into their grandmother's rooms and made inquiries about her health. On their way back to the garden, they reached a point where they had to take different roads. Pao-ch'ai then called out to Tai-yü. "P'in Erh!" she observed, "come with me; I've got a question to ask you."

Tai-yü wended her steps therefore with Pao-ch'ai into the Heng Wu court. As soon as they entered the house, Pao-ch'ai threw herself into a seat. "Kneel down!" she smiled. "I want to examine you about something!"

Tai-yü could not fathom her object, and consequently laughed. "Look here." she cried, "this chit Pao has gone clean off her senses! What do

page 287

you want to examine me about?"

Pao-ch'ai gave a sardonic smile. "My dear, precious girl, my dear maiden," she exclaimed, "what utter trash fills your mouth! Just speak the honest and candid truth, and finish!"

Tai-yü could so little guess her meaning that her sole resource was to smile. Inwardly, however, she could not help beginning to experience certain misgivings. "What did I say?" she remarked. "You're bent upon picking out my faults! Speak out and let me hear what it's all about!"

"Do you still pretend to be a fool?" Pao-ch'ai laughed. "When we played yesterday that game of wine-forfeits, what did you say? I really couldn't make out any head or tail."

Tai-yü, after a moment's reflection, remembered eventually that she had the previous day been guilty of a slip of the tongue and come out with a couple of passages from the 'Peony Pavilion,' and the 'Record of the West Side-house,' and, of a sudden, her face got scarlet with blushes. Drawing near Pao-ch'ai she

threw her arms round her. "My dear cousin!" she smiled, "I really wasn't conscious of what I was saying! It just blurted out of my mouth! But now that you've called me to task, I won't say such things again."

"I've no idea of what you were driving at," Pao-ch'ai laughingly rejoined. "What I heard you recite sounds so thoroughly unfamiliar to me, that I beg you to enlighten me!"

"Dear cousin," pleaded Tai-yü, "don't tell anyone else! I won't, in the future, breathe such things again."

Pao-ch'ai noticed how from shame the blood rushed to her face, and how vehement she was in her entreaties, and she felt both to press her with questions; so pulling her into a seat to make her have a cup of tea, she said to her in a gentle tone, "Whom do you take me for? I too am wayward; from my youth up, yea ever since I was seven or eight, I've been enough trouble to people! Our family was also what one would term literary. My grandfather's extreme delight was to be ever with a book in his hand. At one time, we numbered many members, and sisters and brothers all lived together; but we had a distaste for wholesome books. Among my brothers, some were partial to verses; others had a weakness for blank poetical compositions; and there were none of such works as the 'Western side-House,' and 'the Guitar,' even up to the hundred and one books of the 'Yüan' authors, which they hadn't managed to get. These books they stealthily read behind our backs; but we, on our part, devoured them, on the sly, without their knowing it. Subsequently, our father came to get wind of it; and some of us he beat, while others he scolded; burning some of

page 288

the books, and throwing away others. It is therefore as well that we girls shouldn't know anything of letters. Men, who study books and don't understand the right principle, can't, moreover, reach the standard of those, who don't go in for books; so how much more such as ourselves? Even versifying, writing and the like pursuits aren't in the line of such as you and me. Indeed, neither are they within the portion of men. Men, who go in for study and fathom the right principles, should cooperate in the government of the empire, and should rule the nation; this would be a nobler purpose; but one doesn't now-a-days hear of the very existence of such persons! Hence, the study of books makes them worse than they ever were before. But it isn't the books that ruin them; the misfortune is

that they make improper use of books! That is why study doesn't come up to ploughing and sowing and trading; as these pursuits exercise no serious pernicious influences. As far, however, as you and I go, we should devote our minds simply to matters connected with needlework and spinning; for we will then be fulfilling our legitimate duties. Yet, it so happens that we too know a few characters. But, as we can read, it behoves us to choose no other than wholesome works; for these will do us no harm! What are most to be shirked are those low books, as, when once they pervert the disposition, there remains no remedy whatever!"

While she indulged in this long rigmarole, Tai-yü lowered her head and sipped her tea. And though she secretly shared the same views on the subject, all the answer she gave her in assent was limited to one single word 'yes.' But at an unexpected moment, Su Yün appeared in the room. "Our lady Lien," she said, "requests the presence of both of you, young ladies, to consult with you in an important matter. Miss Secunda, Miss Tertia, Miss Quarta, Miss Shih and Mr. Pao, our master Secundus, are there waiting for you."

"What's up again?" Pao-ch'ai inquired.

"You and I will know what it is when we get there," Tai-yü explained.

So saying, she came, with Pao-ch'ai, into the Tao Hsiang village. Here they, in fact, discovered every one assembled. As soon as Li Wan caught sight of the two cousins, she smiled. "The society has barely been started," she observed, "and here's one who wants to give us the slip; that girl Quarta wishes to apply for a whole year's leave."

"It's that single remark of our worthy senior's yesterday that is at the bottom of it!" Tai-yü laughed. "For by bidding her execute some painting or other of the garden, she has put her in such high feather that she applies for leave!"

"Don't be so hard upon our dear ancestor!" Pao-Ch'ai rejoined, a smile playing on her lips. "It's entirely due to that allusion of grandmother Liu's."

page 289

Tai-yü speedily took up the thread of the conversation. "Quite so!" she smiled. "It's all through that remark of hers! But of what branch of the family is she a

grandmother? We should merely address her as the 'female locust;' that's all.”

As she spoke, one and all were highly amused.

“When any mortal language finds its way into that girl Feng's mouth,” Pao-ch'ai laughed, “she knows how to turn it to the best account! What a fortunate thing it is that that vixen Feng has no idea of letters and can't boast of much culture! Her forte is simply such vulgar things as suffice to raise a laugh! Worse than her is that P'in Erh with that coarse tongue! She has recourse to the devices of the 'Ch'un Ch'iu'! By selecting, from the vulgar expressions used in low slang, the most noteworthy points, she eliminates what's commonplace, and makes, with the addition of a little elegance and finish, her style so much like that of the text that each sentence has a peculiar character of its own! The three words representing 'female locust' bring out clearly the various circumstances connected with yesterday! The wonder is that she has been so quick in devising them!”

After lending an ear to her arguments, they all laughed. “Those explanations of yours,” they cried, “show well enough that you are not below those two!”

“Pray, let's consult as to how many days' leave to grant her!” Li Wan proposed. “I gave her a month, but she thinks it too little. What do you say about it?”

“Properly speaking,” Tai-yü put in, “one year isn't much! The laying out of this garden occupied a whole year; and to paint a picture of it now will certainly need two years' time. She'll have to rub the ink, to moisten the pencils, to stretch the paper, to mix the pigments, and to....”

When she had reached this point, even Tai-yü could not restrain herself from laughing. “If she goes on so leisurely to work,” she exclaimed, “won't she require two years' time?”

Those, who caught this insinuation, clapped their hands and indulged in incessant merriment.

“Her innuendoes are full of zest!” Pao-ch'ai ventured laughingly. “But what takes the cake is that last remark about leisurely going to work, for if she weren't to paint at all, how could she ever finish her task? Hence those jokes cracked yesterday were, sufficient, of course, to evoke laughter, but, on second thought,

they're devoid of any fun! Just you carefully ponder over P'in Erh's words! Albeit they don't amount to much, you'll nevertheless find, when you come to reflect on them, that there's plenty of gusto about them. I've really had such a laugh over them that I can scarcely

page 290

move!

“It's the way that cousin Pao-ch'ai puffs her up,” Hsi Ch'un observed “that makes her so much the more arrogant that she turns me also into a laughing-stock now!”

Tai-yü hastily smiled and pulled her towards her. “Let me ask you,” she said, “are you only going to paint the garden, or will you insert us in it as well?”

“My original idea was to have simply painted the garden,” Hsi Ch'un explained; “but our worthy senior told me again yesterday that a mere picture of the grounds would resemble the plan of a house, and recommended that I should introduce some inmates too so as to make it look like what a painting should. I've neither the knack for the fine work necessary for towers and terraces, nor have I the skill to draw representations of human beings; but as I couldn't very well raise any objections, I find myself at present on the horns of a dilemma about it!”

“Human beings are an easy matter!” Tai-yü said. “What beats you are insects.”

“Here you are again with your trash!” Li Wan exclaimed. “Will there be any need to also introduce insects in it? As far, however, as birds go, it may probably be advisable to introduce one or two kinds!”

“If any other insects are not put in the picture,” Tai-yü smiled, “it won't matter; but without yesterday's female locust in it, it will fall short of the original?”

This retort evoked further general amusement. While Tai-yü laughed, she beat her chest with both hands. “Begin painting at once!” she cried. “I've even got the title all ready. The name I've chosen is, 'Picture of a locust brought in to have a good feed.’”

At these words, they laughed so much the more heartily that at a time they bent forward, and at another they leant back. But a sound of “Ku tung” then fell on their ears, and unable to make out what could have dropped, they anxiously and precipitately looked about. It was, they found, Shih Hsiang-yün, who had been reclining on the back of the chair. The chair had, from the very outset, not been put in a sure place, and while indulging in hearty merriment she threw her whole weight on the back. She did not, besides, notice that the dovetails on each side had come out, so with a tilt towards the east, she as well as the chair toppled over in a heap. Luckily, the wooden partition-wall was close enough to arrest her fall, and she did not sprawl on the ground. The sight of her created more amusement than ever among all her relatives; so much so, that they could scarcely regain their equilibrium. It was only after Pao-yü had rushed up to her, and given her a hand and raised her

page 291

to her feet again that they at last managed to gradually stop laughing.

Pao-yü then winked at Tai-yü. Tai-yü grasped his meaning, and, forthwith withdrawing into the inner room, she lifted the cover of the mirror, and looked at her face. She found the hair about her temples slightly dishevelled, so, promptly opening Li Wan's toilet-case, and extracting a narrow brush, she stood in front of the mirror, and smoothed it down with a few touches. Afterwards, laying the brush in its place she stepped into the outer suite. “Is this,” she said pointing at Li Wan, “doing what you're told and showing us how to do needlework and teaching us manners? Why, instead of that, you press us to come here and have a good romp and a hearty laugh!”

“Just you listen to her perverse talk,” Li Wan laughed. “She takes the lead and kicks up a rumpus, and incites people to laugh, and then she throws the blame upon me! In real truth, she's a despicable thing! What I wish is that you should soon get some dreadful mother-in-law, and several crotchety and abominable older and younger sisters-in-law, and we'll see then whether you'll still be as perverse or not!”

Tai-yü at once became quite scarlet in the face, and pulling Pao-ch'ai, “Let us,” she added, “give her a whole year's leave!”

“I've got an impartial remark to make. Listen to me all of you!” Pao-ch'ai chimed

in. "Albeit the girl, Ou, may have some idea about painting, all she can manage are just a few outline sketches, so that unless, now that she has to accomplish the picture of this garden, she can lay a claim to some ingenuity, will she ever be able to succeed in effecting a painting? This garden resembles a regular picture. The rockeries and trees, towers and pavilions, halls and houses are, as far as distances and density go, neither too numerous, nor too few. Such as it is, it is fitly laid out; but were you to put it on paper in strict compliance with the original, why, it will surely not elicit admiration. In a thing like this, it's necessary to pay due care to the various positions and distances on paper, whether they should be large or whether small; and to discriminate between main and secondary; adding what is needful to add, concealing and reducing what should be concealed and reduced, and exposing to view what should remain visible. As soon as a rough copy is executed, it should again be considered in all its details, for then alone will it assume the semblance of a picture. In the second place, all these towers, terraces and structures must be distinctly delineated; for with just a trifle of inattention, the railings will slant, the pillars will be topsy-turvy, doors and windows will recline in a horizontal position, steps will separate, leaving clefts between them, and even tables will be crowded into the walls, and flower-pots piled on portieres; and won't it, instead of turning out into a picture, be a mere

page 292

caricature? Thirdly, proper care must also be devoted, in the insertion of human beings, to density and height, to the creases of clothing, to jupes and sashes, to fingers, hands, and feet, as these are most important details; for if even one stroke be not thoroughly executed, then, if the hands be not swollen, the feet will be made to look as if they were lame. The colouring of faces and the drawing of the hair are minor points; but, in my own estimation, they really involve intense difficulty. Now a year's leave is, on one hand, too excessive, and a month's is, on the other, too little; so just give her half a year's leave. Depute, besides, cousin Pao-yü to lend her a hand in her task. Not that cousin Pao knows how to give any hints about painting; that in itself would be more of a drawback; but in order that, in the event of there being anything that she doesn't comprehend, or of anything perplexing her as to how best to insert it, cousin Pao may take the picture outside and make the necessary inquiries of those gentlemen, who excel in painting. Matters will thus be facilitated for her."

At this suggestion Pao-yü was the first to feel quite enchanted. "This proposal is

first-rate!" he exclaimed. "The towers and terraces minutely executed by Chan Tzu-liang are so perfect, and the beauties painted by Ch'eng Jih-hsing so extremely fine that I'll go at once and ask them of them!"

"I've always said that you fuss for nothing!" Pao-ch'ai interposed. "I merely passed a cursory remark, and there you want to go immediately and ask for things. Do wait until we arrive at some decision in our deliberations, and then you can go! But let's consider now what would be best to use to paint the picture on?"

"I've got, in my quarters," Pao-yü answered, "some snow-white, wavy paper, which is both large in size, and proof against ink as well."

Pao-ch'ai gave a sarcastic smile. "I do maintain," she cried, "that you are a perfectly useless creature! That snow-white, wavy paper is good for pictures consisting of characters and for outline drawings. Or else, those who have the knack of making landscapes, use it for depicting scenery of the southern Sung era, as it resists ink and is strong enough to bear coarse painting. But were you to employ this sort of paper to make a picture of this garden on, it will neither stand the colours, nor will it be easy to dry the painting by the fire. So not only won't it be suitable, but it will be a pity too to waste the paper. I'll tell you a way how to get out of this. When this garden was first laid out, some detailed plan was used, which although executed by a mere house-decorator, was perfect with regard to sites and bearings. You'd better therefore ask for it of your worthy mother, and apply as well to lady Feng for a piece of thick glazed lustring of the size of that paper, and hand them to the gentlemen outside, and request them to prepare a rough

page 293

copy for you, with any alterations or additions as might be necessary to make so as to accord with the style of these grounds. All that will remain to be done will be to introduce a few human beings; no more. Then when you have to match the azure and green pigments as well as the ground gold and ground silver, you can get those people again to do so for you. But you'll also have to bring an extra portable stove, so as to have it handy for melting the glue, and for washing your pencils, after you've taken the glue off. You further require a large table, painted white and covered with a cloth. That lot of small dishes you have aren't sufficient; your pencils too are not enough. It will be well consequently for you

to purchase a new set of each.”

“Do I own such a lot of painting materials!” Hsi Ch'un exclaimed. “Why, I simply use any pencil that first comes under my hand to paint with; that's all. And as for pigments, I've only got four kinds, ochrey stone, 'Kuang' flower paint, rattan yellow and rouge. Besides these, all I have amount to a couple of pencils for applying colours; no more.”

“Why didn't you say so earlier?” Pao-ch'ai remarked. “I've still got some of these things remaining. But you don't need them, so were I to give you any, they'd lie uselessly about. I'll put them away for you now for a time, and, when you want them, I'll let you have some. You should, however, keep them for the exclusive purpose of painting fans; for were you to paint such big things with them it would be a pity! I'll draw out a list for you to-day to enable you to go and apply to our worthy senior for the items; as it isn't likely that you people can possibly know all that's required. I'll dictate them, and cousin Pao can write them down!”

Pao-yü had already got a pencil and inkslab ready, for, fearing lest he might not remember clearly the various necessaries, he had made up his mind to write a memorandum of them; so the moment he heard Pao-ch'ai's suggestion, he cheerfully took up his pencil, and listened quietly.

“Four pencils of the largest size,” Pao-ch'ai commenced, “four of the third size; four of the second size; four pencils for applying colours on big ground; four on medium ground; four for small ground; ten claws of large southern crabs; ten claws of small crabs; ten pencils for painting side-hair and eyebrows; twenty for laying heavy colours; twenty for light colours; ten for painting faces; twenty willow-twigs; four ounces of 'arrow head' pearls; four ounces of southern ochre; four ounces of stone yellow; four ounces of dark green; four ounces of malachite; four ounces of tube-yellow; eight ounces of 'kuang' flower; four boxes of lead powder; ten sheets of rouge; two hundred sheets of thin red-gold leaves; two hundred sheets of lead; four ounces of smooth glue, from the two Kuang; and four ounces of pure alum.

page 294

The glue and alum for sizing the lustring are not included, so don't bother yourselves about them, but just take the lustring and give it to them outside to size it with alum for you. You and I can scour and clarify all these pigments, and

thus amuse ourselves, and prepare them for use as well. I feel sure you'll have an ample supply to last you a whole lifetime. But you must also get ready four sieves of fine lustring; a pair of coarse ones; four brush-pencils; four bowls, some large, some small; twenty large, coarse saucers; ten five-inch plates; twenty three-inch coarse, white plates; two stoves; four large and small earthenware pans; two new porcelain jars; four new water buckets; four one-foot-long bags, made of white cloth; two cattles of light charcoal; one or two cattles of willow-wood charcoal; a wooden box with three drawers; a yard of thick gauze, two ounces of fresh ginger; half a catty of soy;..."

"An iron kettle and an iron shovel," hastily chimed in Tai-yü with a smile full of irony.

"To do what with them?" Pao-ch'ai inquired.

"You ask for fresh ginger, soy and all these condiments, so I indent for an iron kettle for you to cook the paints and eat them." Tai-yü answered, to the intense merriment of one and all, who gave way to laughter.

"What do you, P'in Erh, know about these things?" Pao-ch'ai laughed. "I am not certain in my mind that you won't put those coarse coloured plates straightway on the fire. But unless you take the precaution beforehand of rubbing the bottom with ginger juice, mixed with soy, and of warming them dry, they're bound to crack, the moment they experience the least heat."

"It's really so," they exclaimed with one voice, after this explanation.

Tai-yü perused the list for a while. She then smiled and gave T'an Ch'un a tug. "Just see," she whispered, "we want to paint a picture, and she goes on indenting for a number of water jars and boxes! But, I presume, she's got so muddled, that she inserts a list of articles needed for her trousseau."

T'an Ch'un, at her remark, laughed with such heartiness, that it was all she could do to check herself. "Cousin Pao," she observed, "don't you wring her mouth? Just ask her what disparaging things she said about you."

"Why need I ask?" Pao-ch'ai smiled. "Is it likely, pray, that you can get ivory out of a cur's mouth?"

Speaking the while, she drew near, and, seizing Tai-yü, she pressed her down on the stove-couch with the intention of pinching her face. Tai-yü smilingly hastened to implore for grace. "My dear cousin," she cried, "spare me! P'in Erh is young in years; all she knows is to talk at random; she has no idea of what's proper and what's improper. But you are my elder cousin, so teach me how to behave. If you, cousin, don't let me off, to whom can I go and address my entreaties?"

page 295

Little did, however, all who heard her apprehend that there lurked some hidden purpose in her insinuations. "She's right there," they consequently pleaded smilingly. "So much is she to be pitied that even we have been mollified; do spare her and finish!"

Pao-ch'ai had, at first, meant to play with her, but when she unawares heard her drag in again the advice she had tendered her the other day, with regard to the reckless perusal of unwholesome books, she at once felt as if she could not have any farther fuss with her, and she let her rise to her feet.

"It's you, after all, elder cousin," Tai-yü laughed. "Had it been I, I wouldn't have let any one off."

Pao-ch'ai smiled and pointed at her. "It is no wonder," she said, "that our dear ancestor doats on you and that every one loves you. Even I have to-day felt my heart warm towards you! But come here and let me put your hair up for you!"

Tai-yü then, in very deed, swung herself round and crossed over to her. Pao-ch'ai arranged her coiffure with her hands. Pao-yü, who stood by and looked on, thought the style, in which her hair was being made up, better than it was before. But, of a sudden, he felt sorry at what had happened, as he fancied that she should not have let her brush her side hair, but left it alone for the time being and asked him to do it for her. While, however, he gave way to these erratic thoughts, he heard Pao-ch'ai speak. "We've done with what there was to write," she said, "so you'd better tomorrow go and tell grandmother about the things. If there be any at home, well and good; but if not, get some money to buy them with. I'll then help you both in your preparations."

Pao-yü vehemently put the list away; after which, they all joined in a further chat

on irrelevant matters; and, their evening meal over, they once more repaired into old lady Chia's apartments to wish her good-night. Their grandmother had, indeed, had nothing serious the matter with her. Her ailment had amounted mainly to fatigue, to which a slight chill had been super-added, so that having kept in the warm room for the day and taken a dose or two of medicine, she entirely got over the effects, and felt, in the evening, quite like own self again.

But, reader, the occurrences of the next day areas yet a mystery to you, but the nest chapter will divulge them.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Having time to amuse themselves, the Chia inmates raise, when least expected, funds to celebrate lady Feng's birthday. In his ceaseless affection for Chin Ch'ün, Pao-yü uses, for the occasion, a pinch of earth as incense and burns it.

When Madame Wang saw, for we will now proceed with our narrative, that the extent of dowager lady Chia's indisposition, contracted on the day she had been into the garden of Broad Vista, amounted to a simple chill, that no serious ailment had supervened, and that her health had improved soon after the doctor had been sent for and she had taken a couple of doses of medicine, she called lady Feng to her and asked her to get ready a present of some kind for her to take to her husband, Chia Cheng. But while they were engaged in deliberation, they perceived a waiting-maid arrive. She came from their old senior's part to invite them to go to her. So, with speedy step, Madame Wang led the way for lady Feng, and they came over into her quarters.

“Pray, may I ask,” Madame Wang then inquired, “whether you're feeling nearly well again now?”

“I'm quite all right to-day,” old lady Chia replied. “I've tasted the young-pheasant soup you sent me a little time back and find it full of relish. I've also had two pieces of meat, so I feel quite comfortable within me.”

“These dainties were presented to you, dear ancestor, by that girl Feng,” Madame Wang smiled. “It only shows how sincere her filial piety is. She does not render futile the love, which you, venerable senior, ever lavish on her.”

Dowager lady Chia nodded her head assentingly. “She's too kind to think of me!” she answered smiling. “But should there be any more uncooked, let them fry a couple of pieces; and, if these be thoroughly immersed in wine, the congee will taste well with them. The soup is, it's true, good, but it shouldn't, properly speaking, be prepared with fine rice.”

After listening to her wishes, lady Feng expressed with alacrity her readiness to see them executed, and directed a servant to go and deliver the message in the

cook-house.

“I sent the servant for you,” dowager lady Chia meanwhile said to Madame Wang with a smile, “not for anything else, but for the birthday of that girl Feng, which falls on the second. I had made up my mind two years ago to celebrate her birthday in proper style, but when the time came, there happened to be again something important to attend to, and it went by without anything being done. But this year, the inmates are, on one hand, all here, and there won't, I fancy, be, on the other, anything to prevent us, so we should all do our best to enjoy ourselves thoroughly for a day.”

“I was thinking the same thing,” Madame Wang rejoined, laughingly, “and, since it's your good pleasure, venerable senior, why, shouldn't we

page 297

deliberate at once and decide upon something?”

“To the best of my recollection,” dowager lady Chia resumed smiling, “whenever in past years I've had any birthday celebrations for any one of us, no matter who it was, we have ever individually sent our respective presents; but this method is common and is also apt, I think, to look very much as if there were some disunion. But I'll now devise a new way; a way, which won't have the effect of creating any discord, and will be productive of good cheer.”

“Let whatever way you may think best, dear ancestor, be adopted.” Madame Wang eagerly rejoined.

“My idea is,” old lady Chia laughingly continued, “that we too should follow the example of those poor families and raise a subscription among ourselves, and devote the whole of whatever we may collect to meet the outlay for the necessary preparations. What do you say, will this do or not?”

“This is a splendid idea!” Madame Wang acquiesced. “But what will, I wonder, be the way adopted for raising contributions?”

Old lady Chia was the more inspired by her reply. There and then she despatched servants to go and invite Mrs. Hsüeh, Madame Hsing and the rest of the ladies, and bade others summon the young ladies and Pao-yü. But from the

other mansion, Chia Chen's spouse, Lai Ta's wife, even up to the wives of such stewards as enjoyed a certain amount of respectability, were likewise to be asked to come round.

The sight of their old mistress' delight filled the waiting-maids and married women with high glee as well; and each hurried with vehemence to execute her respective errand. Those that were to be invited were invited, and those that had to be sent for were sent for; and, before the lapse of such time as could suffice to have a meal in, the old as well as young, the high as well as low, crammed, in a black mass, every bit of the available space in the rooms.

Only Mrs. Hsüeh and dowager lady Chia sat opposite to each other. Mesdames Hsing and Wang simply seated themselves on two chairs, which faced the door of the apartment. Pao-ch'ai and her five or six cousins occupied the stove-couch. Pao-yü sat on his grandmother's lap. Below, the whole extent of the floor was crowded with inmates on their feet. But old lady Chia forthwith desired that a few small stools should be fetched. When brought, these were proffered to Lai Ta's mother and some other nurses, who were advanced in years and held in respect; for it was the custom in the Chia mansion that the family servants, who had waited upon any of the fathers or mothers, should enjoy a higher status than even young masters and mistresses. Hence it was that while Mrs. Yu, lady Feng and other ladies remained standing below, Lai Ta's mother and three or four other old nurses had, after excusing

page 298

themselves for their rudeness, seated themselves on small stools.

Dowager lady Chia recounted, with a face beaming with smiles, the suggestions she had shortly made, for the benefit of the various inmates present; and one and all, of course, were only too ready to contribute for the entertainment. More, some of them, were on friendly terms with lady Feng, so they, of their own free will, adopted the proposal; others lived in fear and trembling of lady Feng, and these were only too anxious to make up to her. Every one, besides, could well afford the means, so that, as soon as they heard of the proposed subscriptions, they, with one consent, signified their acquiescence.

“I'll give twenty taels!” old lady Chia was the first to say with a smile playing round her lips.

"I'll follow your lead, dear senior," Mrs. Hsüeh smiled, "and also subscribe twenty taels."

"We don't presume to place ourselves on an equal footing with your ladyship," Mesdames Hsing and Wang pleaded. "We, of course, come one degree lower; each of us therefore will contribute sixteen taels."

"We too naturally rank one step lower," Mrs. Yu and Li Wan also smiled, "so we'll each give twelve taels."

"You're a widow," dowager lady Chia eagerly demurred, addressing herself to Li Wan, "and have lost all your estate, so how could we drag you into all this outlay! I'll contribute for you!"

"Don't be in such high feather dear senior," lady Feng hastily observed laughing, "but just look to your accounts before you saddle yourself with this burden! You've already taken upon yourself two portions; and do you now also volunteer sixteen taels on behalf of my elder sister-in-law? You may willingly do so, while you speak in the abundance of your spirits, but when you, by and bye, come to ponder over what you've done, you'll feel sore at heart again! 'It's all that girl Feng that's driven me to spend the money,' you'll say in a little time; and you'll devise some ingenious way to inveigle me to fork out three or four times as much as your share and thus make up your deficit in an underhand way; while I will still be as much in the clouds as if I were in a dream!"

These words made every one laugh.

"According to you, what should be done?" dowager lady Chia laughingly inquired.

"My birthday hasn't yet come," lady Feng smiled; "and already now I've been the recipient of so much more than I deserve that I am quite unhappy. But if I don't contribute a single cash, I shall feel really ill at ease for the trouble I shall be giving such a lot of people. It would be as well, therefore, that I should bear this share of my senior sister-in-law; and, when

the day comes, I can eat a few more things, and thus be able to enjoy some happiness.”

“Quite right!” cried Madame Hsing and the others at this suggestion. So old lady Chia then signified her approval.

“There's something more I'd like to add,” lady Feng pursued smiling. “I think that it's fair enough that you, worthy ancestor, should, besides your own twenty taels, have to stand two shares as well, the one for cousin Liu, the other for cousin Pao-yü, and that Mrs. Hsüeh should, beyond her own twenty taels, likewise bear cousin Pao-ch'ai's portion. But it's somewhat unfair that the two ladies Mesdames Hsing and Wang should each only give sixteen taels, when their share is small, and when they don't subscribe anything for any one else. It's you, venerable senior, who'll be the sufferer by this arrangement.”

Dowager lady Chia, at these words, burst out into a boisterous fit of laughter. “It's this hussey Feng,” she observed, “who, after all, takes my side! What you say is quite right. Hadn't it been for you, I would again have been duped by them!”

“Dear senior!” lady Feng smiled. Just hand over our two cousins to those two ladies and let each take one under her charge and finish. If you make each contribute one share, it will be square enough.”

“This is perfectly fair,” eagerly rejoined old lady Chia. “Let this suggestion be carried out!”

Lai Ta's mother hastily stood up. “This is such a subversion of right,” she smiled, “that I'll put my back up on account of the two ladies. She's a son's wife, on the other side, and, in here, only a wife's brother's child; and yet she doesn't incline towards her mother-in-law and her aunt, but takes other people's part. This son's wife has therefore become a perfect stranger; and a close niece has, in fact, become a distant niece!”

As she said this, dowager lady Chia and every one present began to laugh. “If the junior ladies subscribe twelve taels each,” Lai Ta's mother went on to ask, “we must, as a matter of course, also come one degree lower; eh?”

Upon hearing this, old lady Chia remonstrated. “This won't do!” she observed.

“You naturally should rank one degree lower, but you're all, I am well aware, wealthy people; and, in spite of your status being somewhat lower, your funds are more flourishing than theirs. It's only just then that you should be placed on the same standing as those people!”

The posse of nurses expressed with promptness their acceptance of the proposal their old mistress made.

“The young ladies,” dowager lady Chia resumed, “should merely give something for the sake of appearances! If each one contributes a sum

page 300

proportionate to her monthly allowance, it will be ample!” Turning her head, “Yüan Yang!” she cried, “a few of you should assemble in like manner, and consult as to what share you should take in the matter. So bring them along!”

Yüan Yang assured her that her desires would be duly attended to and walked away. But she had not been absent for any length of time, when she appeared on the scene along with P'ing Erh, Hsi Jen, Ts'ai Hsia and other girls, and a number of waiting-maids as well. Of these, some subscribed two taels; others contributed one tael.

“Can it be,” dowager lady Chia then said to P'ing Erh, “that you don't want any birthday celebrated for your mistress, that you don't range yourself also among them?”

“The other money I gave,” P'ing Erh smiled, “I gave privately, and is extra.”

“This is what I am publicly bound to contribute along with the lot.”

“That's a good child!” lady Chia laughingly rejoined.

“Those above as well as those below have all alike given their share,” lady Feng went on to observe with a smile. “But there are still those two secondary wives; are they to give anything or not? Do go and ask them! It's but right that we should go to the extreme length and include them. Otherwise, they'll imagine that we've looked down upon them!”

“Just so!” eagerly answered lady Chia, at these words. “How is it that we forgot all about them? The only thing is, I fear, they've got no time to spare; yet, tell a

servant-girl to go and ask them what they'll do!"

While she spoke, a servant-girl went off. After a long absence, she returned. "Each of them," she reported, "will likewise contribute two taels."

Dowager lady Chia was delighted with the result. "Fetch a pen and inkslab," she cried, "and let's calculate how much they amount to, all together."

Mrs. Yu abused lady Feng in a low tone of voice. "I'll take you, you mean covetous creature, and ... ! All these mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law have come forward and raised money to celebrate your birthday, and are you yet not satisfied that you must also drag in those two miserable beings! But what do you do it for?"

"Try and talk less trash!" lady Feng smiled; also in an undertone. "We'll be leaving this place in a little time and then I'll square up accounts with you! But why ever are those two miserable? When they have money, they uselessly give it to other people; and isn't it better that we should get hold of it, and enjoy ourselves with it?"

While she uttered these taunts, they computed that the collections would reach a sum over and above one hundred and fifty taels.

"We couldn't possibly run through all this for a day's theatricals and

page 301

banquet!" old lady Chia exclaimed.

"As no outside guests are to be invited," Mrs. Yu interposed, "and the number of tables won't also be many, there will be enough to cover two or three days' outlay! First of all, there won't be anything to spend for theatricals, so we'll effect a saving on that item."

"Just call whatever troupe that girl Feng may say she likes best," dowager lady Chia suggested.

"We've heard quite enough of the performances of that company of ours," lady Feng said; "let's therefore spend a little money and send for another, and see

what they can do.”

“I leave that to you, brother Chen's wife,” old lady Chia pursued, “in order that our girl Feng should have occasion to trouble her mind with as little as possible, and be able to enjoy a day's peace and quiet. It's only right that she should.”

Mrs. Yu replied that she would be only too glad to do what she could. They then prolonged their chat for a little longer, until one and all realised that their old senior must be quite fagged out, and they gradually dispersed.

After seeing Mesdames Hsing and Wang off, Mrs. Yu and the other ladies adjourned into lady Feng's rooms to consult with her about the birthday festivities.

“Don't ask me!” lady Feng urged. “Do whatever will please our worthy ancestor.”

“What a fine thing you are to come across such a mighty piece of luck!” Mrs. Yu smiled. “I was wondering what had happened that she summoned us all! Why, was it simply on this account? Not to breathe a word about the money that I'll have to contribute, must I have trouble and annoyance to bear as well? How will you show me any thanks?”

“Don't bring shame upon yourself!” lady Feng laughed. “I didn't send for you; so why should I be thankful to you! If you funk the exertion, go at once and let our venerable senior know, and she'll depute some one else and have done.”

“You go on like this as you see her in such excellent spirits, that's why!” Mrs. Yu smilingly answered. “It would be well, I advise you, to pull in a bit; for if you be too full of yourself, you'll get your due reward!”

After some further colloquy, these two ladies eventually parted company.

On the next day, the money was sent over to the Ning Kuo Mansion at the very moment that Mrs. Yu had got up, and was performing her toilette and ablutions. “Who brought it?” she asked.

“Nurse Lin,” the servant-girl said by way of response.

“Call her in,” Mrs. Yu said.

page 302

The servant-girls walked as far as the lower rooms and called Lin Chih-hsiao's wife to come in. Mrs. Yu bade her seat herself on the footstool. While she hurriedly combed her hair and washed her face and hands, she wanted to know how much the bundle contained in all.

“This is what's subscribed by us servants.” Lin Chih-hsiao's wife replied, “and so I collected it and brought it over first. As for the contributions of our venerable mistress, and those of the ladies, they aren't ready yet.”

But simultaneously with this reply, the waiting-maids announced: “Our lady of the other mansion and Mrs. Hsüeh have sent over some one with their portions.”

“You mean wenches!” Mrs. Yu cried, scolding them with a smile. “All the gumption you've got is to simply bear in mind this sort of nonsense! In a fit of good cheer, your old mistress yesterday purposely expressed a wish to imitate those poor people, and raise a subscription. But you at once treasured it up in your memory, and, when the thing came to be canvassed by you, you treated it in real earnest! Don't you yet quick bundle yourselves out, and bring the money in! Be careful and give them some tea before you see them off.”

The waiting-maids smilingly hastened to go and take delivery of the money and bring it in. It consisted, in all, of two bundles, and contained Pao-ch'ai's and Tai-yü's shares as well.

“Whose shares are wanting?” Mrs. Yu asked.

“Those of our old lady, of Madame Wang, the young ladies, and of our girls below are still missing,” Lin Chih-hsiao's wife explained.

“There's also that of your senior lady,” Mrs. Yu proceeded.

“You'd better hurry over, my lady,” Lin Chih-hsiao's wife said; “for as this money will be issued through our mistress Secunda, she'll nobble the whole of it.”

While conversing, Mrs. Yu finished arranging her coiffure and performing her ablutions; and, giving orders to see that the carriage was got ready, she shortly arrived at the Jung mansion. First and foremost she called on lady Feng. Lady Feng, she discovered, had already put the money into a packet, and was on the point of sending it over.

“Is it all there?” Mrs. Yu asked.

“Yes, it is,” lady Feng smiled, “so you might as well take it away at once; for if it gets mislaid, I’ve nothing to do with it.”

“I’m somewhat distrustful,” Mrs. Yu laughed, “so I’d like to check it in your presence.”

These words over, she verily checked sum after sum. She found Li Wan's share alone wanting. “I said that you were up to tricks!” laughingly

page 303

observed Mrs. Yu. “How is it that your elder sister-in-law's isn't here?”

“There's all that money; and isn't it yet enough?” lady Feng smiled. “If there's merely a portion short it shouldn't matter! Should the money prove insufficient, I can then look you up, and give it to you.”

“When the others were present yesterday,” Mrs. Yu pursued, “you were ready enough to act as any human being would; but here you're again to-day prevaricating with me! I won't, by any manner of means, agree to this proposal of yours! I'll simply go and ask for the money of our venerable senior.”

“I see how dreadful you are!” lady Feng laughed. “But when something turns up by and bye, I'll also be very punctilious; so don't you then bear me a grudge!”

“Well, never mind if you don't give your quota!” Mrs. Yu smilingly rejoined. “Were it not that I consider the dutiful attentions you've all along shown me would I ever be ready to humour you?”

So rejoicing, she produced P'ing Erh's share. “P'ing Erh, come here,” she cried, “take this share of yours and put it away! Should the money collected turn out to

be below what's absolutely required, I'll make up the sum for you.”

P'ing Erh apprehended her meaning. “My lady,” she answered, with a cheerful countenance, “it would come to the same thing if you were to first spend what you want and to give me afterwards any balance that may remain of it.”

“Is your mistress alone to be allowed to do dishonest acts,” Mrs. Yu laughed, “and am I not to be free to bestow a favour?”

P'ing Erh had no option, but to retain her portion.

“I want to see,” Mrs. Yu added, “where your mistress, who is so extremely careful, will run through all the money, we've raised! If she can't spend it, why she'll take it along with her in her coffin, and make use of it there.”

While still speaking, she started on her way to dowager lady Chia's suite of rooms. After first paying her respects to her, she made a few general remarks, and then betook herself into Yüan Yang's quarters where she held a consultation with Yüan Yang. Lending a patient ear to all that Yüan Yang; had to recommend in the way of a programme, and as to how best to give pleasure to old lady Chia, she deliberated with her until they arrived at a satisfactory decision. When the time came for Mrs. Yu to go, she took the two taels, contributed by Yüan Yang, and gave them back to her. “There's no use for these!” she said, and with these words still on her lips, she straightway quitted her presence and went in search of Madame Wang.

After a short chat, Madame Wang stepped into the family shrine reserved

page 304

for the worship of Buddha, so she likewise restored Ts'ai Yün's share to her; and, availing herself of lady Feng's absence, she presently reimbursed to Mrs. Chu and Mrs. Chao the amount of their respective contributions.

These two dames would not however presume to take their money back. “Your lot, ladies, is a pitiful one!” Mrs. Yu then expostulated. “How can you afford all this spare money! That hussey Feng is well aware of the fact. I'm here to answer for you!”

At these assurances, both put the money away, with profuse expressions of

gratitude.

In a twinkle, the second day of the ninth moon arrived. The inmates of the garden came to find out that Mrs. Yu was making preparations on an extremely grand scale; for not only was there to be a theatrical performance, but jugglers and women storytellers as well; and they combined in getting everything ready that could conduce to afford amusement and enjoyment.

“This is,” Li Wan went on to say to the young ladies, “the proper day for our literary gathering, so don't forget it. If Pao-yü hasn't appeared, it must, I presume, be that his mind is so preoccupied with the fuss that's going on that he has lost sight of all pure and refined things.”

Speaking, “Go and see what he is up to!” she enjoined a waiting-maid; “and be quick and tell him to come.”

The waiting-maid returned after a long absence. “Sister Hua says,” she reported, “that he went out of doors, soon after daylight this morning.”

The result of the inquiries filled every one with surprise. “He can't have gone out!” they said. “This girl is stupid, and doesn't know how to speak.” They consequently also directed Ts'ui Mo to go and ascertain the truth. In a little time, Ts'ui Mo returned. “It's really true,” she explained, “that he has gone out of doors. He gave out that a friend of his was dead, and that he was going to pay a visit of condolence.”

“There's certainly nothing of the kind,” T'an Ch'un interposed. “But whatever there might have been to call him away, it wasn't right of him to go out on an occasion like the present one! Just call Hsi Jen here, and let me ask her!”

But just as she was issuing these directions, she perceived Hsi Jen appear on the scene. “No matter what he may have had to attend to to-day,” Li Wan and the rest remarked, “he shouldn't have gone out! In the first place, it's your mistress Secunda's birthday, and our dowager lady is in such buoyant spirits that the various inmates, whether high or low, are coming from either mansion to join in the fun; and lo, he goes off! Secondly, this is the proper day as well for holding our first literary gathering, and he doesn't so as apply for leave, but stealthily sneaks away.”

Hsi Jen heaved it sigh. "He said last night," she explained, "that he had something very important to do this morning; that he was going as far as Prince Pei Ching's mansion, but that he would hurry back. I advised him not to go; but, of course, he wouldn't listen to me. When he got out of bed, at daybreak this morning, he asked for his plain clothes and put them on, so, I suppose, some lady of note belonging to the household of Prince Pei Ching must have departed this life; but who can tell?"

"If such be truly the case," Li Wan and her companions exclaimed, "it's quite right that he should have gone over for a while; but he should have taken care to be back in time !"

This remark over, they resumed their deliberations. "Let's write our verses," they said, "and we can fine him on his return."

As these words were being spoken, they espied a messenger despatched by dowager lady Chia to ask them over, so they at once adjourned to the front part of the compound.

Hsi Jen then reported to his grandmother what Pao-yü had done. Old lady Chia was upset by the news; so much so, that she issued immediate orders to a few servants to go and fetch him.

Pao-yü had, in fact, been brooding over some affair of the heart. A day in advance he therefore gave proper injunctions to Pei Ming. "As I shall be going out of doors to-morrow at daybreak," he said, "you'd better get ready two horses and wait at the back door! No one else need follow as an escort! Tell Li Kuei that I've gone to the Pei mansion. In the event of any one wishing to start in search of me, bid him place every obstacle in the way, as all inquiries can well be dispensed with! Let him simply explain that I've been detained in the Pei mansion, but that I shall surely be back shortly."

Pei Ming could not make out head or tail of what he was driving at; but he had no alternative than to deliver his message word for word. At the first blush of morning of the day appointed, he actually got ready two horses and remained in waiting at the back gate. When daylight set in, he perceived Pao-yü make his appearance from the side door; got up, from head to foot, in a plain suit of

clothes. Without uttering a word, he mounted his steed; and stooping his body forward, he proceeded at a quick step on his way down the road. Pei Ming had no help but to follow suit; and, springing on his horse, he smacked it with his whip, and overtook his master. "Where are we off to?" he eagerly inquired, from behind.

"Where does this road lead to?" Pao-yü asked.

"This is the main road leading out of the northern gate." Pei Ming replied. "Once out of it, everything is so dull and dreary that there's nothing

page 306

worth seeing!"

Pao-yü caught this answer and nodded his head. "I was just thinking that a dull and dreary place would be just the thing!" he observed. While speaking, he administered his steed two more whacks. The horse quickly turned a couple of corners, and trotted out of the city gate. Pei Ming was more and more at a loss what to think of the whole affair; yet his only course was to keep pace closely in his master's track. With one gallop, they covered a distance of over seven or eight lis. But it was only when human habitations became gradually few and far between that Pao-yü ultimately drew up his horse. Turning his head round: "Is there any place here," he asked, "where incense is sold?"

"Incense!" Pei Ming shouted, "yes, there is; but what kind of incense it is I don't know."

"All other incense is worth nothing," Pao-yü resumed, after a moment's reflection. "We should get sandalwood, conifer and cedar, these three."

"These three sorts are very difficult to get," Pei Ming smiled.

Pao-yü was driven to his wits' ends. But Pei Ming noticing his dilemma, "What do you want incense for?" he felt impelled to ask. "Master Secundus, I've often seen you wear a small purse, about your person, full of tiny pieces of incense; and why don't you see whether you've got it with you?"

This allusion was sufficient to suggest the idea to Pao-yü's mind. Forthwith, he drew back his hand and felt the purse suspended on the lapel of his coat. It really

contained two bits of 'Ch'en Su.' At this discovery, his heart expanded with delight. The only thing that (damped his spirits) was the notion that there was a certain want of reverence in his proceedings; but, on second consideration, he concluded that what he had about him was, after all, considerably superior to any he could purchase, and, with alacrity, he went on to inquire about a censer and charcoal.

“Don't think of such things!” Pei Ming urged. “Where could they be procured in a deserted and lonely place like this? If you needed them, why didn't you speak somewhat sooner, and we could have brought them along with us? Would not this have been more convenient?”

“You stupid thing!” exclaimed Pao-yü. “Had we been able to bring them along, we wouldn't have had to run in this way as if for life!”

Pei Ming indulged in a protracted reverie, after which, he gave a smile. “I've thought of something,” he cried, “but I wonder what you'll think about it, Master Secundus! You don't, I expect, only require these things; you'll need others too, I presume. But this isn't the place for them; so let's move on at once another couple of li, when we'll get to the 'Water Spirit' monastery.”

page 307

“Is the 'Water Spirit' monastery in this neighbourhood?” Pao-yü eagerly inquired, upon hearing his proposal. “Yes, that would be better; let's press forward.”

With this reply, he touched his horse with his whip. While advancing on their way, he turned round. “The nun in this 'Water Spirit' monastery,” he shouted to Pei Ming, “frequently comes on a visit to our house, so that when we now get there and ask her for the loan of a censer, she's certain to let us have it.”

“Not to mention that that's a place where our family burns incense,” Pei Ming answered, “she could not dare to raise any objections, to any appeal from us for a loan, were she even in a temple quite unknown to us. There's only one thing, I've often been struck with the strong dislike you have for this 'Water Spirit' monastery, master, and how is that you're now, so delighted with the idea of going to it?”

“I’ve all along had the keenest contempt for those low-bred persons,” Pao-yü rejoined, “who, without knowing why or wherefore, foolishly offer sacrifices to the spirits, and needlessly have temples erected. The reason of it all is, that those rich old gentlemen and unsophisticated wealthy women, who lived in past days, were only too ready, the moment they heard of the presence of a spirit anywhere, to take in hand the erection of temples to offer their sacrifices in, without even having the faintest notion whose spirits they were. This was because they readily credited as gospel-truth such rustic stories and idle tales as chanced to reach their ears. Take this place as an example. Offerings are presented in this 'Water Spirit' nunnery to the spirit of the 'Lo' stream; hence the name of 'Water Spirit' monastery has been given to it. But people really don't know that in past days, there was no such thing as a 'Lo' spirit! These are, indeed, no better than legendary yarns invented by Ts'ao Tzu-chien, and who would have thought it, this sort of stupid people have put up images of it, to which they offer oblations. It serves, however, my purpose to-day, so I'll borrow of her whatever I need to use.”

While engaged in talking, they reached the entrance. The old nun saw Pao-yü arrive, and was thoroughly taken aback. So far was this visit beyond her expectations, that well did it seem to her as if a live dragon had dropped from the heavens. With alacrity, she rushed up to him; and making inquiries after his health, she gave orders to an old Taoist to come and take his horse.

Pao-yü stepped into the temple. But without paying the least homage to the image of the 'Lo' spirit, he simply kept his eyes fixed intently on it; for albeit made of clay, it actually seemed, nevertheless, to flutter as does a terror-stricken swan, and to wriggle as a dragon in motion. It looked like a lotus, peeping its head out of the green stream, or like the sun, pouring its rays

page 308

upon the russet clouds in the early morn. Pao-yü's tears unwittingly trickled down his cheeks.

The old nun presented tea. Pao-yü then asked her for the loan of a censer to burn incense in. After a protracted absence, the old nun returned with some incense as well as several paper horses, which she had got ready for him to offer. But Pao-yü would not use any of the things she brought. “Take the censer,” he said to Pei Ming, “and go out into the back garden and find a clean spot!”

But having been unable to discover one; “What about, the platform round that well?” Pei Ming inquired.

Pao-yü nodded his head assentingly. Then along with him, he repaired to the platform of the well. He deposited the censer on the ground, while Pei Ming stood on one side. Pao-yü produced the incense, and threw it on the fire. With suppressed tears, he performed half of the ceremony, and, turning himself round, he bade Pei Ming clear the things away. Pei Ming acquiesced; but, instead of removing the things, he speedily fell on his face, and made several prostrations, as his lips uttered this prayer: “I, Pei Ming, have been in the service of Master Secundus for several years. Of the secrets of Mr. Secundus' heart there are none, which I have not known, save that with regard to this sacrifice to-day; the object of which, he has neither told me; nor have I had the presumption to ask. But thou, oh spirit! who art the recipient of these sacrificial offerings, must, I expect, unknown though thy surname and name be to me, be a most intelligent and supremely beautiful elder or younger sister, unique among mankind, without a peer even in heaven! As my Master Secundus cannot give vent to the sentiments, which fill his heart, allow me to pray on his behalf! Should thou possess spirituality, and holiness be thy share, do thou often come and look up our Mr. Secundus, for persistently do his thoughts dwell with thee! And there is no reason why thou should'st not come! But should'st thou be in the abode of the dead, grant that our Mr. Secundus too may, in his coming existence, be transformed into a girl, so that he may be able to amuse himself with you all! And will not this prove a source of pleasure to both sides?”

At the close of his invocation, he again knocked his head several times on the ground, and, eventually, rose to his feet.

Pao-yü lent an ear to his utterances, but, before they had been brought to an end, he felt it difficult to repress himself from laughing. Giving him a kick, “Don't talk such stuff and nonsense!” he shouted. “Were any looker-on to overhear what you say, he'd jeer at you!”

Pei Ming got up and put the censer away. While he walked along with Pao-yü, “I've already,” he said, “told the nun that you hadn't as yet had

anything to eat, Master Secundus, and I bade her get a few things ready for you, so you must force yourself to take something. I know very well that a grand banquet will be spread in our mansion to-day, that exceptional bustle will prevail, and that you have, on account of this, Sir, come here to get out of the way. But as you're, after all, going to spend a whole day in peace and quiet in here, you should try and divert yourself as best you can. It won't, therefore, by any manner of means do for you to have nothing to eat."

"I won't be at the theatrical performance to have any wine," Pao-yü remarked, "so what harm will there be in my having a drink here, as the fancy takes me?"

"Quite so!" rejoined Pei Ming. "But there's another consideration. You and I have run over here; but there must be some whose minds are ill at ease. Were there no one uneasy about us, well, what would it matter if we got back into town as late as we possibly could? But if there be any solicitous on your account, it's but right, Master Secundus, that you should enter the city and return home. In the first place, our worthy old mistress and Madame Wang, will thus compose their minds; and secondly, you'll observe the proper formalities, if you succeed in doing nothing else. But even supposing that, when once you get home, you feel no inclination to look at the plays and have anything to drink, you can merely wait upon your father and mother, and acquit yourself of your filial piety! Well, if it's only a matter of fulfilling this obligation, and you don't care whether our old mistress and our lady, your mother, experience concern or not, why, the spirit itself, which has just been the recipient of your oblations, won't feel in a happy frame of mind! You'd better therefore, master, ponder and see what you think of my words!"

"I see what you're driving at!" Pao-yü smiled. "You keep before your mind the thought that you're the only servant, who has followed me as an attendant out of town, and you give way to fear that you will, on your return, have to bear the consequences. You hence have recourse to these grandiloquent arguments to shove words of counsel down my throat! I've come here now with the sole object of satisfying certain rites, and then going to partake of the banquet and be a spectator of the plays; and I never mentioned one single word about any intention on my part not to go back to town for a whole day! I've, however, already accomplished the wish I fostered in my heart, so if we hurry back to town, so as to enable every one to set their solicitude at rest, won't the right principle be carried out to the full in one respect as well as another?"

“Yes, that would be better!” exclaimed Pei Ming.

Conversing the while, they wended their way into the Buddhistic hall.

page 310

Here the nun had, in point of fact, got ready a table with lenten viands. Pao-yü hurriedly swallowed some refreshment and so did Pei Ming; after which, they mounted their steeds and retraced their steps homewards, by the road they had come.

Pei Ming followed behind. “Master Secundus!” he kept on shouting, “be careful how you ride! That horse hasn't been ridden very much, so hold him in tight a bit.”

As he urged him to be careful, they reached the interior of the city walls, and, making their entrance once more into the mansion by the back gate, they betook themselves, with all possible despatch, into the I Hung court. Hsi Jen and the other maids were not at home. Only a few old women were there to look after the rooms. As soon as they saw him arrive, they were so filled with gratification that their eyebrows dilated and their eyes smiled. “O-mi-to-fu!” they said laughingly, “you've come! You've all but driven Miss Hua mad from despair! In the upper quarters, they're just seated at the feast, so be quick, Mr. Secundus, and go and join them.”

At these words, Pao-yü speedily divested himself of his plain clothes and put on a coloured costume, reserved for festive occasions, which he hunted up with his own hands. This done, “Where are they holding the banquet?” he inquired.

“They're in the newly erected large reception pavilion,” the old women responded.

Upon catching their reply, Pao-yü straightway started for the reception-pavilion. From an early moment, the strains of flageolets and pipes, of song and of wind-instruments faintly fell on his ear. The moment he reached the passage on the opposite side, he discerned Yü Ch'uan-erh seated all alone under the eaves of the verandah giving way to tears. As soon as she became conscious of Pao-yü's arrival, she drew a long, long breath. Smacking her lips, “Ai!” she cried, “the phoenix has alighted! go in at once! Hadn't you come for another minute, every

one would have been quite upset!”

Pao-yü forced a smile. “Just try and guess where I've been?” he observed.

Yü Ch'uan-erh twisted herself round, and, paying no notice to him, she continued drying her tears. Pao-yü had, therefore, no option but to enter with hasty step. On his arrival in the reception-hall, he paid his greetings to his grandmother Chia, to Madame Wang, and the other inmates, and one and all felt, in fact, as happy to see him back as if they had come into the possession of a phoenix.

“Where have you been,” dowager lady Chia was the first to ask, “that you come back at this hour? Don't you yet go and pay your congratulations

page 311

to your cousin?” And smiling she proceeded, addressing herself to lady Feng, “Your cousin has no idea of what's right and what's wrong. Even though he may have had something pressing to do, why didn't he utter just one word, but stealthily bolted away on his own hook? Will this sort of thing ever do? But should you behave again in this fashion by and bye, I shall, when your father comes home, feel compelled to tell him to chastise you.”

Lady Feng smiled. “Congratulations are a small matter?” she observed. “But, cousin Pao, you must, on no account, sneak away any more without breathing a word to any one, and not sending for some people to escort you, for carriages and horses throng the streets. First and foremost, you're the means of making people uneasy at heart; and, what's more, that isn't the way in which members of a family such as ours should go out of doors!”

Dowager lady Chia meanwhile went on reprimanding the servants, who waited on him. “Why,” she said, “do you all listen to him and readily go wherever he pleases without even reporting a single word? But where did you really go?” Continuing, she asked, “Did you have anything to eat? Or did you get any sort of fright, eh?”

“A beloved wife of the duke of Pei Ching departed this life,” Pao-yü merely returned for answer, “and I went to-day to express my condolences to him. I found him in such bitter anguish that I couldn't very well leave him and come

back immediately. That's the reason why I tarried with him a little longer.”

“If hereafter you do again go out of doors slyly and on your own hook,” dowager lady Chia impressed on his mind, “without first telling me, I shall certainly bid your father give you a caning!”

Pao-yü signified his obedience with all promptitude. His grandmother Chia was then bent upon having the servants, who were on attendance on him, beaten, but the various inmates did their best to dissuade her. “Venerable senior!” they said, “you can well dispense with flying into a rage! He has already promised that he won't venture to go out again. Besides, he has come back without any misadventure, so we should all compose our minds and enjoy ourselves a bit!”

Old lady Chia had, at first, been full of solicitude. She had, as a matter of course, been in a state of despair and displeasure; but, seeing Pao-yü return in safety, she felt immoderately delighted, to such a degree, that she could not reconcile herself to visit her resentment upon him. She therefore dropped all mention of his escapade at once. And as she entertained fears lest he may have been unhappy or have had, when he was away, nothing to eat, or got a start on the road, she did not punish him, but had, contrariwise, recourse to every sort of inducement to coax him to feel at ease. But Hsi Jen soon

page 312

came over and attended to his wants, so the company once more turned their attention to the theatricals. The play acted on that occasion was, “The record of the boxwood hair-pin.” Dowager lady Chia, Mrs. Hsüeh and the others were deeply impressed by what they saw and gave way to tears. Some, however, of the inmates were amused; others were provoked to anger; others gave vent to abuse.

But, reader, do you wish to know the sequel? If so, the next chapter will explain it.

CHAPTER XLIV.

By some inscrutable turn of affairs, lady Feng begins to feel the pangs of jealousy.

Pao-yü experiences joy, beyond all his expectations, when P'ing Erh (receives a slap from lady Feng) and has to adjust her hair.

But to resume our narrative. At the performance of the 'Record of the boxwood hairpin,' at which all the inmates of the household were present, Pao-yü and his female cousins sat together. When Lin Tai-yü noticed that the act called, 'The man offers a sacrifice' had been reached, "This Wang Shih-p'eng," she said to Pao-ch'ai, "is very stupid! It would be quite immaterial where he offered his sacrifices, and why must he repair to the riverside? 'At the sight of an object,' the proverb has it, 'one thinks of a person. All waters under the heavens revert but to one source.' So had he baled a bowlful from any stream, and given way to his lamentations, while gazing on it, he could very well have satisfied his feelings."

Pao-ch'ai however made no reply.

Pao-yü then turned his head round and asked for some warm wine to drink to lady Feng's health. The fact is, that dowager lady Chia had enjoined on them that this occasion was unlike others, and that it was absolutely necessary for them to do the best to induce lady Feng to heartily enjoy herself for the day. She herself, nevertheless, felt too listless to join the banquet, so simply reclining on a sofa of the inner room, she looked at the plays in company with Mrs. Hsüeh; and choosing several kinds of such eatables as were to her taste, she placed them on a small teapoy, and now helped herself to some, and now talked, as the fancy took her. Then allotting what viands were served on the two tables assigned to her to the elder and younger waiting-maids, for whom no covers were laid, and to those female servants and other domestics, who were on duty and had to answer calls, she urged them not to mind but to seat themselves outside the windows, under the eaves of the verandahs,

page 313

and to eat and drink at their pleasure, without any regard to conventionalities. Madame Wang and Madame Hsing occupied places at the high table below;

while round several tables outside sat the posse of young ladies.

“Do let that girl Feng have the seat of honour,” old lady Chia shortly told Mrs. Yu and her contemporaries, “and mind be careful in doing the honours for me, for she is subjected to endless trouble from one year's end to another!”

“Very well,” said Mrs. Yu. “I fancy,” she went on to smile, “that little used as she is to filling the place of honour, she's bound, if she takes the high seat, to be so much at a loss how to behave, as to be loth even to have any wine!”

Dowager lady Chia was much amused by her reply. “Well, if you can't succeed,” she said, “wait and I'll come and offer it to her.”

Lady Feng with hasty step walked into the inner room. “Venerable ancestor!” she smiled, “don't believe all they tell you! I've already had several cups!”

“Quick, pull her out,” old lady Chia laughingly cried to Mrs. Yu, “and shove her into a chair, and let all of you drink by turns to her health! If she then doesn't drink, I'll come myself in real earnest and make her have some!”

At these words, Mrs. Yu speedily dragged her out, laughing the while, and forced her into a seat, and, directing a servant to fetch a cup, she filled it with wine. “You've got from one year's end to another,” she smiled, “the trouble and annoyance of conferring dutiful attentions upon our venerable senior, upon Madame Wang and upon myself, so, as I've nothing to-day, with which to prove my affection for you, have a sip, from my hand, my own dear, of this cup of wine I poured for you myself!”

“If you deliberately wish to present me a glass,” lady Feng laughed, “fall on your knees and I'll drink at once!”

“What's this you say?” Mrs. Yu replied with a laugh. “And who are you, I wonder? But let me tell you this once for all and finish that though we've succeeded, after ever so many difficulties, in getting up this entertainment to-day, there's no saying whether we shall in the future be able to have anything more the like of this or not. Let's avail ourselves then of the present to put our capacity to the strain and drink a couple of cups!”

Lady Feng saw very well that she could not advance any excuses, and necessity

obliged her to swallow the contents of two cups. In quick succession, however, the various young ladies also drew near her, and lady Feng was constrained again to take a sip from the cup each held. But nurse Lai Ta too felt compelled, at the sight of dowager lady Chia still in buoyant spirits, to come forward and join in the merriment, so putting herself at the

page 314

head of a number of nurses, she approached and proffered wine to lady Feng who found it once more so difficult to refuse that she had to swallow a few mouthfuls. But Yüan Yang and her companions next appeared, likewise, on the scene to hand her their share of wine; but lady Feng felt, in fact, so little able to comply with their wishes, that she promptly appealed to them entreatingly. "Dear sisters," she pleaded, "do spare me! I'll drink some more to-morrow!"

"Quite so! we're a mean lot," Yüan Yang laughed. "But now that we stand in the presence of your ladyship, do condescend to look upon us favourably! We've always enjoyed some little consideration, and do you put on the airs of a mistress on an occasion like the present, when there's such a crowd of people standing by? Really, I shouldn't have come. But, as you won't touch our wine, we might as well be quick and retire!"

While she spoke, she was actually walking away, when lady Feng hastened to lay hold of her and to detain her. "Dear sister," she cried, "I'll drink some and have done!"

So saying, she took the wine and filled a cup to the very brim, and drained it. Yüan Yang then at length gave her a smile, (and she and her friends) dispersed.

Subsequently, the company resumed their places at the banquet. But lady Feng was conscious that the wine she had primed herself with was mounting to her head, so abruptly staggering to the upper end, she meant to betake herself home to lie down, when seeing the jugglers arrive, "Get the tips ready!" she shouted to Mrs. Yu. "I'm off to wash my face a bit."

Mrs. Yu nodded her head assentingly; and lady Feng, noticing that the inmates were off their guard, left the banquet, and wended her steps beneath the eaves towards the back entrance of the house. P'ing Erh had, however, been keeping her eye on her, so hastily she followed in her footsteps. Lady Feng at once

propped herself on her arm. But no sooner did they reach the covered passage than she discerned a young maid, attached to her quarters, standing under it. (The girl), the moment she perceived them, twisted herself round and beat a retreat. Lady Feng forthwith began to give way to suspicion; and she immediately shouted out to her to halt. The maid pretended at first not to hear, but, as, while following her they called out to her time after time, she found herself compelled to turn round. Lady Feng was seized with greater doubts than ever. Quickly therefore entering the covered passage with P'ing Erh, she bade the maid go along with them. Then opening a folding screen, lady Feng stated herself on the steps leading to the small courtyard, and made the girl fall on her knees. "Call two boy-servants from among those on duty at the second gate," she cried out to P'ing Erh, "to bring a

page 315

whip of twisted cords, and to take this young wench, who has no regard for her mistress, and beat her to shreds."

The servant-maid fell into a state of consternation, and was scared out of her very wits. Sobbing the while, she kept on bumping her head on the ground and soliciting for grace.

"I'm really no ghost! So you must have seen me! Don't you know what good manners mean and stand still?" lady Feng asked. "Why did you instead persist in running on?"

"I truly did not see your ladyship coming," the maid replied with tears in her eyes. "I was, besides, much concerned as there was no one in the rooms; that's why I was running on."

"If there's no one in the rooms, who told you to come out again?" lady Feng inquired. "And didn't you see me, together with P'ing Erh, at your heels, stretching out our necks and calling out to you about ten times? But the more we shouted, the faster you ran! You weren't far off from us either, so is it likely that you got deaf? And are you still bent upon bandying words with me?"

So speaking, she raised her hand and administered her a slap on the face. But, while the girl staggered from the blow, she gave her a second slap on the other side of the face, so both cheeks of the maid quickly began to get purple and to

swell.

P'ing Erh hastened to reason with her mistress. "My lady!" she said, "be careful you'll be hurting your hand!"

"Go on, pommel her," urged lady Feng, "and ask her what made her run! and, if she doesn't tell you, just you take her mouth and tear it to pieces for her!"

At the outset, the girl obstinately prevaricated, but when she eventually heard that lady Feng intended to take a red-hot branding-iron and burn her mouth with, she at last sobbingly spoke out. "Our Master Secundus, Mr. Lien, is at home," she remarked, "and he sent me here to watch your movements, my lady; bidding me go ahead, when I saw you leave the banquet, and convey the message to him. But, contrary to his hopes, your ladyship came back just now!"

Lady Feng saw very well that there lurked something behind all she said. "What did he ask you to watch me for?" she therefore eagerly asked. "Can it be, pray, that he dreaded to see me return home? There must be some other reason; so be quick and tell it to me and I shall henceforward treat you with regard. If you don't minutely confess all to me, I shall this very moment take a knife and pare off your flesh!"

Threatening her the while, she turned her head round, and, extracting a

page 316

hairpin from her coiffure, she stuck it promiscuously about the maid's mouth. This so frightened the girl that, as she made every effort to get out of her way, she burst out into tears and entreaties. "I'll tell your ladyship everything," she cried, "but you mustn't say that it was I who told you."

Ping Erh, who stood by, exhorted her to obey; but she at the same time impressed on her mind to speak out without delay.

"Mr. Secundus himself arrived only a few minutes back," the maid began. "The moment, however, he came, he opened a bog, and, taking two pieces of silver, two hairpins, and a couple of rolls of silk, he bade me stealthily take them to Pao Erh's wife and tell her to come in. As soon as she put the things away, she hurried to our house, and Master Secundus ordered me to keep an eye on your

ladyship; but of what happened after that, I've no idea whatever."

When these disclosures fell on lady Feng's ears, she flew into such a rage that her whole person felt quite weak; and, rising immediately, she straightway repaired home. The instant she reached the gate of the courtyard, she espied a waiting-maid peep out of the entrance. Seeing lady Feng, she too drew in her head, and tried at once to effect her escape. But lady Feng called her by name, and made her stand still. This girl had ever been very sharp, so when she realised that she could not manage to beat a retreat, she went so far as to run out to her. "I was just going to tell your ladyship," she smiled, "and here you come! What a strange coincidence!"

"Tell me what?" lady Feng exclaimed.

"That Mr. Secundus is at home," the girl replied, "and has done so and so." She then recounted to her all the incidents recorded a few minutes back.

"Ts'ui!" ejaculated lady Feng. "What were you up to before? Now, that I've seen you, you come and try to clear yourself!"

As she spoke, she raised her arm and administered the maid a slap, which upset her equilibrium. So with hurried step, she betook herself away. Lady Feng then drew near the window. Lending an ear to what was going on inside, she heard some one in the room laughingly observe: "When that queen-of-hell sort of wife of yours dies, it will be a good riddance!"

"When she's gone," Chia Lien rejoined, "and I marry another, the like of her, what will I again do?"

"When she's dead and gone," the woman resumed, "just raise P'ing Erh to the rank of primary wife. I think she'll turn out considerably better than she has."

"At present," Chia Lien put in, "she won't even let me enjoy P'ing Erh's society! P'ing Erh herself is full of displeasure; yet she dares not

page 317

speak. How is it that it has been my fate to bring upon myself the influence of this evil star?"

Lady Feng overheard these criticisms and flew into a fit of anger, which made her tremble violently. When she, however, also caught the praise heaped by both of them upon P'ing Erh, she harboured the suspicion that P'ing Erh too must, as a matter of course, have all along employed the sly resentful language against her. And, as the wine bubbled up more and more into her head, she did not so much as give the matter a second thought, but, twisting round, she first and foremost gave P'ing Erh a couple of whacks, and, with one kick, she banged the door open, and walked in. Then, without allowing her any time to give any explanation in her own defence, she clutched Pao Erh's wife, and, tearing her about, she belaboured her with blows. But the dread lest Chia Lien should slip out of the room, induced her to post herself in such a way as to obstruct the doorway. "What a fine wench!" she shouted out abusively. "You make a paramour of your mistress' husband, and then you wish to compass your master's wife's death, for P'ing Erh to transfer her quarters in here! You base hirelings! You're all of the same stamp, thoroughly jealous of me; you try to cajole me by your outward display!"

While abusing them, she once more laid hold of P'ing Erh and beat her several times. P'ing Erh was pummelled away till her heart thrilled with a sense of injury, but she had nowhere to go, and breathe her woes. Such resentment overpowered her feelings that she sobbed without a sign of a tear. "You people," she railingly shouted, "go and do a lot of shameful things, and then you also deliberately involve me; but why?"

So shouting, she too clutched Pao Erh's wife and began to assail her. Chia Lien had freely primed himself with wine, so, on his return home, he was in such exuberance of spirits that he observed no secrecy in his doings. The moment, however, he perceived lady Feng appear on the scene, he got to his wits' end. Yet when he saw P'ing Erh also start a rumpus, the liquor he had had aroused his ire. The sight of the assault committed by lady Feng on Pao Erh's wife had already incensed him and put him to shame, but he had not been able with any consistency to interfere; but the instant he espied P'ing Erh herself lay hands on her, he vehemently jumped forward and gave her a kick. "What a vixen!" he cried. "Are you likewise going to start knocking people about?"

P'ing Erh was of a timid disposition. At once, therefore, she withheld her hands, and melted into tears. "Why do you implicate me," she said, "in things you say behind my back?"

When lady Feng descried in what fear and dread P'ing Erh was of Chia

page 318

Lien, she lost more than ever control over her temper, and, starting again in pursuit of her, she struck P'ing Erh, while urging her to go for Pao Erh's wife.

P'ing Erh was driven to exasperation; and forthwith rushing out of the apartment, she went in search of a knife to commit suicide with. But the company of old matrons, who stood outside, hastened to place impediments in her way, and to argue with her.

Lady Feng, meanwhile, realised that P'ing Erh had gone to take her life, and rolling, head foremost, into Chia Lien's embrace, "You put your heads together to do me harm," she said, "and, when I overhear your designs, you people conspire to frighten me! But strangle me and have done."

Chia Lien was driven to despair; to such a degree that unsheathing a sword suspended on the wall, "There's no need for any one of you to commit suicide!" he screamed. "I too am thoroughly exasperated, so I'll kill the whole lot of you and pay the penalty with my own life! We'll all then be free from further trouble!"

The bustle had just reached a climax beyond the chance of a settlement, when they perceived Mrs. Yu and a crowd of inmates make their appearance in the room. "What's the matter?" they asked. "There was nothing up just now, so why is all this row for?"

At the sight of the new arrivals, Chia Lien more than ever made the three parts of intoxication, under which he laboured, an excuse to assume an air calculated to intimidate them, and to pretend, in order to further his own ends, that he was bent upon despatching lady Feng.

But lady Feng, upon seeing her relatives appear, got into a mood less perverse than the one she had been in previous to their arrival; and, leaving the whole company of them, she scampered, all in tears, over to the off side, into dowager lady Chia's quarters.

By this time, the play was over. Lady Feng rushed consequently into the old lady's presence and fell into her lap. "Venerable ancestor! help me!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Chia Lien wishes to kill me."

"What's up?" precipitately inquired dowager lady Chia, Mesdames Hsing and Wang and the rest.

"I was just going to my rooms to change my dress," lady Feng wept, "when I unexpectedly found Mr. Chia Lien at home, talking with some one. Fancying that visitors had come, I was quite taken aback, and not presuming to enter, I remained outside the window and listened. It turned out, in fact, to be Pao Erh's wife holding council with him. She said that I was dreadful, and that she meant to poison me so as to get me out of the way and enable P'ing Erh to be promoted to be first wife. At this, I lost my temper. But

page 319

not venturing, none the less, to have a row with him, I simply gave P'ing Erh two slaps; and then I asked him why he wished to do me harm. But so stricken did he get with shame that he tried there and then to despatch me."

Dowager lady Chia treated every word that fell on her ear as truth. "Dreadful!" she ejaculated. "Bring here at once that low-bred offspring!"

Barely was, however, this exclamation out of her lips, than they perceived Chia Lien, a sword in hand, enter in pursuit of his wife, followed closely by a bevy of inmates. Chia Lien evidently placed such thorough reliance upon the love, which old lady Chia had all along lavished upon them, that he entertained little regard even for his mother or his aunt, so he came, with perfect effrontery, to stir up a disturbance in their presence. When Mesdames Hsing and Wang saw him, they got into a passion, and, with all despatch, they endeavoured to deter him from his purpose. "You mean thing!" they shouted, abusing him. "Your crime is more heinous, for our venerable senior is in here!"

"It's all because our worthy ancestor spoils her," cried Chia Lien, with eyes awry, "that she behaved as she did and took upon herself to rate even me!"

Madame Hsing was full of resentment. Snatching the sword from his grasp, she kept on telling him to quit the room at once. But Chia Lien continued to prattle

foolish nonsense in a drivelling and maudlin way. His manner exasperated dowager lady Chia. "I'm well aware," she observed, "that you haven't the least consideration for any one of us. Tell some one to go and call his father here and we'll see whether he doesn't clear out."

When Chia Lien caught these words, he eventually tottered out of the apartment. But in such a state of frenzy was he that he did not return to his quarters, but betook himself into the outer study.

During this while, Mesdames Hsing and Wang also called lady Feng to task.

"Why, what serious matter could it ever have been?" old lady Chia remarked. "But children of tender years are like greedy kittens, and how can one say for certain that they won't do such things? Human beings have, from their very infancy, to go through experiences of this kind! It's all my fault, however, for pressing you to have a little more wine than was good for you. But you've also gone and drunk the vinegar of jealousy!"

This insinuation made every one laugh.

"Compose your mind!" proceeded dowager lady Chia. "To-morrow I'll send for him to apologise to you; but, you'd better to-day not go over, as you might put him to shame!" Continuing, she also went on to abuse P'ing Erh. "I've always thought highly of that wench," she said, "and how is it that

page 320

she's turned out to be secretly so bad?"

"P'ing Erh isn't to blame!" Mrs. Yu and the others smiled. "It's lady Feng who makes people her tools to give vent to her spite! Husband and wife could not very well come to blows face to face, so they combined in using P'ing Erh as their scapegoat! What injuries haven't fallen to P'ing Erh's lot! And do you, venerable senior, still go on blowing her up?"

"Is it really so!" exclaimed old lady Chia. "I always said that that girl wasn't anything like that artful shrew! Well, in that case, she is to be pitied, for she has had to bear the brunt of her anger, and all through no fault of hers!" Calling Hu Po to her, "Go," she added, "and tell P'ing Erh all I enjoin you; 'that I know that

she has been insulted and that to-morrow I'll send for her mistress to make amends, but that being her mistress' birthday to-day, I won't have her give rise to any reckless fuss!"

P'ing Erh had, we may explain, from an early hour, been dragged by Li Wan into the garden of Broad Vista. Here P'ing Erh gave way to bitter tears. So much so, that her throat choked with sobs, and could not give utterance to speech.

"You are an intelligent person," exhorted her Pao-ch'ai, "and how considerately has your lady treated you all along! It was simply because she has had a little too much wine that she behaved as she did to-day! But had she not made you the means of giving vent to her spite, is it likely that she could very well have aired her grievances upon any one else? Besides, any one else would have laughed at her for acting in a sham way!"

While she reasoned with her, she saw Hu Po approach, and deliver dowager lady Chia's message. P'ing Erh then felt in herself that she had come out of the whole affair with some credit, and she, little by little, resumed her equilibrium. She did not, nevertheless, put her foot anywhere near the front part of the compound.

After a little rest, Pao Ch'ai and her companions came and paid a visit to old lady Chia and lady Feng, while Pao-yü pressed P'ing Erh to come to the I Hung court. Hsi Jen received her with alacrity. "I meant," she said, "to be the first to ask you, but as our senior lady, Chia Chu, and the young ladies invited you, I couldn't very well do so myself."

P'ing Erh returned her smile. "Many thanks!" she rejoined. "How words ever commenced between us;" she then went on, "when there was no provocation, I can't tell! But without rhyme or reason, I came in for a spell of resentment."

"Our lady Secunda has always been very good to you," laughingly remarked Hsi Jen, "so she must have done this in a sudden fit of exasperation!"

"Our lady Secunda did not, after all, say anything to me," P'ing Erh

page 321

explained. "It was that wench that blew me up. And she deliberately made a laughing-stock of me. But that fool also of a master of ours struck me!"

While recounting her experiences, she felt a keener sense of injustice than before, and she found it hard to restrain her tears from trickling down her cheeks.

“My dear sister,” Pao-yü hastily advised her, “don't wound your heart! I'm quite ready to express my apologies on behalf of that pair!”

“What business is that of yours?” P'ing Erh smiled.

“We cousins, whether male or female, are all alike.” Pao-yü smilingly argued. “So when they hurt any one's feelings, I apologise for them; it's only right that I should do so. What a pity;” he continued, “these new clothes too have been stained! But you'll find your sister Hua's costumes in here, and why don't you put one on, and take some hot wine and spurt it over yours and iron them out? You might also remake your coiffure.”

Speaking, he directed the young maids to draw some water for washing the face and to heat an iron and bring it.

P'ing Erh had ever heard people maintain that all that Pao-yü excelled in was in knitting friendships with girls. But Pao-yü had so far been loth, seeing that P'ing Erh was Chia Lien's beloved secondary wife, and lady Feng's confidante, to indulge in any familiarities with her. And being precluded from accomplishing the desire upon which his heart was set, he time and again gave way to vexation. When P'ing Erh, however, remarked his conduct towards her on this occasion, she secretly resolved within herself that what was said of him was indeed no idle rumour. But as he had anticipated every one of her wants, and she saw moreover that Hsi Jen had, for her special benefit, opened a box and produced two articles of clothing, not much worn by her, she speedily drew near and washed her face.

Pao-yü stood by her side. “You must, dear girl, also apply a little cosmetic and powder,” she smiled; “otherwise you'll look as if you were angry with lady Feng. It's her birthday, besides; and our old ancestor has sent some one again to come and cheer you up.”

Hearing how reasonable his suggestions were, P'ing Erh readily went in search of powder; but she failed to notice any about, so Pao-yü hurriedly drew up to the toilet-table, and, removing the lid of a porcelain box made at the “Hsüan” kiln, which contained a set of ten small ladles, tuberoses-like in shape, (for helping

one's self to powder with), he drew out one of them and handed it to P'ing Erh. "This isn't lead powder," he smiled. "This is made of the seeds of red jasmine, well triturated, and compounded with suitable first class ingredients."

P'ing Erh emptied some on the palm of her hand. On examination, she

page 322

really found that it was light, clear, red and scented; perfect in all four properties; that it was easy to apply evenly to the face, that it kept moist, and that it differed from other kinds of powder, ordinarily so rough. She subsequently noticed that the cosmetic too was not spread on a sheet, but that it was contained in a tiny box of white jade, the contents of which bore the semblance of rose-paste.

"The cosmetic one buys in the market isn't clean;" Pao-yü remarked smilingly. "Its colour is faint as well. But this is cosmetic of superior quality. The juice was squeezed out, strained clear, mixed with perfume of flowers and decocted. All you need do is to take some with that hair-pin and rub it on your lips, that will be enough; and if you dissolve some in a little water, and rub it on the palm of your hand, it will be ample for you to cover your whole face with."

P'ing Erh followed his directions and performed her toilette. She looked exceptionally fresh and beautiful. A sweet fragrance pervaded her cheeks. Pao-yü then cut, with a pair of bamboo scissors, a stalk, with two autumn orchids, which had blossomed in a flower pot, and he pinned it in her side-hair. But a maid was unexpectedly seen to enter the room, sent by Li Wan to come and call her, so she quitted his quarters with all possible despatch.

Pao-yü had not so far been able to have his wishes to revel in P'ing Erh's society gratified. P'ing Erh was furthermore a girl of a high grade, most intelligent, most winsome, and unlike that sort of vulgar and dull-minded beings, so that he cherished intense disgust against his fate.

The present occasion had been the anniversary of Chin Ch'uan-erh's birth, and he had remained, in consequence, plunged in a disconsolate frame of mind throughout the whole day. But, contrary to his expectations, the incident eventually occurred, which afforded him, after all, an opportunity to dangle in P'ing Erh's society and to gratify to some small degree a particle of his wish. This had been a piece of good fortune he so little expected would fall to his share

during the course of his present existence, that as he reclined on his bed, his heart swelled with happiness and contentment. Suddenly, he reflected that Chia Lien's sole thought was to make licentious pleasures the means of gratifying his passions, and that he had no idea how to show the least regard to the fair sex; and he mused that P'ing Erh was without father or mother, brothers or sisters, a solitary being destined to dance attendance upon a couple such as Chia Lien and his wife; that Chia Lien was vulgar, and lady Feng haughty, but that she was gifted nevertheless with the knack of splendidly managing things; and that (P'ing Erh) had again to-day come across bitter sorrow, and that her destiny was extremely unfortunate.

At this stage of his reverie, he began to feel wounded and distressed. When he rose

page 323

once more to his feet, he noticed that the wine, which she had spurted on the clothes, she had a few minutes back divested herself of, had already half dried, and, taking up the iron, he smoothed them and folded them nicely for her. He then discovered that she had left her handkerchief behind, and that it still bore traces of tears, so throwing it into the basin, he rinsed it and hung it up to dry, with feelings bordering on joy as well as sadness. But after a short time spent in a brown study, he too betook himself to the Tao Hsiang village for a chat; and it was only when the lamps had been lit that he got up to take his leave.

P'ing Erh put up in Li Wan's quarters for the night. Lady Feng slept with dowager lady Chia, while Chia Lien returned at a late hour to his home. He found it however very lonely. Yet unable to go and call his wife over, he had no alternative but to sleep as best he could for that night. On the morrow, he remembered, as soon as he opened his eyes, the occurrence of the previous day, and he fell a prey to such extreme unhappiness that he could not be conscience-stricken enough.

Madame Hsing pondered with solicitude on Chia Lien's drunken fit the day before. The moment therefore it was light, she hastily crossed over, and sent for Chia Lien to repair to dowager lady Chia's apartments. Chia Lien was thus compelled to suppress all timidity and to repair to the front part of the mansion and fall on his knees at the feet of his old senior.

“What was the matter?” inquired old lady Chia.

“I really had too much wine yesterday,” Chia Lien promptly answered with a forced smile. “I must have given you a fright, worthy ancestor, so I come to-day to receive condign punishment.”

“You mean fellow!” shouted dowager lady Chia, spitting at him disdainfully. “You go and glut yourself with spirits, and, not to speak of your not going to stretch yourself like a corpse and sleep it off, you contrariwise start beating your wife! But that vixen Feng brags away the whole day long, as if she were a human being as valiant as any tyrant, and yet yesterday she got into such a funk that she presented a woeful sight! Had it not been for me, you would have done her bodily harm; and what would you feel like now?”

Chia Lien was at heart full of a sense of injury, but he could not master sufficient courage to say anything in his own defence. The only course open to him was therefore to make a confession of fault.

“Don't lady Feng and P'ing Erh possess the charms of handsome women?” dowager lady Chia resumed. “And aren't you yet satisfied with them that you must, of a day, go slyly prowling and gallavating about, dragging indiscriminately into your rooms frowsy and filthy people? Is it for the sake of this sort of wenches that you beat your wife and belabour the inmates of your quarters?”

page 324

You've nevertheless had the good fortune of starting in life as the scion of a great family; and do you, with eyes wide open, bring disgrace upon your own head? If you have any regard for me, well, then get up and I'll spare you! And if you make your apologies in a proper manner to your wife and take her home, I'll be satisfied. But if you don't, just you clear out of this, for I won't even presume to have any of your genuflexions!”

Chia Lien took to heart the injunctions that fell on his ear. Espying besides lady Feng standing opposite to him in undress, her eyes swollen from crying, and her face quite sallow, without cosmetic or powder, he thought her more lovable and charming than ever. “Wouldn't it be well,” he therefore mused, “that I should make amends, so that she and I may be on friendly terms again and that I should

win the good pleasure of my old ancestor?"

At the conclusion of his reflections, he forthwith put on a smile. "After your advice, venerable senior," he said, "I couldn't be so bold as not to accede to your wishes! But this is shewing her more indulgence than ever!"

"What nonsense!" exclaimed dowager lady Chia laughingly. "I am well aware that with her extreme decorum she couldn't hurt any one's susceptibilities. But should she, in the future, wrong you in any way, I shall, of course, take the law into my own hands and bid you make her submit to your authority and finish."

Chia Lien, at this assurance, crawled up and made a bow to lady Feng. "It was really my fault, so don't be angry, lady Secunda," he said.

Every one in the room laughed.

"Now, my girl Feng," lady Chia laughingly observed, "you are not to lose your temper; for if you do, I'll lose mine too!"

Continuing, she directed a servant to go and call P'ing Erh; and, on her arrival, she advised lady Feng and Chia Lien to do all they could to reconcile her. At the sight of P'ing Erh, Chia Lien showed less regard than ever for the saying that 'a primary wife differs from a secondary wife,' and the instant he heard old lady Chia's exhortation he drew near her. "The injuries," he remarked, "to which you were subjected yesterday, Miss, were entirely due to my shortcoming. If your lady hurt your feelings, it was likewise all through me that the thing began. So I express my regret; but, besides this, I tender my apologies as well on behalf of your mistress."

Saying this, he made another bow. This evoked a smile from dowager lady Chia. Lady Feng, however, also laughed. Their old ancestor then desired lady Feng to come and console P'ing Erh, but P'ing Erh hastily advanced and knocked her head before lady Feng. "I do deserve death," she urged, "for provoking your ladyship to wrath on the day of your birthday!"

Lady Feng was at the moment pricked by shame and remorse for having

so freely indulged in wine the previous day as to completely have lost sight of longstanding friendships, and for allowing her temper to so thoroughly flare up as to lend a patient ear to the gossip of outsiders, and unjustly put P'ing Erh out of countenance, so when she contrariwise now saw her make advances, she felt both abashed and grieved, and, promptly extending her arms, she dragged her up and gave way to tears.

“I've waited upon your ladyship for all these years,” P'ing Erh pleaded, “and you've never so much as given me a single fillip; and yet, you beat me yesterday. But I don't bear you any grudge, my lady, for it was that wench, who was at the bottom of it all. Nor do I wonder that your ladyship lost control over your temper.”

As she spoke, tears trickled down her cheeks too.

“Escort those three home!” dowager lady Chia shouted to the servants. “If any one of them makes the least allusion to the subject, come at once and tell me of it; for without any regard as to who it may be, I shall take my staff and give him or her a sound flogging.”

The trio then prostrated themselves before dowager lady Chia and the two ladies, Mesdames Hsing and Wang. And assenting to her old mistress' injunctions, an old nurse accompanied the three inmates to their quarters.

When they got home, lady Feng assured herself that there was no one about. “How is it,” she next asked, “that I'm like a queen of hell, or like a 'Yakcha' demon? That courtesan swore at me and wished me dead; and did you too help her to curse me? If I'm not nice a thousand days, why, I must be nice on some one day! But if, poor me, I'm so bad as not even to compare with a disorderly woman, how can I have the face to come and spend my life with you here?”

So speaking, she melted into tears.

“Aren't you yet gratified?” cried Chia Lien. “Just reflect carefully who was most to blame yesterday! And yet, in the presence of so many people, it was I who, after all, fell to-day on my knees and made apologies as well. You came in for plenty of credit, and do you now go on jabber, jabber? Can it be that you'd like to make me kneel at your feet before you let matters rest? If you try and play the bully beyond bounds, it won't be a good thing for you!”

To these arguments, lady Feng could find no suitable response.

P'ing Erh then blurted out laughing.

“She's all right again!” Chia Lien smiled. “But I'm really quite at a loss what to do with this one.”

These words were still on his lips, when they saw a married woman walk in. “Pao Erh's wife has committed suicide by hanging herself,” she said.

page 326

This announcement plunged both Chia Lien and lady Feng into great consternation. Lady Feng, however, lost no time in putting away every sign of excitement. “Dead, eh? What a riddance!” she shouted instead. “What's the use of making such a fuss about a mere trifle?”

But not long elapsed before she perceived Lin Chih-hsiao's wife make her appearance in the room. “Pao Erh's wife has hung herself,” she whispered to lady Feng in a low tone of voice, “and her mother's relatives want to take legal proceedings.”

Lady Feng gave a sardonic smile. “That's all right!” she observed. “I myself was just thinking about lodging a complaint!”

“I and the others tried to dissuade them,” Lin Chih-hsiao's wife continued. “And by having recourse to intimidation as well as to promises of money, they, at last, agreed to our terms.”

“I haven't got a cash,” lady Feng replied. “Had I even any money, I wouldn't let them have it; so just let them go and lodge any charge they fancy. You needn't either dissuade them or intimidate them. Let them go and complain as much as they like. But if they fail to establish a case against me, they'll, after all, be punished for trying to make the corpse the means of extorting money out of me!” Lin Chih-hsiao's wife was in a dilemma, when she espied Chia Lien wink at her. Comprehending his purpose, she readily quitted the apartment and waited for him outside.

“I'll go out and see what they're up to!” Chia Lien remarked.

“Mind, I won't have you give them any money!” shouted lady Feng.

Chia Lien straightway made his exit. He came and held consultation with Lin Chih-hsiao, and then directed the servants to go and use some fair means, others harsh. The matter was, however, not brought to any satisfactory arrangement until he engaged to pay two hundred taels for burial expenses. But so apprehensive was Chia Lien lest something might occur to make the relatives change their ideas, that he also despatched a messenger to lay the affair before Wang Tzu-t'eng, who bade a few constables, coroners and other official servants come and help him to effect the necessary preparations for the funeral. The parties concerned did not venture, when they saw the precautions he had adopted, to raise any objections, disposed though they may have been to try and bring forward other arguments. Their sole alternative therefore was to suppress their resentment, to refrain from further importunities and let the matter drop into oblivion.

Chia Lien then impressed upon Lin Chih-hsiao to insert the two hundred taels in the accounts for the current year, by making such additions to various items here and there as would suffice to clear them off, and presented Pao Erh with money out of his own pocket as a crumb of comfort, adding, “By and bye, I'll choose a nice wife for you.” When

page 327

Pao Erh, therefore, came in for a share of credit as well as of hard cash, he could not possibly do otherwise than practise contentment; and forthwith, needless to dilate on this topic, he began to pay court to Chia Lien as much as ever.

In the inner rooms, lady Feng was, it is true, much cut up at heart; but she strained every nerve to preserve an exterior of total indifference. Noticing that there was no one present in the apartment, she drew P'ing Erh to her. “I drank yesterday,” she smiled, “a little more wine than was good for me, so don't bear me a grudge. Where did I strike you, let me see?”

“You didn't really strike me hard!” P'ing Erh said by way of reply.

But at this stage they heard some one remark that the ladies and young ladies had come in.

If you desire, reader, to know any of the subsequent circumstances, peruse the account given in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XLV.

Friends interchange words of friendship.

Tai-yü feels dull on a windy and rainy evening, and indites verses on wind and rain.

Lady Feng, we will now go on to explain, was engaged in comforting P'ing Erh, when upon unawares perceiving the young ladies enter the room, she hastened to make them sit down while P'ing Erh poured the tea.

“So many of you come to-day,” lady Feng smiled, “that it looks as if you'd been asked to come by invitation.”

T'an Ch'un was the first to speak. “We have,” she smilingly rejoined, “two objects in view, the one concerns me; the other cousin Quarta; but among these are, besides, certain things said by our venerable senior.”

“What's up?” inquired lady Feng with a laugh. “Is it so urgent?”

“Some time ago,” T'an Ch'un proceeded laughingly, “we started a rhyming club; but the first meeting was not quite a success. Every one of us proved so soft-hearted! The rules therefore were set at naught. So I can't help thinking that we must enlist your services as president of the society and superintendent; for what is needed to make the thing turn out well is firmness and no favour. The next matter is: cousin Quarta explained to our worthy ancestor that the requisites for painting the picture of the garden were short of one thing and another, and she said: 'that there must still be,' she fancied, 'in the lower story of the back loft some articles, remaining over from previous

page 328

years, and that we should go and look for them. That if there be any, they should be taken out, but that in the event of their being none, some one should be commissioned to go and purchase a supply of them.”

“I'm not up to doing anything wet or dry, (play on word 'shih,' verses),” lady Feng laughed, “and would you have me, pray, come and gorge?”

“You may, it's possible, not be up to any of these things,” T'an Ch'un replied, “but we don't expect you to do anything! All we want you for is to see whether there be among us any remiss or lazy, and to decide how they should be punished, that's all.”

“You shouldn't try and play your tricks upon me!” lady Feng smiled, “I can see through your little game! Is it that you wish me to act as president and superintendent? No! it's as clear as day that your object is that I should play the part of that copper merchant, who put in contributions in hard cash. You have, at every meeting you hold, to each take turn and pay the piper; but, as your funds are not sufficient, you've invented this plan to come and inveigle me into your club, in order to wheedle money out of me! This must be your little conspiracy!”

These words evoked general laughter. “You've guessed right!” they exclaimed.

“In very truth,” Li Wan smiled, “you're a creature with an intellect as transparent as crystal, and with wits as clear as glass!”

“You've got the good fortune of being their elder sister-in-law,” lady Feng smilingly remarked, “so the young ladies asked you to take them in hand, and teach them how to read, and make them learn good manners and needlework; and it's for you to guide and direct them in everything! But here they start a rhyming society, for which not much can be needed, and don't you concern yourself about them? We'll leave our worthy ancestor and our Madame Wang aside; they are old people, but you receive each moon an allowance of ten taels, which is twice as much as what any one of us gets. More, our worthy ancestor and Madame Wang maintain that being a widow, and having lost your home, you haven't, poor thing, enough to live upon, and that you have a young child as well to bring up; so they added with extreme liberality another ten taels to your original share. Your allowance therefore is on a par with that of our dear senior. But they likewise gave you a piece of land in the garden, and you also come in for the lion's share of rents, collected from various quarters, and of the annual allowances, apportioned at the close of each year. Yet, you and your son don't muster, masters and servants, ten persons in all. What you eat and what your wear comes, just as ever, out of the general public fund, so that, computing everything together, you get as much as four to five hundred taels. Were you then to contribute each year a

hundred or two hundred taels, to help them to have some fun, how many years could this outlay continue? They'll very soon be getting married, and, are they likely then to still expect you to make any contributions? So loth are you, however, at present to fork out any cash that you've egged them on to come and worry me! I'm quite prepared to spend away until we've drained our chest dry! Don't I know that the money isn't mine?"

"Just you listen to her," Li Wan laughed. "I simply made one single remark, and out she came with two cartloads of nonsensical trash! You're as rough a diamond as a leg made of clay! All you're good for is to work the small abacus, to divide a catty and to fraction an ounce, so finicking are you! A nice thing you are, and yet, you've been lucky enough to come to life as the child of a family of learned and high officials. You've also made such a splendid match; and do you still behave in the way you do? Had you been a son or daughter born in some poverty-stricken, humble and low household, there's no saying what a mean thing you wouldn't have been! Every one in this world has been gulled by you; and yesterday you went so far as to strike P'ing Erh! But it wasn't the proper thing for you to stretch out your hand on her! Was all that liquor, forsooth, poured down a cur's stomach? My monkey was up, and I meant to have taken upon myself to avenge P'ing Erh's grievance; but, after mature consideration, I thought to myself, 'her birthday is as slow to come round as a dog's tail grows to a point.' I also feared lest our venerable senior might be made to feel unhappy; so I did not come forward. Anyhow, my resentment isn't yet spent; and do you come to-day to try and irritate me? You aren't fit to even pick up shoes for P'ing Erh! You two should therefore change your respective places!"

These taunts created merriment among the whole party.

"Oh!" hastily exclaimed lady Feng, laughingly, "I know everything! You don't at all come to look me up on account of verses or paintings, but simply to take revenge on P'ing Erh's behalf! I never had any idea that P'ing Erh had such a backer as yourself to bolster her up! Had I known it, I wouldn't have ventured to strike her, even though a spirit had been tugging my arm! Miss P'ing come over and let me tender my apologies to you, in the presence of your senior lady and the young ladies. Do bear with me for having proved so utterly wanting in virtue, after I had had a few drinks!"

Every one felt amused by her insinuations.

“What do you say?” Li Wan asked P'ing Erh smiling. “As for me, I think it my bounden duty to vindicate your wrongs, before we let the matter drop!”

“Your remarks, ladies, may be spoken in jest,” P'ing Erh smiled, “but I am not worthy of such a fuss!”

page 330

“What about worthy and unworthy?” Li Wan observed. “I'm here for you! Quick, get the key, and let your mistress go and open the doors and hunt up the things!”

“Dear sister-in-law,” lady Feng said with a smile, “you'd better go along with them into the garden. I'm about to take the rice accounts in hand and square them up with them. Our senior lady, Madame Hsing, has also sent some one to call me; what she wants to tell me again, I can't make out; but I must need go over for a turn. There are, besides, all those extra clothes for you people to wear at the end of the year, and I must get them ready and give them to be made!”

“These matters are none of my business!” Li Wan laughingly answered. “First settle my concerns so as to enable me to retire to rest, and escape the bother of having all these girls at me!”

“Dear sister-in-law,” vehemently smiled lady Feng, “be good enough to give me a little time! You've ever been the one to love me best, and how is it that you have, on P'ing Erh's account, ceased to care for me? Time and again have you impressed on my mind that I should, despite my manifold duties, take good care of my health, and manage things in such a way as to find a little leisure for rest, and do you now contrariwise come to press the very life out of me? There's another thing besides. Should such clothes as will be required at the end of the year by any other persons be delayed, it won't matter; but, should those of the young ladies be behind time, let the responsibility rest upon your shoulders! And won't our old lady bear you a grudge, if you don't mind these small things? But as for me, I won't utter a single word against you, for, as I had rather bear the blame myself, I won't venture, to involve you!”

“Listen to her!” Li Wan smiled. “Hasn't she got the gift of the gab? But let me

ask you. Will you, after all, assume the control of this rhyming society or not?"

"What's this nonsense you're talking?" lady Feng laughed. "Were I not to enter the society, and spend a little money, won't I be treated as a rebel in this garden of Broad Vista? And will I then still think of tarrying here to eat my head off? So soon as the day dawns to-morrow, I'll arrive at my post, dismount from my horse, and, after kneeling before the seals, my first act will be to give fifty taels for you to quietly cover the expenses of your meetings. Yet after a few days, I shall neither indite any verses, nor write any compositions, as I am simply a rustic boor, nothing more! But it will be just the same whether I assume the direction or not; for after you pocket my money, there's no fear of your not driving me out of the place!"

As these words dropped from her lips, one and all laughed again.

page 331

"I'll now open the loft," proceeded lady Feng. "Should there be any of the articles you want, you can tell the servants to bring them out for you to look at them! If any will serve your purpose, keep them and use them. If any be short, I'll bid a servant go and purchase them according to your list. I'll go at once and cut the satin for the painting. As for the plan, it isn't with Madame Wang; it's still over there, at Mr. Chia Chen's. I tell you all this so that you should avoid going over to Madame Wang's and getting into trouble! But I'll go and depute some one to fetch it. I'll direct also a servant to take the satin and give it to the gentlemen to size with alum; will this be all right?"

Li Wan nodded her head by way of assent and smiled. "This will be putting you to much trouble and inconvenience," she said. "But we must really act as you suggest. Well in that case, go home all of you, and, if after a time, she doesn't send the thing round, you can come again and bully her."

So saying, she there and then led off the young ladies, and was making her way out, when lady Feng exclaimed: "It's Pao-yü and he alone, who has given rise to all this fuss."

Li Wan overheard her remark and hastily turned herself round. "We did, in fact, come over," she smiled, "on account of Pao-yü, and we forgot, instead all about him! The first meeting was deferred through him; but we are too soft-hearted, so

tell us what penalty to inflict on him!”

Lady Feng gave herself to reflection. “There's only one thing to do,” she then remarked. “Just punish him by making him sweep the floor of each of your rooms. This will do!”

“Your verdict is faultless!” they laughed with one accord.

While they conversed they were on the point of starting on their way back, when they caught sight of a young maid walk in, supporting nurse Lai. Lady Feng and her companions immediately rose to their feet, their faces beaming with smiles. “Venerable mother!” they said, “do take a seat!” They then in a body presented their congratulations to her.

Nurse Lai seated herself on the edge of the stovetop and returned their smiles. “I'm to be congratulated,” she rejoined, “but you, mistresses, are to be congratulated as well; for had it had not been for the bountiful grace displaced by you, mistresses, whence would this joy of mine have come? Your ladyship sent Ts'ai Ko again yesterday to bring me presents, but my grandson kotowed at the door, with his face turned towards the upper quarters.”

“When is he going to his post?” Li Wan inquired, with a smile.

Nurse Lai heaved a sigh. “How can I interfere with them?” she answered. “Why, I let them have their own way and start when they like! The other day, they were at my house, and they prostrated themselves before

page 332

me; but I could find no complimentary remark to make to him, so, 'Sir!' I said, 'putting aside that you're an official, you've lived in a reckless and dissolute way, for now thirty years. You should, it's true, have been people's bond-servant, but from the moment you came out of your mother's womb, your master graciously accorded you your liberty. Thanks, above, to the boundless blessings showered upon you by your lord, and, below, to the favour of your father and mother, you're like a noble scion and a gentleman, able to read and to write; and you have been carried about by maids, old matrons, and nurses, just as if you had been a very phoenix! But now that you've grown up and reached this age, do you have the faintest notion of what the two words 'bond-servant' imply? All you

think of is to enjoy your benefits. But what hardships your grandfather and father had to bear, in slaving away for two or three generations, before they succeeded, after ever so many ups and downs, in raising up a thing like you, you don't at all know! From your very infancy, you ever ailed from this, or sickened for that, so that the money that was expended on your behalf, would suffice to fuse into a lifelike silver image of you! At the age of twenty, you again received the bounty of your master in the shape of a promise to purchase official status for you. But just mark, how many inmates of the principal branch and main offspring have to endure privation, and suffer the pangs of hunger! So beware you, who are the offshoot of a bond-servant, lest you snap your happiness! After enjoying so many good things for a decade, by the help of what spirits, and the agency of what devils have you, I wonder, managed to so successfully entreat your master as to induce him to bring you to the fore again and select you for office? Magistrates may be minor officials, but their functions are none the less onerous. In whatever district they obtain a post, they become the father and mother of that particular locality. If you therefore don't mind your business, and look after your duties in such a way as to acquit yourself of your loyal obligations, to prove your gratitude to the state and to show obedience and reverence to your lord, heaven, I fear, will not even bear with you!"

Li Wan and lady Feng laughed. "You're too full of misgivings!" they observed. "From what we can see of him, he's all right! Some years back, he paid us a visit or two; but it's many years now that he hasn't put his foot here. At the close of each year, and on birthdays, we've simply seen his name brought in, that's all. The other day, that he came to knock his head before our venerable senior and Madame Wang, we caught sight of him in her courtyard yonder; and, got up in the uniform of his new office, he looked so dignified, and stouter too than before. Now that he has got this post, you should be quite happy; instead of that you worry and fret

page 333

about this and that! If he does get bad, why, he has his father and mother yet to take care of him, so all you need do is to be cheerful and content! When you've got time to spare, do get into a chair and come in and have a game of cards and a chat with our worthy senior; and who ever will have the face to hurt your feelings? Why, were you go to your home, you'd also have there houses and halls, and who is there who would not hold you in high respect? You're certainly, what one would call, a venerable old dame!"

P'ing Erh poured a cup of tea and brought it to her. Nurse Lai speedily stood up. "You could have asked any girl to do this for me; it wouldn't have mattered! But here I'm troubling you again!"

Apologising, she resumed, sipping her tea the while: "My lady you're not aware that young girls of this age must be in everything kept strictly in hand. In the event of any license, they're sure to find time to kick up trouble, and annoy their elders. Those, who know (how well they are supervised), will then say that children are always up to mischief. But those, who don't, will maintain that they take advantage of their wealthy position to despise people; to the detriment as well of their mistresses' reputation. How I regret that there's nothing that I can do with him. Time after time, have I had to send for his father; and he has been the better, after a scolding from him." Pointing at Pao-yü, "I don't mind whether you feel angry with me for what I'm going to say," she proceeded, "but if your father were to attempt now to exercise ever so little control over you, your venerable grandmother is sure to try and screen you. Yet, when in days gone by your worthy father was young, he used to be beaten by your grandfather. Who hasn't seen him do it? But did your father, in his youth resemble you, who have neither fear for God or man? There was also our senior master, on the other side, Mr. Chia She. He was, I admit, wild; but never such a crossgrained fellow as yourself; and yet he too had his daily dose of the whip. There was besides the father of your elder cousin Chen, of the eastern mansion. He had a disposition that flared up like a fire over which oil is poured. If anything was said, and he flew into a rage, why, talk about a son, it was really as if he tortured a robber. From all I can now see and hear, Mr. Chen keeps his son in check just as much as was the custom in old days among his ancestors; the only thing is that he abides by it in some respects, but not in others. Besides, he doesn't exercise the least restraint over his own self, so is it to be wondered at if all his cousins and nieces don't respect him? If you've got any sense about you, you'll only be too glad that I speak to you in this wise; but if you haven't, you mayn't be very well able to say anything openly to me, but you'll inwardly abuse me, who knows to what extent!"

As she reproved him, they saw Lai Ta's wife arrive. In close succession

page 334

came Chou Jui's wife along with Chang Ts'ai's wife to report various matters.

“A wife,” laughed lady Feng, “has come to fetch her mother-in-law!”

“I haven't come to fetch our old dame,” Lai Ta's wife smilingly rejoined, “but to inquire whether you, my lady and the young ladies, will confer upon us the honour of your company?”

When nurse Lai caught this remark, she smiled. “I've really grown quite idiotic!” “What,” she exclaimed, “was right and proper for me to say, I didn't say, but I went on talking instead a lot of rot and rubbish! As our relatives and friends are presenting their congratulations to our grandson for having been selected to fill up that office of his, we find ourselves under the necessity of giving a banquet at home. But I was thinking that it wouldn't do, if we kept a feast going the whole day, and we invited this one, and not that one. Reflecting also that it was thanks to our master's vast bounty that we've come in for this unforeseen glory and splendour, I felt quite agreeable to do anything, even though it may entail the collapse of our household. I therefore advised his father to give banquets on three consecutive days. That he should, on the first, put up several tables, and a stage in our mean garden, and invite your venerable dowager lady, the senior ladies, junior ladies, and young ladies to come and have some distraction during the day, and that he should have several tables laid on the stage in the main pavilion outside, and request the senior and junior gentlemen to confer upon us the lustre of their presence. That for the second day, we should ask our relatives and friends; and that for the third, we should invite our companions from the two mansions. In this way, we'll have three days' excitement, and, by the boundless favour of our master, we'll have the benefit of enjoying the honour of your society.”

“When is it to be?” Li Wan and lady Feng inquired, smilingly. “As far as we are concerned, we'll feel it our duty to come. And we hope that our worthy senior may feel in the humour to go. But there's no saying for certain!”

“The day chosen is the fourteenth,” Lai Ta's wife eagerly replied. “Just come for the sake of our old mother-in-law!”

“I can't tell about the others,” lady Feng explained with a laugh, “but as for me I shall positively come. I must however tell you beforehand that I've no congratulatory presents to give you. Nor do I know anything about tips to players or others. As soon as I shall have done eating, I shall bolt, so don't laugh

at me.”

“Fiddlesticks!” Lai Ta's wife laughed. “Were your ladyship disposed, you could well afford to give us twenty and thirty thousand taels.”

“I'm off now to invite our venerable mistress,” nurse Lai smilingly remarked. “And if her ladyship also agrees to come, I shall deem it a greater honour

page 335

than ever conferred upon me.”

Having said this, she went on to issue some injunctions; after which, she got up to go, when the sight of Chou Jui's wife reminded her of something.

“Of course!” she consequently observed. “I've got one more question to ask you, my lady. What did sister-in-law Chou's son do to incur blame, that he was packed off, and his services dispensed with?”

“I was just about to tell your daughter-in-law,” lady Feng answered smilingly, after listening to her question, “but with so many things to preoccupy me, it slipped from my memory! When you get home, sister-in-law Lai, explain to that old husband of yours that we won't have his, (Chou Jui's), son kept in either of the mansions; and that he can tell him to go about his own business!”

Lai Ta's wife had no option but to express her acquiescence. Chou Jui's wife however speedily fell on her knees and gave way to urgent entreaties.

“What is it all about?” nurse Lai shouted. “Tell me and let me determine the right and wrong of the question.”

“The other day,” lady Feng observed, “that my birthday was celebrated, that young fellow of his got drunk, before the wine ever went round; and when the old dame, over there, sent presents, he didn't go outside to give a helping hand, but squatted down, instead, and upbraided people. Even the presents he wouldn't carry inside. And it was only after the two girls had come indoors that he eventually got the servant-lads and brought them in. Those lads were however careful enough in what they did, but as for him, he let the box, he held, slip from his hands, and bestrewed the whole courtyard with cakes. When every one had

left, I deputed Ts'ai Ming to go and talk to him; but he then turned round and gave Ts'ai Ming a regular scolding. So what's the use of not bundling off a disorderly rascal like him, who neither shows any regard for discipline or heaven?"

"I was wondering what it could be!" nurse Lai ventured. "Was it really about this? My lady, listen to me! If he has done anything wrong, thrash him and scold him, until you make him mend his ways, and finish with it! But to drive him out of the place, will never, by any manner of means, do. He isn't, besides, to be treated like a child born in our household. He is at present employed as Madame Wang's attendant, so if you carry out your purpose of expelling him, her ladyship's face will be put to the blush. My idea is that you should, my lady, give him a lesson by letting him have several whacks with a cane so as to induce him to abstain from wine in the future. If you then retain him in your service as hitherto he'll be all right! If you don't do it for his mother's sake; do it at least for that of Madame Wang!"

After lending an ear to her arguments, lady Feng addressed herself to Lai

page 336

Ta's wife. "Well, in that case," she said, "call him over to-morrow and give him forty blows; and don't let him after this touch any more wine!"

Lai Ta's wife promised to execute her directions. Chou Jui's wife then kotowed and rose to her feet. But she also persisted upon prostrating herself before nurse Lai; and only desisted when Lai Ta's wife pulled her up. But presently the trio took their departure, and Li Wan and her companions sped back into the garden.

When evening came, lady Feng actually bade the servants go and look (into the loft), and when they discovered a lot of painting materials, which had been put away long ago, they brought them into the garden. Pao-ch'ai and her friends then selected such as they deemed suitable. But as they only had as yet half the necessaries they required, they drew out a list of the other half and sent it to lady Feng, who, needless for us to particularise, had the different articles purchased, according to the specimens supplied.

By a certain day, the silk had been sized outside, a rough sketch drawn, and both returned into the garden. Pao-yü therefore was day after day to be found over at

Hsi Ch'un's, doing his best to help her in her hard work. But T'an Ch'un, Li Wan, Ying Ch'un, Pao-ch'ai and the other girls likewise congregated in her quarters, and sat with her when they were at leisure, as they could, in the first place, watch the progress of the painting, and as secondly they were able to conveniently see something of each other.

When Pao-ch'ai perceived how cool and pleasant the weather was getting, and how the nights were beginning again to gradually draw out, she came and found her mother, and consulted with her, until they got some needlework ready. Of a day, she would cross over to the quarters of dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang, and twice pay her salutations, but, she could not help as well amusing them and sitting with them to keep them company. When free, she would come and see her cousins in the garden, and have, at odd times, a chat with them, so having, during daylight no leisure to speak of, she was wont, of a night, to ply her needle by lamplight, and only retire to sleep after the third watch had come and gone.

As for Tai-yü, she had, as a matter of course, a relapse of her complaint regularly every year, soon after the spring equinox and autumn solstice. But she had, during the last autumn, also found her grandmother Chia in such buoyant spirits, that she had walked a little too much on two distinct occasions, and naturally fatigued herself more than was good for her. Recently, too, she had begun to cough and to feel heavier than she had done at ordinary times, so she never by any chance put her foot out of doors, but remained at home and looked after her health. When at times, dullness crept over her, she longed for her cousins to come and chat with her and dispel her despondent

page 337

feelings. But whenever Pao-ch'ai or any of her cousins paid her a visit, she barely uttered half a dozen, words, before she felt quite averse to any society. Yet one and all made every allowance for her illness. And as she had ever been in poor health and not strong enough to resist any annoyance, they did not find the least fault with her, despite even any lack of propriety she showed in playing the hostess with them, or any remissness on her part in observing the prescribed rules of etiquette.

Pao-ch'ai came, on this occasion to call on her. The conversation started on the symptoms of her ailment. "The various doctors, who visit this place," Pao-ch'ai

consequently remarked, "may, it's true, be all very able practitioners; but you take their medicines and don't reap the least benefit! Wouldn't it be as well therefore to ask some other person of note to come and see you? And could he succeed in getting you all right, wouldn't it be nice? Here you year by year ail away throughout the whole length of spring and summer; but you're neither so old nor so young, so what will be the end of it? Besides, it can't go on for ever."

"It's no use," Tai-yü rejoined. "I know well enough that there's no cure for this complaint of mine! Not to speak of when I'm unwell, why even when I'm not, my state is such that one can see very well that there's no hope!"

Pao-ch'ai shook her head. "Quite so!" she ventured. "An old writer says: 'Those who eat, live.' But what you've all along eaten hasn't been enough to strengthen your energies and physique. This isn't a good thing!"

Tai-yü heaved a sigh. "Whether I'm to live or die is all destiny!" she said. "Riches and honours are in the hands of heaven; and human strength cannot suffice to forcibly get even them! But my complaint this year seems to be far worse than in past years, instead of any better."

While deploring her lot, she coughed two or three times. "It struck me," Pao-ch'ai said, "that in that prescription of yours I saw yesterday there was far too much ginseng and cinnamon. They are splendid tonics, of course, but too many heating things are not good. I think that the first urgent thing to do is to ease the liver and give tone to the stomach. When once the fire in the liver is reduced, it will not be able to overcome the stomach; and, when once the digestive organs are free of ailment, drink and food will be able to give nutriment to the human frame. As soon as you get out of bed, every morning, take one ounce of birds' nests, of superior quality, and five mace of sugar candy and prepare congee with them in a silver kettle. When once you get into the way of taking this decoction, you'll find it far more efficacious than medicines; for it possesses the highest virtue for invigorating the vagina and bracing up the physique."

page 338

"You've certainly always treated people with extreme consideration," sighed Tai-yü, "but such a supremely suspicious person am I that I imagined that you inwardly concealed some evil design! Yet ever since the day on which you represented to me how unwholesome it was to read obscene books, and you gave

me all that good advice, I've felt most grateful to you! I've hitherto, in fact, been mistaken in my opinion; and the truth of the matter is that I remained under this misconception up to the very present. But you must carefully consider that when my mother died, I hadn't even any sisters or brothers; and that up to this my fifteenth year there has never been a single person to admonish me as you did the other day. Little wonder is it if that girl Yün speaks well of you! Whenever, in former days, I heard her heap praise upon you, I felt uneasy in my mind, but, after my experiences of yesterday, I see how right she was. When you, for instance, began to tell me all those things, I didn't forgive you at the time, but, without worrying yourself in the least about it you went on, contrariwise, to tender me the advice you did. This makes it evident that I have laboured under a mistaken idea! Had I not made this discovery the other day, I wouldn't be speaking like this to your very face to-day. You told me a few minutes back to take bird's nest congee; but birds' nests are, I admit, easily procured; yet all on account of my sickly constitution and of the relapses I have every year of this complaint of mine, which amounts to nothing, doctors have had to be sent for, medicines, with ginseng and cinnamon, have had to be concocted, and I've given already such trouble as to turn heaven and earth topsy-turvey; so were I now to start again a new fad, by having some birds' nests congee or other prepared, our worthy senior, Madame Wang, and lady Feng, will, all three of them, have no objection to raise; but that posse of matrons and maids below will unavoidably despise me for my excessive fussiness! Just notice how every one in here ogles wildly like tigers their prey; and stealthily says one thing and another, simply because they see how fond our worthy ancestor is of both Pao-yü and lady Feng, and how much more won't they do these things with me? What's more, I'm not a pucker mistress. I've really come here as a mere refugee, for I had no one to sustain me and no one to depend upon. They already bear me considerable dislike; so much so, that I'm still quite at a loss whether I should stay or go; and why should I make them heap execrations upon me?"

"Well, in that case," Pao-ch'ai observed, "I'm too in the same plight as yourself!"

"How can you compare yourself with me?" Tai-yü exclaimed. "You have a mother; and a brother as well! You've also got some business and land in here, and, at home, you can call houses' and fields your own. It's

only therefore the ties of relationship, which make you stay here at all. Neither

are you in anything whether large or small, in their debt for one single cash or even half a one; and when you want to go, you're at liberty to go. But I, have nothing whatever that I can call my own. Yet, in what I eat, wear, and use, I am, in every trifle, entirely on the same footing as the young ladies in their household, so how ever can that mean lot not despise me out and out?"

"The only extra expense they'll have to go to by and bye," Pao-ch'ai laughed, "will be to get one more trousseau, that's all. And for the present, it's too soon yet to worry yourself about that!"

At this insinuation, Tai-yü unconsciously blushed scarlet. "One treats you," she smiled, "as a decent sort of person, and confides in you the woes of one's heart, and, instead of sympathising with me, you make me the means of raising a laugh!"

"Albeit I raise a laugh at your expense," Pao-ch'ai rejoined, a smile curling her lips, "what I say is none the less true! But compose your mind! I'll try every day that I'm here to cheer you up; so come to me with every grievance or trouble, for I shall, needless to say, dispel those that are within my power. Notwithstanding that I have a brother, you yourself know well enough what he's like! All I have is a mother, so I'm just a trifle better off than you! We can therefore well look upon ourselves as being in the same boat, and sympathise with each other. You have, besides, plenty of wits about you, so why need you give way to groans, as did Ssu Ma-niu? What you said just now is quite right; but, you should worry and fret about as little and not as much as you can. On my return home, to-morrow, I'll tell my mother; and, as I think there must be still some birds' nests in our house, we'll send you several ounces of them. You can then tell the servant-maids to prepare some for you at whatever time you want every day; and you'll thus be suiting your own convenience and be giving no trouble or annoyance to any one."

"The things are, of themselves, of little account," eagerly responded Tai-yü laughingly. "What's difficult to find is one with as much feeling as yourself."

"What's there in this worth speaking about?" Pao-ch'ai said. "What grieves me is that I fail to be as nice as I should be with those I come across. But, I presume, you feel quite done up now, so I'll be off!"

"Come in the evening again," Tai-yü pressed her, "and have a chat with me."

While assuring her that she would come, Pao-ch'ai walked out, so let us leave her alone for the present.

Tai-yü, meanwhile, drank a few sips of thin congee, and then once more

page 340

lay herself down on her bed. But before the sun set, the weather unexpectedly changed, and a fine drizzling rain set in. So gently come the autumn showers that dull and fine are subject to uncertain alternations. The shades of twilight gradually fell on this occasion. The heavens too got so overcast as to look deep black. Besides the effect of this change on her mind, the patter of the rain on the bamboo tops intensified her despondency, and, concluding that Pao-ch'ai would be deterred from coming, she took up, in the lamp light, the first book within her reach, which turned out to be the 'Treasury of Miscellaneous Lyrics.' Finding among these 'the Pinings of a maiden in autumn,' 'the Anguish of Separation,' and other similar poems, Tai-yü felt unawares much affected; and, unable to restrain herself from giving vent to her feelings in writing, she, there and then, improvised the following stanza, in the same strain as the one on separation; complying with the rules observed in the 'Spring River-Flower' and 'Moonlight Night.' These verses, she then entitled 'the Poem on the Autumn evening, when wind and rain raged outside the window.' Their burden was:

*In autumn, flowers decay; herbage, when autumn comes, doth yellow
turn.*

*On long autumnal nights, the autumn lanterns with bright radiance
burn.*

*As from my window autumn scenes I scan, autumn endless doth seem.
This mood how can I bear, when wind and rain despondency enhance?
How sudden break forth wind and rain, and help to make the autumntide!
Fright snaps my autumn dreams, those dreams which under my lattice I
dreamt.*

*A sad autumnal gloom enclasps my heart, and drives all sleep away!
In person I approach the autumn screen to snuff the weeping wick.
The tearful candles with a flickering flame consume on their short
stands.*

*They stir up grief, dazzle my eyes, and a sense of parting arouse.
In what family's courts do not the blasts of autumn winds intrude?*

*And where in autumn does not rain patter against the window-frames?
The silken quilt cannot ward off the nipping force of autumn winds.
The drip of the half drained water-clock impels the autumn rains.
A lull for few nights reigned, but the wind has again risen in
strength.*

*By the lantern I weep, as if I sat with some one who must go.
The small courtyard, full of bleak mist, is now become quite desolate.
With quick drip drops the rain on the distant bamboos and vacant
sills.*

*What time, I wonder, will the wind and rain their howl and patter
cease?*

The tears already I have shed have soaked through the window gauze.

After scanning her verses, she flung the pen aside, and was just on the point of retiring to rest, when a waiting-maid announced that 'master Secundus, Mr. Pao-yü, had come.' Barely was the announcement out of her lips, than Pao-yü appeared on the scene with a large bamboo hat on his head, and a wrapper thrown over his shoulders. Of a sudden, a smile betrayed itself on Tai-yü's lips. "Where does this fisherman come from?" she exclaimed.

"Are you better to-day?" Pao-yü inquired with alacrity. "Have you had any medicines? How much rice have you had to eat to-day?"

page 341

While plying her with questions, he took off the hat and divested himself of the wrapper; and, promptly raising the lamp with one hand, he screened it with the other and threw its rays upon Tai-yü's face. Then straining his eyes, he scrutinised her for a while. "You look better to-day," he smiled.

As soon as he threw off his wrapper, Tai-yü noticed that he was clad in a short red silk jacket, the worse for wear; that he was girded with a green sash, and that, about his knees, his nether garments were visible, made of green thin silk, brocaded with flowers. Below these, he wore embroidered gauze socks, worked all over with twisted gold thread, and a pair of shoes ornamented with butterflies and clusters of fallen flowers.

"Above, you fight shy of the rain," Tai-yü remarked, "but aren't these shoes and socks below afraid of rain? Yet they're quite clean!"

“This suit is complete!” Pao-yü smiled. “I’ve got a pair of crab-wood clogs, I put on to come over; but I took them off under the eaves of the verandah.”

Tai-yü's attention was then attracted by the extreme fineness and lightness of the texture of his wrapper and hat, which were unlike those sold in the market places. “With what grass are they plaited?” she consequently asked. “It would be strange if you didn't, with this sort of things on, look like a very hedgehog!”

“These three articles are a gift from the Prince of Pei Ching,” Pao-yü answered. “Ordinarily, when it rains, he too wears this kind of outfit at home. But if it has taken your fancy, I'll have a suit made for you. There's nothing peculiar about the other things, but this hat is funny! The crown at the top is movable; so if you want to wear a hat, during snowy weather in wintertime, you pull off the bamboo pegs, and remove the crown, and there you only have the circular brim. This is worn, when it snows, by men and women alike. I'll give you one therefore to wear in the wintry snowy months.”

“I don't want it!” laughed Tai-yü. “Were I to wear this sort of thing, I'd look like one of those fisherwomen, one sees depicted in pictures or represented on the stage!”

Upon reaching this point, she remembered that there was some connection between her present remarks and the comparison she had some time back made with regard to Pao-yü, and, before she had time to indulge in regrets, a sense of shame so intense overpowered her that the colour rushed to her face, and, leaning her head on the table, she coughed and coughed till she could not stop. Pao-yü, however, did not detect her embarrassment; but catching sight of some verses lying on the table, he eagerly snatched them up and conned them from beginning to end. “Splendid!” he could not help crying. But the moment Tai-yü heard his exclamation, she speedily jumped to her feet, and

page 342

clutched the verses and burnt them over the lamp.

“I've already committed them sufficiently to memory!” Pao-yü laughed.

“I want to have a little rest,” Tai-yü said, “so please get away; come back again

to-morrow.”

At these words, Pao-yü drew back his hand, and producing from his breast a gold watch about the size of a walnut, he looked at the time. The hand pointed between eight and nine p.m.; so hastily putting it away, “You should certainly retire to rest!” he replied. “My visit has upset you. I've quite tired you out this long while.” With these apologies, he threw the wrapper over him, put on the rain-hat and quitted the room. But turning round, he retraced his steps inside. “Is there anything you fancy to eat?” he asked. “If there be, tell me, and I'll let our venerable ancestor know of it to-morrow as soon as it's day. Won't I explain things clearer than any of the old matrons could?”

“Let me,” rejoined Tai-yü smiling, “think in the night. I'll let you know early to-morrow. But harken, it's raining harder than it did; so be off at once! Have you got any attendants, or no?”

“Yes!” interposed the two matrons. “There are servants to wait on him. They're outside holding his umbrella and lighting the lanterns.”

“Are they lighting lanterns with this weather?” laughed Tai-yü.

“It won't hurt them!” Pao-yü answered. “They're made of sheep's horn, so they don't mind the rain.”

Hearing this, Tai-yü put back her hand, and, taking down an ornamented glass lantern in the shape of a ball from the book case, she asked the servants to light a small candle and bring it to her; after which, she handed the lantern to Pao-yü. “This,” she said, “gives out more light than the others; and is just the thing for rainy weather.”

“I've also got one like it.” Pao-yü replied. “But fearing lest they might slip, fall down and break it, I did not have it lighted and brought round.”

“What's of more account,” Tai-yü inquired, “harm to a lantern or to a human being? You're not besides accustomed to wearing clogs, so tell them to walk ahead with those lanterns. This one is as light and handy as it is light-giving; and is really adapted for rainy weather, so wouldn't it be well if you carried it yourself? You can send it over to me to-morrow! But, were it even to slip from your hand, it wouldn't matter much. How is it that you've also suddenly

developed this money-grabbing sort of temperament? It's as bad as if you ripped your intestines to secrete pearls in."

After these words, Pao-yü approached her and took the lantern from her. Ahead then advanced two matrons, with umbrellas and sheep horn lanterns, and

page 343

behind followed a couple of waiting-maids also with umbrellas. Pao-yü handed the glass lantern to a young maid to carry, and, supporting himself on her shoulder, he straightway wended his steps on his way back.

But presently arrived an old servant from the Heng Wu court, provided as well with an umbrella and a lantern, to bring over a large bundle of birds' nests, and a packet of foreign sugar, pure as powder, and white as petals of plum-blossom and flakes of snow. "These," she said, "are much better than what you can buy. Our young lady sends you word, miss, to first go on with these. When you've done with them, she'll let you have some more."

"Many thanks for the trouble you've taken!" Tai-yü returned for answer; and then asked her to go and sit outside and have a cup of tea.

"I won't have any tea," the old servant smiled. "I've got something else to attend to."

"I'm well aware that you've all got plenty in hand," Tai-yü resumed with a smiling countenance. "But the weather being cool now and the nights long, it's more expedient than ever to establish two things: a night club and a gambling place."

"I won't disguise the fact from you, miss," the old servant laughingly observed, "that I've managed this year to win plenty of money. Several servants have, under any circumstances, to do night duty; and, as any neglect in keeping watch wouldn't be the right thing, isn't it as well to have a night club, as one can sit on the look-out and dispel dullness as well? But it's again my turn to play the croupier to-day, so I must be getting along to the place, as the garden gate, will, by this time, be nearly closing!"

This rejoinder evoked a laugh from Tai-yü. "I've given you all this bother," she

remarked, "and made you lose your chances of getting money, just to bring these things in the rain." And calling a servant she bade her present her with several hundreds of cash to buy some wine with, to drive the damp away.

"I've uselessly put you again, miss, to the expense of giving me a tip for wine," the old servant smiled. But saying this she knocked her forehead before her; and issuing outside, she received the money, after which, she opened her umbrella, and trudged back.

Tzu Chüan meanwhile put the birds' nests away; and removing afterwards the lamps, she lowered the portieres and waited upon Tai-yü until she lay herself down to sleep.

While she reclined all alone on her pillow, Tai-yü thought gratefully of Pao-ch'ai. At one moment, she envied her for having a mother and a brother; and at another, she mused that with the friendliness Pao-yü had ever shown her they were bound to be the victims of suspicion. But the pitter-patter of the

page 344

rain, dripping on the bamboo tops and banana leaves, fell on her ear; and, as a fresh coolness penetrated the curtain, tears once more unconsciously trickled down her cheeks. In this frame of mind, she continued straight up to the fourth watch, when she at last gradually dropped into a sound sleep.

For the time, however, there is nothing that we can add. So should you, reader, desire to know any subsequent details, peruse what is written in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XLVI.

*An improper man with difficulty keeps from improprieties.
The maid, Yüan Yang, vows to break off the marriage match.*

Lin Tai-yü, to resume our story, dropped off gradually to sleep about the close of the fourth watch. As there is therefore nothing more that we can for the present say about her, let us take up the thread of our narrative with lady Feng.

Upon hearing that Madame Hsing wanted to see her, she could not make out what it could be about, so hurriedly putting on some extra things on her person and head, she got into a carriage and crossed over.

Madame Hsing at once dismissed every attendant from her suite of apartments. "I sent for you," she began, addressing herself to lady Feng, in a confidential tone, "not for anything else, but on account of something which places me on the horns of a dilemma. My husband has entrusted me with a job; and being quite at my wits' ends how to act, I'd like first to consult with you. My husband has taken quite a fancy to Yüan Yang, who is in our worthy senior's rooms; so much so, that he's desirous to get her into his quarters as a secondary wife. He has deputed me therefore to ask her of our venerable ancestor. I know that this is quite an ordinary matter. Yet I can't help fearing that our worthy senior may refuse to give her. But do you perchance see your way to bring this concern about?"

Lady Feng listened to her. "You shouldn't, I say, go and bang your head against a nail!" she then vehemently exclaimed. "Were our old ancestor separated from Yüan Yang, she wouldn't even touch her rice! How ever could she reconcile herself to part from her? Besides, our worthy senior has time and again said, in the course of a chat, 'that she can't see the earthly use of a man well up in years, as your lord and master is, having here one concubine, and there another? That cooping them up in his rooms, is a mere waste of human beings. That he neglects his constitution and doesn't husband it; and that he doesn't either attend diligently to his official duties,

but spends his whole days in boozing with his young concubines. When your

ladyship hears these nice doings of his, don't you feel enamoured with that fine gentleman of ours? Were he even to try, at this juncture, to beat a retreat, he couldn't, I fear, effectively do so. Yet, instead of (making an effort to turn tail), he wants to go and dig the tiger's nostrils with a blade of straw. Don't, my lady, be angry with me; but I daren't undertake the errand. It's clear as day that it will be a wild goose chase. What's more, it will do him no good; but will, contrariwise, heap disgrace upon his own head! Our Mr. Chia She is now so stricken in years, that in all his actions he unavoidably behaves somewhat as a dotard. It would be well therefore for your ladyship to advise him what to do. It isn't as if he were in the prime of life to be able to do all these things with impunity! He's got at present a whole array of brothers, nieces, sons, and grandsons; and should he still go on in this wild sort of way, how will he be able to face any of them?"

Madame Hsing gave a sardonic smile. "There are endless wealthy families with three and four concubines," she said, "and is it in ours that such a thing won't do? But were I even to tender him as much advice as I can, it isn't at all likely that he'll abide by it! Even though that maid be one beloved by our venerable senior, it doesn't follow that she'll very well be able to give a rebuff to a hoary-bearded elderly son, and, erewhile, an official, were he to express a wish to have her as an inmate of his household! I sent for you for no other purpose than to deliberate with you, and here you take the initiative and enumerate a whole array of shortcomings. But is there any reason why I should commission you to go? Of course I'll go and speak to her! You make a bold statement that I don't give him any good counsel; but don't you yet know that with a disposition, such as his, he rushes, before I can very well open my lips to advise him, into a tantrum with me?"

Lady Feng was well alive to the fact that Madame Hsing was, by nature, simple and weak-minded, and that all she knew was to adulate Chia She so as to ensure her own safety. That she was, in the next place, ever ready, so greedy was she, to grasp as much hard cash and as many effects, as she could lay hold of, for her own private gain. That she left all family matters, irrespective of important or unimportant, under the sole control of Chia She; but that, whenever anything turned up, involving any receipts or payments, she extorted an unusual percentage, the moment the money passed through her clutches, giving out as a pretence: 'Well Chia She is so extravagant that I have to interfere and effect sufficient economies to enable us to make up our deficits.' And that she would not trust any one, whether son, daughter or servant, nor lend an ear to a single

word of remonstrance. When she therefore now heard Madame Hsing speak as she did, she concluded that she must

page 346

be in another of her perverse moods, and that any admonitions would be of no avail. So hastily forcing a smile: "My lady," she observed, "you're perfectly right in your remarks! But how long can I have lived, and what discrimination can I boast of? It seems to me that if a father and mother do not bestow, not a mere servant-girl like she is, but a living jewel of the size of her, on one like Mr. Chia She, to whom are they likely to give her? How can one give faith to words spoken behind one's back? So what a fool I was (in cramming what I heard down my throat)! Just take our Mr. Secundus, (my husband), as an instance. If ever he does anything to incur blame, Mr. Chia She and you, my lady, feel so wrath with him as to only wish you could lay hands upon him there and then and give him such a blow as would kill him downright, but the moment you set eyes on his face, your whole resentment vanishes, and lo, you again let him have, as of old, everything, and anything, much though both of you might relish it in your hearts! Our worthy ancestor will certainly therefore behave in the present instance, with equal liberality, towards Mr. Chia She! So if her ladyship feels in the humour to-day, she'll let him have her, I fancy, at once this very day, if he makes the proper advances. But I'll go ahead and coax our venerable senior; and, when your ladyship comes over, I'll find some pretence to get out of the way, and take along with me those too who may be present in her rooms, so as to make it convenient for you to broach the subject. If she gives her, so much the better. But if even she doesn't, it won't matter; for none of the inmates will have any idea what the object of your mission could have been."

After listening to her suggestion, Madame Hsing began again to feel in a happier frame of mind. "My idea is," she observed, "that I shouldn't start by mentioning anything to our venerable senior, for were she to say that she wouldn't give her, the matter would be simply quashed on the head. I can't help thinking that I should first and foremost quietly approach Yüan Yang on the subject. She will, of course, feel extremely ashamed, but when I explain everything minutely to her, she'll certainly have nothing to say against the proposal, and everything will be all right. I can then speak to our old senior; and, despite any desire on her part not to accede to our wishes, she won't be able to put the girl off, provided she herself be willing; for as the adage says: 'If a person wishes to go, it's no use trying to keep him.' Thus needless to say, the whole thing will be satisfactorily

settled!”

“You're really shrewd in your devices, my lady!” lady Feng smilingly ejaculated. “This is perfect in every respect! For without taking Yüan Yang into account, what girl does not long to rise high, or hope to exalt herself, or think of pushing herself forward above the rest as to cast away the chances of becoming half a mistress, and prefer instead being a maid,

page 347

and merely becoming by and bye the mate of some servant-lad?”

“Quite so!” Madame Hsing smiled. “But let's put Yüan Yang aside. Who is there, even among the various elderly waiting-maids, who look after the house, who wouldn't be only too willing to step into these shoes? You'd better then go ahead. But, mind, don't let the cat out of the bag! I'll join you as soon as I can finish my evening meal.”

“Yüan Yang,” thereupon secretly reflected lady Feng, “has always been an extremely shrewd-minded girl; to such a degree, that there is notwithstanding all our arguments, no saying positively whether she'll accept or refuse. So were I to go ahead, and Madame Hsing to follow me by and bye, there won't be any occasion for her to grumble or complain, so long as she assents; but, if she doesn't, why, Madame Hsing, who is so suspicious a creature, will possibly imagine that I've been gassing with her, and been the means of making her put on side and assume high airs. When Madame Hsing finds then that my conjectures have turned out true again, her shame will be converted into anger, and she'll so vent her spite upon me that I shall, after all, be put in a false position. Would it not be better then that she and I should go together; for, if she says 'yes,' I'll be all right; and, if she replies 'no,' I'll be on the safe side; and no suspicion, of any kind, will fall upon me!”

At the close of her reflections, “As I was about to cross over here,” she remarked laughingly, “our aunt yonder sent us two baskets of quails, and I gave orders that they should be fried, with the idea that they should be brought to your ladyship, in time for you to have some at your evening repast. Just as I was stepping inside the main entrance, I saw the servant-boys carrying your curricle; they said that it was your ladyship's vehicle, that it had cracked, and that they were taking it to be repaired. Wouldn't it be as well then that you should now come in my carriage,

for it will be better for you and me to get there together?”

At this suggestion, Madame Hsing directed her servants to come and change her costume. Lady Feng quickly waited upon her, and in a while the two ladies got into one and the same curricule and drove over.

“My lady,” lady Feng went on to say, “it would be well for you to look up our worthy senior, for were I to accompany you, and her ladyship to ask me what was the object of my visit, it would be rather awkward. The best way is for your ladyship to go first, and I'll join you, as soon as I divest myself of my fine clothes.”

Madame Hsing noticed how reasonable her proposal was, and she readily betook herself to old lady Chia's quarters. But after a chat with her senior, she quitted the apartment, under the pretence that she was going to Madame Wang's rooms. Then making her exit by the back door, she passed in front

page 348

of Yüan Yang's bedroom. Here she saw Yüan Yang sitting, hard at work at some needlework. The moment she caught sight of Madame Hsing, she rose to her feet.

“What are you up to?” Madame Hsing laughingly inquired. “Let me see! How much nicer you embroider artificial flowers now!”

So speaking, she entered, and, taking the needlework from her hands, she scrutinised it, while extolling its beauty. Then laying down the work, and scanning her again from head to foot, she observed that her costume consisted of a half-new, grey thin silk jacket, and a bluish satin waistcoat with scollops; that below this came a water-green jupe; that her waist was slim as that of a wasp; that her shoulders sloped as if pared; that her face resembled a duck's egg; that her hair was black and shiny; that her nose was very high, and that on both her cheeks were slightly visible several small flat moles.

Yüan Yang realised how intently she was being passed under scrutiny, and began to feel inwardly uneasy; while utter astonishment prevailed in her mind. “Madame,” she felt impelled to ask, “what do you come for at this impossible hour?”

At a wink from Madame Hsing, her attendants withdrew from the room. Madame Hsing forthwith seated herself, and grasped Yüan Yang's hand in hers. "I've come," she smiled, "with the special purpose of presenting you my congratulations."

This reply enabled Yüan Yang at once to form within herself some surmise more or less correct of the object of her errand, and suddenly blushing crimson, she lowered her head, and uttered not a word.

"You know well enough," she next heard Madame Hsing resume, "that there's not a single reliable person with my husband; but much though we'd like to purchase some other girl we fear that such as might come out of a broker's household wouldn't be quite spotless and taintless. Nor would one be able to get any idea what her failings are, until after she has been purchased and brought home; when she too will be sure, in two or three days, to behave like an imp and play some monkey tricks! That's why we thought of choosing some home-born girl out of those which throng in our mansion, but then again we could find none decent enough; for if her looks were not at fault, her disposition was not proper; and if she possessed this quality, she lacked that one. Hence it is that after repeatedly choosing with dispassionate eye, during half a year, (he finds) that there's only you among that whole bevy of girls, who's worth anything; that in looks, behaviour and deportment, you're gentle, trustworthy, and perfection itself in every respect. His intention therefore is to ask your hand of our old lady and take you over and attach you to his quarters. You won't be treated as one newly-purchased, or newly-sought for

page 349

outside; for the moment you put your foot into our house, you'll at once have your face shaved and be promoted to a secondary wife; so you'll thus attain as much dignity as honour. More, you're one who is anxious to excel; and, as the proverb says, 'gold will still be exchanged for gold.' My husband has, who'd have thought it, taken a fancy to you, so when you now enter our threshold, you'll fulfil the wish you've cherished all along with such high purpose and lofty aim, and stop the mouths of those persons, who are envious of your lot. Follow me therefore and let's go and lay the matter before our venerable ancestor."

Arguing the while, she dragged her by the hand with the idea of hurrying her off

there and then. Yüan Yang, however, blushed to her very ears, and, snatching her hand out of her grip she refused to budge.

Madame Hsing was conscious that she was under the spell of intense shame. "What's there in this to be ashamed?" she continued, "You needn't besides breathe a word! All you have to do is to follow me, that's all."

Yüan Yang continued to droop her head and to decline to go with her. Madame Hsing, perceiving her behaviour, went on to exhort her. "Is it likely, pray," she said, "that you still hesitate? If you actually don't feel inclined to accept the offer, you're, in real truth, a foolish girl; for here you let go the chances of becoming the secondary consort of a master, and choose instead to continue a servant-girl. You'll be united, in two or three years, to no one higher than some young domestic, and remain as much a bond-servant as ever! If you come along with us, you know that my disposition too is gentle; that I'm not one of those persons, who don't show any regard for any one; that my husband will also treat you as well as he does every one else, and that when, in the course of a year or so, you give birth to a son or daughter, you'll be placed on the same footing as myself. And of all the servants at home, will any you may wish to employ not deign to move to execute your orders? If now that you have a chance of becoming a mistress, you don't choose to, why, you'll miss the opportunity, and then you may repent it, but it will be too late!"

Yüan Yang still kept her head bent against her chest and spake not a syllable by way of reply.

"How is it," added Madame Hsing, "that you, who've ever been so quick have now too begun to be so infirm of purpose? What is there that doesn't fall in with your wishes? Just tell me; and I can safely assure you that you'll have everything done to satisfy you."

Yüan Yang observed, as hitherto, perfect silence.

"I suppose," laughed Madame Hsing, "that having a father and mother, you yourself don't wish to speak, for fear of being put to the blush, and that

you want to wait until such time as they consult you about it, eh? This is quite

right! But you'd better let me go and make the proposal to them and tell them to come and ascertain your wishes; and whatever your answer then may be just entrust it to them.”

This said, she sped into lady Feng's suite of rooms.

Lady Feng had long ago changed her attire, and availed herself of the absence of any bystander in her apartments to confide the whole matter to P'ing Erh.

P'ing Erh nodded her head and smiled. “According to my views, success is not so certain,” she observed. “She and I have often secretly talked this matter over, and the arguments I heard her propound don't make it the least probable that she'll consent. But all we can say now is: 'We'll see!'”

“Madame Hsing,” lady Feng remarked, “is sure to come over here to consult with me. If she has assented, well and good; but, if she hasn't, she'll bring displeasure upon her own self, and won't she feel out of countenance, if all of you are present? So tell the others to fry several quails, and get anything nice, that goes well with them, and prepare it for our repast, while you can go and stroll about in some other spot, and return when you fancy she has gone.”

Hearing this, P'ing Erh transmitted her wishes word for word to the matrons; after which, she sauntered leisurely all alone, into the garden.

When Yüan Yang saw Madame Hsing depart, she concluded that she was bound to go into lady Feng's rooms to consult with her, and that some one was sure to come and ask her about the proposal, so thinking it advisable to cross over to this side of the mansion to get out of the way, she consequently repaired in quest of Hu Po.

“Should our old mistress,” she said to her, “ask for me, just say that I was so unwell that I couldn't even have any breakfast; that I've gone into the garden for a stroll, but that I will be back at once.”

Hu Po undertook to tell her so, and Yüan Yang then betook herself too into the garden. While lolling all over the place, she, contrary to her expectations, encountered P'ing Erh. P'ing Erh looked round to see that there was no one about. “Here comes the new secondary wife!” she smilingly exclaimed.

Yüan Yang caught this greeting, and promptly the colour rose to her face. "How strange it is," she rejoined, "that you've all colluded together to come, with one accord, and scheme against me! But wait until I've had it out with your mistress, and then I'll set things all right."

When P'ing Erh observed the angry look on Yüan Yang's countenance, her conscience was so stricken with remorse, on account of the inconsiderate

page 351

remark she had passed, that drawing her under the maple tree, she made her sit on the same boulder as herself, and then went so far as to recount to her, from beginning to end, all that transpired, and everything that was said on lady Feng's return, a short while back, from the off mansion.

Blushes flew to Yüan Yang's cheeks. Facing P'ing Erh, she gave a sardonic smile. "We've all ever been friends," she said, "that is: Hsi Jen, Hu Po, Su Yün, Tzu Chüan, Ts'ai Hsia, Yü Ch'uan, She Yüeh, Ts'ui Mo, Ts'ui Lü, who was in Miss Shih's service and is now gone, K'o Jen and Chin Ch'uan, now deceased, Hsi Hsüeh, who left, and you and I. Ever since our youth up, how many chats have the ten or dozen of us not had, and what have we not been up to together? But now that we've grown up, each of us has gone her own way! Yet, my heart is just what it was in days gone by. Whenever there's anything for me to say or do, I don't try to impose upon any of you; so just first treasure in your heart the secret I'm going to tell you, and don't mention it to our lady Secunda! Not to speak of our senior master wishing to make me his concubine, were even our lady to die this very moment, and he to send endless go-betweens, and countless betrothal presents, with the idea of wedding me and taking me over as his lawful primary wife, I wouldn't also go."

P'ing Erh was at this point desirous to put in some observation, when from behind the boulder became audible the loud tones of laughter. "You most barefaced girl!" a voice cried. "It's well you're not afraid of your teeth falling when you utter such things!"

These words reached the ears of both girls, and, so unawares were they taken, that they got a regular start, and jumping up with all haste they went to see behind the boulder. They found no one else than Hsi Jen, who presented herself before them, with a smiling countenance, and asked: "What's up? Do tell me!"

As she spoke, the trio seated themselves on a rock. P'ing Erh then imparted to Hsi Jen as well the drift of their recent conversation.

“Properly speaking, we shouldn't pass such judgments,” Hsi Jen remarked, after listening to her confidences, “but this senior master of ours is really a most licentious libertine. So much so, that whenever he comes across a girl with any good looks about her, he won't let her out of his grasp.”

“Since you don't like to entertain his offer,” P'ing Erh suggested, “I'll put you up to a plan.”

“What plan is it?” Yüan Yang inquired.

“Just simply tell our old mistress,” P'ing Erh laughed, “this answer: that you've already been promised to our master Secundus, Mr. Lien. Our senior master then won't very well be able to be importunate.”

page 352

“Ts'ui!” ejaculated Yüan Yang. “What a thing you are! Do you still make such suggestions? Didn't your mistress the other day utter this silly nonsense! Who'd have thought it, her words have now come true!”

“If you won't have either of them,” Hsi Jen smiled, “my idea is that you should tell our old lady point blank and ask her to give out that she promised you long ago to our master, number two, Pao-yü. Our senior master will then banish this fad from his mind.”

Yüan Yang was overcome with anger, shame and exasperation. “What dreadful vixens both of you are!” she shouted. “You don't deserve a natural death! I find myself in a fix, and treat you as decent sort of persons and confide in you so that you should arrange matters for me; and not to say that you don't bother yourselves a rap about me, you take turn and turn about to poke fun at me! You're under the impression, in your own minds, that your fates are sealed, and that both of you are bound by and bye to become secondary wives; but I can't help thinking that affairs under the heavens don't so certainly fall in always with one's wishes and expectations! So you'd better now pull up a bit, and not be cheeky to such an excessive degree!”

Both her companions then realised in what state of despair she was, and promptly forcing a smile, "Dear sister," they said, "don't be so touchy! We've been, ever since we were little mites, like very sisters! All we've done is to spontaneously indulge in a little fun in a spot where there's no one present. But tell us what you've decided to do, so that we too should know, and set our minds at ease."

"Decided what?" Yüan Yang cried. "All I know is that I won't go; that's finished."

P'ing Erh shook her head. "You mightn't go," she interposed, "but it isn't likely that the matter will drop. You're well aware what sort of temperament that of our senior master's is. It's true that you're attached to our old mistress' rooms, and that he can't, just at present, presume to do the least thing to you; but can it be, forsooth, that you'll be with the old dame for your whole lifetime? You'll also have to leave to get married, and if you then fall into his hands, it won't go well with you."

Yüan Yang smiled ironically. "I won't leave this place so long as my old lady lives!" Yüan Yang protested. "In the event of her ladyship departing this life, he'll have, under any circumstances, to also go into mourning for three years; for there's no such thing as starting by marrying a concubine, soon after a mother's death! And while he waits for three years to expire, can one say what may not happen? It will be time enough to talk about it when that date comes. But should I be driven to despair from being hard pressed, I'll cut my hair off and become a nun. If not, there's yet another

page 353

thing: death! And as for a whole life time I shall not join myself to a man, what joy will not then be mine, for having managed to preserve my purity?"

"In very truth," P'ing Erh and Hsi Jen laughed, "this vixen has no sense of shame! She has now more than ever spoken whatever came foremost to her lips!"

"What matters a moment's shame," Yüan Yang rejoined, "when things have reached this juncture? But if you don't believe my words, well, you'll be able to

see by and bye; then you'll feel convinced. Madame Hsing said a short while back that she was going to look up my father and mother, but I'd like to see whether she'll proceed to Nanking to find them."

"Your parents are in Nanking looking after the houses," P'ing Erh said, "and they can't come up; yet, in the long run, they can be found out. Your elder brother and your sister-in-law are besides in here at present. You, poor thing, are a child born in this establishment. You're not like us two, who are solitary creatures here."

"What does it matter whether I be born here or not?" Yüan Yang exclaimed. "You can lead a horse to a fountain, but you can't make him drink!" So if I don't listen to any proposals, is it likely, may I ask, that they'll kill my father and mother?" While the words were still on her lips, they caught sight of her sister-in-law, advancing from the opposite side. "As they couldn't at once get at your parents," Hsi Jen remarked, "they've, for a certainty, told your sister-in-law."

"All this wench is good for," Yüan Yang shouted, "is 'to rush about as if selling camels in the six states!' If she heard what I said, she won't feel flattered."

But while she spoke, her sister-in-law approached them. "Where didn't I look for you?" her sister-in-law smilingly observed. "Have you, miss, run over here? Come along with me; I've got something to tell you!"

P'ing Erh and Hsi Jen speedily motioned to her to sit down, but (Yüan Yang's) sister-in-law demurred. "Young ladies, pray be seated; I've come in search of our girl to tell her something."

Hsi Jen and P'ing Erh feigned perfect ignorance. "What can it be that it's so pressing?" they said with a smile. "We were engaged in guessing puns here, so let's find out this, before you go."

"What do you want to tell me?" Yuan Yang inquired. "Speak out!"

"Follow me!" her sister-in-law laughed. "When we get over there, I'll tell you. It's really some good tidings!"

"Is it perchance what Madame Hsing has told you?" Yüan Yang asked.

“Since you, miss, know what it's all about,” her sister-in-law added

page 354

smilingly, “what else remains for me to do? Be quick and come with me and I'll explain everything. Verily, it's a piece of happiness as large as the heavens!”

Yüan Yang, at these words, rose to her feet and spat contemptuously with all her might in her sister-in-law's face. Pointing at her: “Be quick,” she cried abusively, “and stop that filthy tongue of yours! It would be ever so much better, were you to bundle yourself away from this! What good tidings and what piece of happiness! Little wonder is it that you long and crave the whole day long to see other people's daughter turned into a secondary wife as one and all of your family would rely upon her to act contrary to reason and right! A whole household has been converted into secondary wives! But the sight fills you with such keen jealousy that you would like to also lay hold of me and throw me into the pit-fire! If any honours fall to my share, all of you outside will do everything disorderly and improper, and raise yourselves, in your own estimations, to the status of uncles (and aunts). But if I don't get any, and come to grief, you'll draw in your foul necks, and let me live or die as I please!”

While indulging in this raillery, she gave vent to tears. P'ing Erh and Hsi Jen did all they could to reason with her so as to prevent her from crying.

Her sister-in-law felt quite out of countenance. “Whether you mean to accept the proposal, or not,” she consequently said, “you can anyhow speak nicely. It isn't worth the while dragging this one in and involving that one! The proverb adequately says: 'In the presence of a dwarf one mustn't speak of dwarfish things!' Here you've been heaping insult upon me, but I didn't presume to retaliate. These two young ladies have however given you no provocation whatever; and yet by referring, as you've done, in this way and that way to secondary wives how can people stand it peacefully?”

“You shouldn't speak so!” Hsi Jen and P'ing Erh quickly remonstrated. “She didn't allude to us; so don't be implicating others! Have you heard of any ladies or gentlemen who'd like to raise us to the rank of secondary wives? What's more, we two have neither father nor mother, nor brothers, within these doors, to avail themselves of our positions to act in a way contrary to right and reason! If she abuses people, let her do so; it isn't worth our while to be touchy!”

“Seeing,” Yüan Yang resumed, “that the abuse I've heaped upon her head has put her to such shame that she doesn't know where to go and screen her face, she tries to egg you two on! But you two have, fortunately, your wits about you! Though quite impatient, I never started arguing the question; she it was who chose to speak just now.”

Her sister-in-law felt inwardly much disconcerted, and beat a retreat in

page 355

high dudgeon. But Yüan Yang so lost her temper that she still went on to abuse her; and it was only after P'ing Erh and Hsi Jen had admonished her for ever so long that she let the matter drop.

“What were you hiding there for?” P'ing Erh then asked Hsi Jen. “We couldn't see anything of you.”

“I went,” Hsi Jen explained, “into Miss Quarta's rooms to see our Mr. Pao-yü, but, who'd have thought it, I got there a little too late, and they told me that he had gone home. But my suspicions were, however, aroused as I couldn't make out how it was that I hadn't come across him, and I was about to go and hunt him up in Miss Lin's apartments, when I met one of her servants who said that he hadn't been there either. Then just as I was surmising that he must have gone out of the garden, behold, you came, as luck would have it, from the opposite direction. But I dodged you, so you didn't see anything of me. Subsequently, she too appeared on the scene; but I got behind the boulder, from the back of these trees. I, however, saw that you two had come to have a chat. Strange to say, though you have four eyes between you, you never caught a glimpse of me.”

Scarcely had she concluded this remark, than they heard some one else from behind, laughingly exclaim, “Four eyes never saw you, but your six eyes haven't as yet found me out!”

The three girls received quite a shock from fright; but turning round, they perceived that it was no other person than Pao-yü.

Hsi Jen smiled, and was the first to speak. “You've made me have a good search,” she said. “Where do you hail from?”

“I was just leaving cousin Quarta's,” Pao-yü laughed, “when I noticed you coming along, just in front of me; and knowing well enough that you were bent upon finding me, I concealed myself to have a lark with you. I saw you then go by, with uplifted head, enter the court, walk out again, and ask every one you met on your way; but there I stood convulsed with laughter. I was only waiting to rush up to you and frighten you, when I afterwards realised that you too were prowling stealthily about, so I readily inferred that you also were playing a trick upon some one. Then when I put out my head and looked before me, I saw that it was these two girls, so I came behind you, by a circuitous way; and as soon as you left, I forthwith sneaked into your hiding place.”

“Let's go and look behind there,” P'ing Erh suggested laughingly; “we may possibly discover another couple; there's no saying.”

“There's no one else!” Pao-yü laughed.

Yüan Yang had long ago concluded that every word of their conversation had been overheard by Pao-yü; but leaning against the rock, she pretended

page 356

to be fast asleep.

Pao-yü gave her a push. “This stone is cold!” he smiled. “Let's go and sleep in our rooms. Won't it be better there?”

Saying this, he made an attempt to pull Yüan Yang to her feet. Then hastily pressing P'ing Erh to repair to his quarters and have some tea, he united his efforts with those of Hsi Jen, and tried to induce Yüan Yang to come away. Yüan Yang, at length, got up, and the quartet betook themselves, after all, into the I Hung court.

Pao-yü had caught every word that had fallen from their lips a few minutes back, and felt, indeed, at heart so much distressed on Yüan Yang's behalf, that throwing himself silently on his bed, he left the three girls in the outer rooms to prosecute their chat and laugh.

On the other side of the compound, Madame Hsing about this time inquired of

lady Feng who Yüan Yang's father was.

“Her father,” lady Feng replied, “is called Chin Ts'ai. He and his wife are in Nanking; they have to look after our houses there, so they can't pay frequent visits to the capital. Her brother is the Wen-hsiang, who acts at present as our senior's accountant; but her sister-in-law too is employed in our worthy ancestor's yonder as head washerwoman.”

Madame Hsing thereupon despatched a servant to go and call Yüan Yang's sister-in-law. On Mrs. Chin Wen-hsiang's arrival, she told her all. Mrs. Chin was naturally pleased and left in capital spirits to find Yüan Yang, in the hope that the moment she communicated the offer to her, the whole thing would be satisfactorily arranged. But contrary to all her anticipations, she had to bear a good blowing up from Yüan Yang, and to be told several unpleasant things by Hsi Jen and P'ing Erh, so that she was filled with as much shame as indignation. She then came and reported the result to Madame Hsing. “It's no use,” she said, “she gave me a scolding.” But as lady Feng was standing by, she could not summon up courage enough to allude to P'ing Erh, so she added: “Hsi Jen too helped her to rate me, and they told me a whole lot of improper words, which could not be breathed in a mistress' ears. It would thus be better to arrange with our master to purchase a girl and have done; for from all I see, neither can that mean vixen enjoy such great good fortune, nor we such vast propitious luck!”

“What's that again to do with Hsi Jen? How came they to know anything about it?” Madame Hsing exclaimed upon learning the issue. “Who else was present?” she proceeded to inquire.

“There was Miss P'ing!” was Chin's wife's reply.

“Shouldn't you have given her a slap on the mouth?” lady Feng precipitately shouted. “As soon as I ever put my foot outside the door, she starts

page 357

gadding about; and I never see so much as her shadow, when I get home. She too is bound to have had a hand in telling you something or other!”

“Miss P'ing wasn't present,” Chin's wife protested. “Looking from a distance it seemed to me like her; but I couldn't see distinctly. It was a mere surmise on my

part that it was she at all.”

“Go and fetch her at once!” lady Feng shouted to a servant. “Tell her that I've come home, and that Madame Hsing is also here and wants her to help her in her hurry.”

Feng Erh quickly came up to her. “Miss Lin,” she observed, “despatched a messenger for her, and asked her in writing three and four times before she at last went. I advised her to get back so soon as your ladyship stepped inside the gate, but 'tell your mistress,' Miss Lin said, 'that I've put her to the inconvenience of coming round, as I've got something for her to do for me.'”

This explanation satisfied lady Feng and she let the matter drop. “What has she got to do,” she purposely went on to ask, “that she will trouble her day after day?”

Madame Hsing was driven to her wits' ends. As soon as the meal was over, she returned home; and, in the evening, she communicated to Chia She the result of her errand. After some reflection, Chia She promptly summoned Chia Lien.

“There are other people in Nanking to look after our property,” he told him on his arrival; “there's not only one family, so be quick and depute some one to go and summon Chin Ts'ai to come up to the capital.”

“Last night a letter arrived from Nanking,” Chia Lien rejoined, “to the effect that Chin Ts'ai had been suffering from some phlegm-obstruction in the channels of the heart. So a coffin and money were allowed from the other mansion. Whether he be dead or alive now, I don't know. But even if alive, he must have lost all consciousness. It would therefore be a fruitless errand to send for him. His wife, on the other hand, is quite deaf.”

Hearing this, Chia She gave vent to an exclamation of reproof, and next launched into abuse. “You stupid and unreasonable rascal!” he shouted. “Is it you of all people, who are up to those things? Don't you yet bundle yourself off from my presence?”

Chia Lien withdrew out of the room in a state of trepidation. But in a short while, (Chia She) gave orders to call Chin Wen-hsiang. Chia Lien (meanwhile) remained in the outer study, for as he neither ventured to go home, nor presumed

to face his father, his only alternative was to tarry behind. Presently, Chin Wenhsiang arrived. The servant-lads led him straightway past the second gate; and he only came out again and took his departure after

page 358

sufficient time had elapsed to enable one to have four or five meals in.

Chia Lien could not for long summon up courage enough to ask what was up, but when he found out, after a time, that Chia She had gone to sleep, he eventually crossed over to his quarters. In the course of the evening lady Feng told him the whole story. Then, at last, he understood the meaning of the excitement.

But to revert to Yüan Yang. She did not get, the whole night, a wink of sleep. On the morrow, her brother reported to dowager lady Chia that he would like to take her home on a visit. Dowager lady Chia accorded her consent and told her she could go and see her people. Yüan Yang, however, would have rather preferred to stay where she was, but the fear lest her old mistress should give way to suspicion, placed her under the necessity of going, much against her own inclinations though it was. Her brother then had no course but to lay before her Chia She's proposal, and all his promises that she would occupy an honourable position, and that she would be a secondary wife, with control in the house; but Yüan Yang was so persistent in her refusal that her brother was quite nonplussed and he was compelled to return, and inform Chia She.

Chia She flew into a dreadful passion. "I'll tell you what," he shouted; "bid your wife go and tell her that I say: 'that she must, like the goddess Ch'ang O herself who has from olden times shown a predilection for young people, only despise me for being advanced in years; that, as far as I can see, she must be hankering after some young men; that it must, most likely, be Pao-yü; but probably Lien Erh too! If she fosters these affections, warn her to at once set them at rest; for should she not come, when I'm ready to have her, who will by and bye venture to take her? This is the first thing. Should she imagine, in the next place, that because our venerable senior is fond of her, she may, in the future, be engaged to be married in the orthodox way, tell her to consider carefully that she won't very well be able to escape my grip, no matter in what family she may marry. That it's only in case of her dying or of her not wedding any one throughout her life that I shall submit to her decision. Under other circumstances, urge her to seize the

first opportunity and change her mind, as she'll come in for many benefits.'"

To every remark that Chia She uttered, Chin Wen-hsiang acquiesced. "Yes!" he said.

"Mind you don't humbug me!" Chia She observed. "I shall to-morrow send again your mistress round to ask Yüan Yang. If you two have spoken to her, and she hasn't given a favorable answer, well, then, no blame will fall on you. But if she does assent, when she broaches the subject with her,

page 359

look out for your heads!"

Chin Wen-hsiang eagerly expressed his obedience over and over again, and withdrawing out of the room, he retraced his footsteps homeward. Nor did he have the patience to wait until he could commission his womankind to speak to her. Indeed he went in person and told her face to face the injunctions entrusted to him. Yüan Yang was incensed to such a degree that she was at a loss what reply to make. "I'm quite ready to go," she rejoined, after some cogitation, "but you people must take me before my old mistress first and let me tell her something about it."

Her brother and sister-in-law flattered themselves that reflection had induced her to alter her previous decision, and they were both immeasurably delighted. Her sister-in-law there and then led her into the upper quarters and ushered her into the presence of old lady Chia. As luck would have it, Madame Wang, Mrs. Hsüeh, Li Wan, lady Feng, Pao-ch'ai and the other girls were, together with several respectable outside married women who acted as housekeepers, having some fun with old lady Chia. Yüan Yang observed where her mistress was seated, and hastily dragging her sister-in-law before her, she fell on her knees, and explained to her, with tears in her eyes, what proposal Madame Hsing had made to her, what her sister-in-law, who lived in the garden, had told her, and what message her brother had recently conveyed to her. "As I would not accept his advances," (she continued), "our senior master has just now gone so far as to insinuate 'that I was violently attached to Pao-yü; or if that wasn't the case, my object was to gain time so as to espouse some one outside. That were I even to go up to the very heavens, I couldn't, during my lifetime, escape his clutches, and that he would, in the long run, wreak his vengeance on me.' I have

obstinately made up my mind, so I may state in the presence of all of you here, that I'll, under no circumstances, marry, as long as I live, any man whatsoever, not to speak of his being a Pao-yü, (precious jade); but even a Pao Chin, (precious gold), a Pao Yin, (precious silver); a Pao T'ien Wang, (precious lord of heaven); or a Pao Huang Ti, (precious Emperor); and have done! Were even your venerable ladyship to press me to take such a step, I couldn't comply with your commands, though you may threaten to cut my throat with a sword. I'm quite prepared to wait upon your ladyship, till you depart this life; but go with my father, mother, or brother, I won't! I'll either commit suicide, or cut my hair off, and go and become a nun. If you fancy that I'm not in earnest, and that I'm temporarily using this language to put you off, may, as surely as heaven, earth, the spirits, the sun and moon look upon me, my throat be covered with boils!"

Yüan Yang had, in fact, upon entering the room, brought along a pair

page 360

of scissors, concealed in her sleeve, and, while she spoke, she drew her hand back, and, disheveling her tresses, she began to clip them. When the matrons and waiting-maids saw what she was up to, they hurriedly did everything they could to induce her to desist from her purpose; but already half of her locks had gone. And when they found on close inspection, that with the thick crop of hair she happily had, she had not succeeded in cutting it all, they immediately dressed it up for her.

Upon hearing of Chia She's designs, dowager lady Chia was provoked to displeasure. Her whole body trembled and shook. "Of all the attendants I've had," she cried, "there only remains this single one, upon whom I can depend, and now they want to conspire and carry her off!" Noticing then Madame Wang standing close to her, she turned herself towards her. "All you people really know is to impose upon me!" she resumed. "Outwardly, you display filial devotion; but, secretly, you plot and scheme against me. If I have aught that's worth having, you come and dun me for it. If I have any one who's nice, you come and ask for her. What's left to me is this low waiting-maid, but as you see that she serves me faithfully, you naturally can't stand it, and you're doing your utmost to estrange her from me so as to be the better able to play your tricks upon me."

Madame Wang quickly rose to her feet. She did not, however, dare to return a

single syllable in self-defence.

Mrs. Hsüeh noticed that Madame Wang herself came in for her share of blame, and she did not feel as if she could any longer make an attempt to tender words of advice. Li Wan, the moment she heard Yüan Yang speak in the strain she did, seized an early opportunity to lead the young ladies out of the room. T'an Ch'un was a girl with plenty of common sense, so reflecting within herself that Madame Wang could not, in spite of the insult heaped upon her, very well presume to say any thing to exculpate herself, that Mrs. Hsüeh could not, of course, in her position of sister, bring forward any arguments, that Pao-ch'ai was unable to explain things on behalf of her maternal aunt, and that Li Wan, lady Feng or Pao-yü could, still less, take upon themselves the right of censorship, she thought the opportunity rendered necessary the services of a daughter; but, as Ying Ch'un was so quiet, and Hsi Ch'un so young, she consequently walked in, no sooner did she overhear from outside the window what was said inside, and forcing a smile, she addressed herself to her grandmother. "How does this matter concern Madame Wang, my mother?" she interposed. "Venerable senior, just consider! This is a matter affecting her husband's eldest brother; and how could she, a junior sister-in-law, know anything about it?..."

But before she had exhausted all her arguments, dowager lady Chia's

page 361

countenance thawed into a smile. "I've really grown stupid from old age!" she exclaimed. "Mrs. Hsüeh, don't make fun of me! This eldest sister of yours is most reverent to me; and so unlike that senior lady of mine, who only knows how to regard her lord and master and to simply do things for the mere sake of appearances when she deals with her mother-in-law. I've therefore done her a wrong!"

Mrs. Hsüeh confined her reply to a 'yes.' "Dear senior, you're so full of prejudices," she afterwards observed, "that you love your youngest son's wife more than any one of the others; but it's quite natural."

"I have no prejudices," old lady Chia protested. "Pao-yü," she then proceeded, "I unjustly found fault with your mother; but, how was it that even you didn't tell me anything, but that you looked on, while she was having her feelings trampled upon?"

“Could I,” smiled Pao-yü, “have taken my mother's part, and run down my senior uncle and aunt? If my mother did not bear the whole blame, upon whom could she throw it? And had I admitted that it was I who was entirely at fault, you, venerable ancestor, wouldn't have believed me.”

“What you say is quite reasonable,” his grandmother laughed. “So be quick and fall on your knees before your mother and tell her: 'mother, don't feel aggrieved! Our old lady is so advanced in years. Do it for Pao-yü's sake!'“

At this suggestion, Pao-yü hastily crossed over, and dropping on his knees, he was about to open his lips, when Madame Wang laughingly pulled him up. “Get up,” she cried, “at once! This won't do at all! Is it likely, pray, that you would tender apologies to me on behalf of our venerable ancestor?”

Hearing this, Pao-yü promptly stood up.

“Even that girl Feng didn't call me to my senses,” dowager lady Chia smiled again.

“I don't lay a word to your charge, worthy senior,” lady Feng remarked smilingly, “and yet you brand me with reproach!”

This rejoinder amused dowager lady Chia. “This is indeed strange!” she said to all around. “But I'd like to listen to these charges.”

“Who told you, dear senior,” lady Feng resumed, “to look after your attendants so well, and lavish such care on them as to make them plump and fine as water onions? How ever can you therefore bear people a grudge, if they ask for her hand? I'm, lucky for you, your grandson's wife; for were I your grandson, I would long ere this have proposed to her. Would I have ever waited up to the present?”

“Is this any fault of mine?” dowager lady Chia laughed.

page 362

“Of course, it's your fault, venerable senior!” lady Feng retorted with a smile.

“Well, in that case, I too don't want her,” old lady Chia proceeded laughing. “Take her away, and have done!”

“Wait until I go through this existence,” lady Feng responded, “and, in the life to come, I'll assume the form of a man and apply for her hand.”

“Take her along,” dowager lady Chia laughed, “and give her to Lien-Erh to attach to his apartments; and we'll see whether that barefaced father-in-law of yours will still wish to have her or not.”

“Lien-Erh is not a match for her!” lady Feng added. “He's only a fit mate for such as myself and P'ing Erh. A pair of loutish bumpkins like us to have anything to do with such a one as herself!”

At this rejoinder, they all exploded into a hearty fit of laughter. But a waiting-maid thereupon announced: “Our senior lady has come.” So Madame Wang immediately quitted the room to go and meet her.

But any further particulars, which you, reader may like to know, will be given in the following chapter; so listen to it.

CHAPTER XLVII.

*An idiotic bully tries to be lewd and comes in for a sound thrashing.
A cold-hearted fellow is prompted by a dread of trouble to betake
himself to a strange place.*

As soon as Madame Wang, so runs our narrative, heard of Madame Hsing's arrival, she quickly went out to welcome her. Madame Hsing was not yet aware that dowager lady Chia had learnt everything connected with Yüan Yang's affair, and she was coming again to see which way the wind blew. The moment, however, she stepped inside the courtyard-entrance, several matrons promptly explained to her, quite confidentially, that their old mistress had been told all only a few minutes back, and she meant to retrace her steps, (but she saw that) every inmate in the suite of rooms was already conscious of her presence. When she caught sight, besides, of Madame Wang walking out to meet her she had no option but to enter. First and foremost, she paid her respects to dowager lady Chia, but old lady Chia did not address her a single remark, so she felt within herself smitten with shame and remorse.

Lady Feng soon gave something or other as an excuse and withdrew. Yüan Yang then returned also quite alone to her chamber to give vent to her resentment; and Mrs. Hsüeh, Madame Wang and the other inmates, one by one, retired in like manner, for fear of putting Madame Hsing out of countenance.

page 363

Madame Hsing, however, could not muster courage to beat a retreat. Dowager lady Chia noticed that there was no one but themselves in her apartments. "I hear," she remarked, "that you had come to play the part of a go-between for your lord and master! You can very well observe the three obediences and four virtues, but this softness of yours is a work of supererogation! You people have also got now a whole lot of grandchildren and sons. Do you still live in fear and trembling lest he should put his monkey up? Rumour has it that you yet let that disposition of your husband's run riot!"

Madame Hsing's whole face got suffused with blushes. "I advised him time and again," she explained, "but he wouldn't listen to me. How is it, venerable senior, that you don't yet know that he turns a deaf ear to me? That's why I had no

choice in the matter!”

“Would you go and kill any one,” dowager lady Chia asked, “that he might instigate you to? But consider now. Your brother's wife is naturally a quiet sort of person, and is born with many ailments; but is there anything, whether large or small, that she doesn't go to the trouble of looking after? And notwithstanding that that daughter-in-law of yours lends her a helping hand, she is daily so busy that she 'no sooner puts down the pick than she has to take up the broom.' So busy, that I have myself now curtailed a hundred and one things. But whenever there's anything those two can't manage, there's Yüan Yang to come to their assistance. She is, it's true, a mere child, but nevertheless very careful; and knows how to concern herself about my affairs a bit; indenting for anything that need be indented, and availing herself of an opportunity to tell them to supply every requisite. Were Yüan Yang not the kind of girl she is, how could those two ladies not neglect a whole or part of those matters, both important as well as unimportant, connected with the inner and outer quarters? Would I not at present have to worry my own mind, instead of leaving things to others? Why, I'd daily have to rack my brain and go and ask them to give me whatever I might need! Of those girls, who've come to my quarters and those who've gone, there only remains this single one. She's, besides other respects, somewhat older in years, and has as well a slight conception of my ways of doing things, and of my tastes. In the second place, she has managed to win her mistresses' hearts, for she never tries to extort aught from me, or to dun this lady for clothes or that one for money. Hence it is that beginning from your sister-in-law and daughter-in-law down to the servants in the house, irrespective of old or young, there isn't a soul, who doesn't readily believe every single word she says in anything, no matter what it is! Not only do I thus have some one upon whom I can rely, but your young sister-in-law and your daughter-in-law are both as well spared much trouble.

page 364

With a person such as this by me, should even my daughter-in-law and granddaughter-in-law not have the time to think of anything, I am not left without it; nor am I given occasion to get my temper ruffled. But were she now to go, what kind of creature would they hunt up again to press into my service? Were you even to bring me a person made of real pearls, she'd be of no use; if she doesn't know how to speak! I was just about to send some one to go and explain to your husband that 'I've got money in here enough to buy any girl he

fancies,' and to tell him that 'he's at liberty to give for her purchase from eight to ten thousand taels; that, if he has set his heart upon this girl, he can't however have her; and that by leaving her behind to attend to me, during the few years to come, it will be just the same as if he tried to acquit himself of his filial duties by waiting upon me day and night,' so you come at a very opportune moment. Were you therefore to go yourself at once and deliver him my message, it will answer the purpose far better!"

These words over, she called the servants. "Go," she said, "and ask Mrs. Hsüeh, and your young mistresses to come! We were in the middle of a chat full of zest, and how is it they've all dispersed?"

The waiting-maids immediately assented and left to go in search of their mistresses, one and all of whom promptly re-entered her apartments, with the sole exception of Mrs. Hsüeh.

"I've only now returned," she observed to the waiting-maid, "and what shall I go again for? Just tell her that I'm fast asleep!"

"Dearest Mrs. Hsüeh!" the waiting-maid pleaded, "my worthy senior! our old mistress will get angry. If you, venerable lady, don't appear nothing will appease her; so do it for the love of us! Should you object to walking, why I'm quite ready to carry you on my back."

"You little imp!" Mrs. Hsüeh laughed. "What are you afraid of? All she'll do will be to scold you a little; and it will all be over soon!"

While replying, she felt that she had no course but to retrace her footsteps, in company with the waiting-maid.

Dowager lady Chia at once motioned her into a seat. "Let's have a game of cards!" she then smilingly proposed. "You, Mrs. Hsüeh, are not a good hand at them; so let's sit together, and see that lady Feng doesn't cheat us!"

"Quite so," laughed Mrs. Hsüeh. "But it will be well if your venerable ladyship would look over my hand a bit! Are we four ladies to play, or are we to add one or two more persons to our number?"

"Naturally only four!" Madame Wang smiled.

“Were one more player let in,” lady Feng interposed, “it would be merrier!”

page 365

“Call Yüan Yang here,” old lady Chia suggested, “and make her take this lower seat; for as Mrs. Hsüeh's eyesight is rather dim, we'll charge her to look over our two hands a bit.”

“You girls know how to read and write,” lady Feng remarked with a smile, addressing herself to T'an Ch'un, “and why don't you learn fortune-telling?”

“This is again strange!” T'an Ch'un exclaimed. “Instead of bracing up your energies now to rook some money out of our venerable senior, you turn your thoughts to fortune-telling!”

“I was just wishing to consult the fates,” lady Feng proceeded, “as to how much I shall lose to-day. Can I ever dream of winning? Why, look here. We haven't commenced playing, and they have placed themselves in ambush on the left and right.”

This remark amused dowager lady Chia and Mrs. Hsüeh. But presently Yüan Yang arrived, and seated herself below her old mistress. After Yüan Yang sat lady Feng. The red cloth was then spread; the cards were shuffled; the dealer was decided upon and the quintet began to play. After the game had gone on for a time, Yüan Yang noticed that dowager lady Chia had a full hand and was only waiting for one two-spotted card, and she made a secret sign to lady Feng. Lady Feng was about to lead, but purposely lingered for a few moments. “This card will, for a certainty, be snatched by Mrs. Hsüeh,” she smiled, “yet if I don't play this one, I won't be able later to come out with what I want.”

“I haven't got any cards you want in my hand,” Mrs. Hsüeh remarked.

“I mean to see by and bye,” lady Feng resumed.

“You're at liberty to see,” Mrs. Hsüeh said. “But go on, play now! Let me look what card it is.”

Lady Feng threw the card in front of Mrs. Hsüeh. At a glance, Mrs. Hsüeh

perceived that it was the two spot. "I don't fancy this card," she smiled. "What I fear is that our dear senior will get a full hand."

"I've played wrong!" lady Feng laughingly exclaimed at these words.

Dowager lady Chia laughed, and throwing down her cards, "If you dare," she shouted, "take it back! Who told you to play the wrong card?"

"Didn't I want to have my fortune told?" lady Feng observed. "I played this card of my own accord, so there's no one with whom I can find fault."

"You should then beat your own lips and punish your own self; it's only fair;" old lady Chia remarked. Then facing Mrs. Hsüeh, "I'm not a niggard, fond of winning money," she went on to say, "but it was my good luck!"

"Don't we too think as much?" Mrs. Hsüeh smiled. "Who's there stupid enough to say that your venerable ladyship's heart is set upon money?"

page 366

Lady Feng was busy counting the cash, but catching what was said, she restrung them without delay. "I've got my share," she said, laughingly to the company. "It isn't at all that you wish to win. It's your good luck that made you come out a winner! But as for me, I am really a mean creature; and, as I managed to lose, I count the money and put it away at once."

Dowager lady Chia usually made Yüan Yang shuffle the cards for her, but being engaged in chatting and joking with Mrs. Hsüeh, she did not notice Yüan Yang take them in hand. "Why is it you're so huffed," old lady Chia asked, "that you don't even shuffle for me?"

"Lady Feng won't let me have the money!" Yüan Yang replied, picking up the cards.

"If she doesn't give the money," dowager lady Chia observed, "it will be a turning-point in her luck. Take that string of a thousand cash of hers," she accordingly directed a servant, "and bring it bodily over here!"

A young waiting-maid actually fetched the string of cash and deposited it by the

side of her old mistress.

“Let me have them,” lady Feng eagerly cried smiling, “and I’ll square all that’s due, and finish.”

“In very truth, lady Feng, you’re a miserly creature!” Mrs. Hsüeh laughed. “It’s simply for mere fun, nothing more!”

Lady Feng, at this insinuation, speedily stood up, and, laying her hand on Mrs. Hsüeh, she turned her head round, and pointed at a large wooden box, in which old lady Chia usually deposited her money. “Aunt,” she said, a smile curling her lips, “look here! I couldn’t tell you how much there is in that box that was won from me! This tiao will be wheedled by the cash in it, before we’ve played for half an hour! All we’ve got to do is to give them sufficient time to lure this string in as well; we needn’t trouble to touch the cards. Your temper, worthy ancestor, will thus calm down. If you’ve also got any legitimate thing for me to do, you might bid me go and attend to it!”

This joke had scarcely been concluded than it evoked incessant laughter from dowager lady Chia and every one else. But while she was bandying words, P’ing Erh happened to bring her another string of cash prompted by the apprehension that her capital might not suffice to meet her wants.

“It’s useless putting them in front of me!” lady Feng cried. “Place these too over there by our old lady and let them be wheedled in along with the others! It will thus save trouble, as there won’t be any need to make two jobs of them, to the inconvenience of the cash already in the box.”

Dowager lady Chia had a hearty laugh, so much so, that the cards, she held in her hand, flew all over the table; but pushing Yüan Yang. “Be quick,” she shouted, “and wrench that mouth of hers!”

page 367

P’ing Erh placed the cash according to her mistress’ directions. But after indulging too in laughter for a time, she retraced her footsteps. On reaching the entrance into the court, she met Chia Lien. “Where’s your Madame Hsing?” he inquired. “Mr. Chia She told me to ask her to go round.”

“She's been standing in there with our old mistress,” P'ing Erh hastily laughed, “for ever so long, and yet she isn't inclined to budge! Seize the earliest opportunity you can get to wash your hands clean of this business! Our old lady has had a good long fit of fuming and raging. Luckily, our lady Secunda cracked an endless stock of jokes, so she, at length, got a bit calmer!”

“I'll go over,” Chia Lien said. “All I have to do is to find out our venerable senior's wishes, as to whether she means to go to Lai Ta's house on the fourteenth, so that I might have time to get the chairs ready. As I'll be able to tell Madame Hsing to return, and have a share of the fun, won't it be well for me to go?”

“My idea is,” P'ing Erh suggested laughingly, “that you shouldn't put your foot in there! Every one, even up to Madame Wang, and Pao-yü, have alike received a rap on the knuckles, and are you also going now to fill up the gap?”

“Everything is over long ago,” Chia Lien observed, “and can it be that she'll cap the whole thing by blowing me up too? What's more, it's no concern of mine. In the next place, Mr. Chia She enjoined me that I was to go in person, and ask his wife round, so, if I at present depute some one else, and he comes to know about it, he really won't feel in a pleasant mood, and he'll take advantage of this pretext to give vent to his spite on me.”

These words over, he quickly marched off. And P'ing Erh was so impressed with the reasonableness of his arguments, that she followed in his track.

As soon as Chia Lien reached the reception hall, he trod with a light step. Then peeping in he saw Madame Hsing standing inside. Lady Feng, with her eagle eye, was the first to espy him. But she winked at him and dissuaded him from coming in, and next gave a wink to Madame Hsing. Madame Hsing could not conveniently get away at once, and she had to pour a cup of tea, and place it in front of dowager lady Chia. But old lady Chia jerked suddenly round, and took Chia Lien at such a disadvantage that he found it difficult to beat a retreat. “Who is outside?” exclaimed old lady Chia. “It seemed to me as if some servant-boy had poked his head in.”

Lady Feng sprung to her feet without delay. “I also,” she interposed, “indistinctly noticed the shadow of some one.”

Saying this, she walked away and quitted the room. Chia Lien entered with hasty step. Forcing a smile, "I wanted to ask," he remarked, "whether

page 368

you, venerable senior, are going out on the fourteenth, so that the chairs may be got ready."

"In that case," dowager lady Chia rejoined, "why didn't you come straight in; but behaved again in that mysterious way?"

"I saw that you were playing at cards, dear ancestor," Chia Lien explained with a strained laugh, "and I didn't venture to come and disturb you. I therefore simply meant to call my wife out to find out from her."

"Is it anything so very urgent that you had to say it this very moment?" old lady Chia continued. "Had you waited until she had gone home, couldn't you have asked her any amount of questions you may have liked? When have you been so full of zeal before? I'm puzzled to know whether it isn't as an eavesdropping spirit that you appear on the scene; nor can I say whether you don't come as a spy. But that impish way of yours gave me quite a start! What a low-bred fellow you are! Your wife will play at cards with me for a good long while more, so you'd better bundle yourself home, and conspire again with Chao Erh's wife how to do away with your better half."

Her remarks evoked general merriment.

"It's Pao Erh's wife," Yüan Yang put in laughingly, "and you, worthy senior, have dragged in again Chao Erh's wife."

"Yes!" assented old lady Chia, likewise with a laugh. "How could I remember whether he wasn't (pao) embracing her, or (pei) carrying her on his back. The bare mention of these things makes me lose all self-control and provokes me to anger! Ever since I crossed these doors as a great grandson's wife, I have never, during the whole of these fifty-four years, seen anything like these affairs, albeit it has been my share to go through great frights, great dangers, thousands of strange things and hundred and one remarkable occurrences! Don't you yet pack yourself off from my presence?"

Chia Lien could not muster courage to utter a single word to vindicate himself, but retired out of the room with all promptitude. P'ing Erh was standing outside the window. "I gave you due warning in a gentle tone, but you wouldn't hear; you've, after all, rushed into the very meshes of the net!"

These reproaches were still being heaped on him when he caught sight of Madame Hsing, as she likewise made her appearance outside. "My father," Chia Lien ventured, "is at the bottom of all this trouble; and the whole blame now is shoved upon your shoulders as well as mine, mother."

"I'll take you, you unfilial thing and..." Madame Hsing shouted. "People lay down their lives for their fathers; and you are prompted by a few harmless remarks to murmur against heaven and grumble against earth! Won't you behave in a proper manner? He's in high dudgeon these last few

page 369

days, so mind he doesn't give you a pounding!"

"Mother, cross over at once," Chia Lien urged; "for he told me to come and ask you to go a long time ago."

Pressing his mother, he escorted her outside as far as the other part of the mansion. Madame Hsing gave (her husband) nothing beyond a general outline of all that had been recently said; but Chia She found himself deprived of the means of furthering his ends. Indeed, so stricken was he with shame that from that date he pleaded illness. And so little able was he to rally sufficient pluck to face old lady Chia, that he merely commissioned Madame Hsing and Chia Lien to go daily and pay their respects to her on his behalf. He had no help too but to despatch servants all over the place to make every possible search and inquiry for a suitable concubine for him. After a long time they succeeded in purchasing, for the sum of eighty taels, a girl of seventeen years of age, Yen Hung by name, whom he introduced as secondary wife into his household.

But enough of this subject. In the rooms on the near side, they protracted for a long time their noisy game of cards, and only broke up after they had something to eat. Nothing worthy of note, however, occurred during the course of the following day or two. In a twinkling, the fourteenth drew near. At an early hour before daybreak, Lai Ta's wife came again into the mansion to invite her guests.

Dowager lady Chia was in buoyant spirits, so taking along Madame Wang, Mrs. Hsüeh, Pao-yü and the various young ladies, she betook herself into Lai Ta's garden, where she sat for a considerable time.

This garden was not, it is true, to be compared with the garden of Broad Vista; but it also was most beautifully laid out, and consisted of spacious grounds. In the way of springs, rockeries, arbours and woods, towers and terraces, pavilions and halls, it likewise contained a good many sufficient to excite admiration. In the main hall outside, were assembled Hsüeh P'an, Chia Chen, Chia Lien, Chia Jung and several close relatives. But Lai Ta had invited as well a number of officials, still in active service, and numerous young men of wealthy families, to keep them company. Among that party figured one Liu Hsiang-lien, whom Hsüeh P'an had met on a previous occasion and kept ever since in constant remembrance. Having besides discovered that he had a passionate liking for theatricals, and that the parts he generally filled were those of a young man or lady, in fast plays, he had unavoidably misunderstood the object with which he indulged in these amusements, to such a degree as to misjudge him for a young rake. About this time, he had been entertaining a wish to cultivate intimate relations with him, but he had, much to his disgust, found no one to introduce him, so when he, by a strange coincidence, came to be thrown in his way, on the present occasion, he revelled in

page 370

intense delight. But Chia Chen and the other guests had heard of his reputation, so as soon as wine had blinded their sense of shame, they entreated him to sing two short plays; and when subsequently they got up from the banquet, they ensconced themselves near him, and, pressing him with questions, they carried on a conversation on one thing and then another.

This Liu Hsiang-lien was, in fact, a young man of an old family; but he had been unsuccessful in his studies, and had lost his father and mother. He was naturally light-hearted and magnanimous; not particular in minor matters; immoderately fond of spear-exercise and fencing, of gambling and boozing; even going to such excesses as spending his nights in houses of easy virtue; playing the fife, thrumming the harp, and going in for everything and anything. Being besides young in years, and of handsome appearance, those who did not know what his standing was, invariably mistook him for an actor. But Lai Ta's son had all along been on such friendly terms with him, that he consequently invited him for the

nonce to help him do the honours.

Of a sudden, while every one was, after the wines had gone round, still on his good behaviour, Hsüeh P'an alone got another fit of his old mania. From an early stage, his spirits sunk within him and he would fain have seized the first convenient moment to withdraw and consummate his designs but for Lai Shang-jung, who then said: "Our Mr. Pao-yü told me again just now that although he saw you, as he walked in, he couldn't speak to you with so many people present, so he bade me ask you not to go, when the party breaks up, as he has something more to tell you. But as you insist upon taking your leave, you'd better wait until I call him out, and when you've seen each other, you can get away; I'll have nothing to say then."

While delivering the message, "Go inside," he directed the servant-boys, "and get hold of some old matron and tell her quietly to invite Mr. Pao-yü to come out."

A servant-lad went on the errand, and scarcely had time enough elapsed to enable one to have a cup of tea in, than Pao-yü, actually, made his appearance outside.

"My dear sir," Lai Shang-jung smilingly observed to Pao-yü, "I hand him over to you. I'm going to entertain the guests!"

With these words, he was off.

Pao-yü pulled Lia Hsiang-lien into a side study in the hall, where they sat down.

"Have you been recently to Ch'in Ch'ung's grave?" he inquired of him.

"How could I not go?" Hsiang-lien answered. "The other day a few of us went out to give our falcons a fly; and we were yet at a distance of two li from his tomb, when remembering the heavy rains, we've had this summer,

page 371

I gave way to fears lest his grave may not have been proof against them; so evading the notice of the party I went over and had a look. I found it again slightly damaged; but when I got back home, I speedily raised a few hundreds of cash, and issued early on the third day, and hired two men, who put it right."

“It isn't strange then!” exclaimed Pao-yü, “When the lotus blossomed last month in the pond of our garden of Broad Vista, I plucked ten of them and bade T'sai Ming go out of town and lay them as my offering on his grave. On his return, I also inquired of him: whether it had been damaged by the water or not; and he explained that not only had it not sustained any harm, but that it looked better than when last he'd seen it. Several of his friends, I argued, must have had it put in proper repair; and I felt it irksome that I should, day after day, be so caged at home as to be unable to be my own master in the least thing, and that if even I move, and any one comes to know of it, this one is sure to exhort me, if that one does not restrain me. I can thus afford to brag, but can't manage to act! And though I've got plenty of money, I'm not at liberty to spend any of it!”

“There's no use your worrying in a matter like this!” Liu Hsiang-lien said. “I am outside, so all you need do is to inwardly foster the wish; that's all. But as the first of the tenth moon will shortly be upon us, I've already prepared the money necessary for going to the graves. You know well enough that I'm as poor as a rat; I've no hoardings at home; and when a few cash find their way into my pocket, I soon remain again quite empty-handed. But I'd better make the best of this opportunity, and keep the amount I have, in order that, when the time comes, I mayn't find myself without a cash.”

“It's exactly about this that I meant to send Pei Ming to see you,” Pao-yü added. “But it isn't often that one can manage to find you at home. I'm well aware how uncertain your movements are; one day you are here, and another there; you've got no fixed resort.”

“There's no need sending any one to hunt me up!” Liu Hsiang-lien replied. “All that each of us need do in this matter is to acquit ourselves of what's right. But in a little while, I again purpose going away on a tour abroad, to return in three to five years' time.”

When Pao-yü heard his intention, “Why is this?” he at once inquired.

Liu Hsiang-lien gave a sardonic smile. “When my wish is on a fair way to be accomplished,” he said, “you'll certainly hear everything. I must now leave you.”

“After all the difficulty we've had in meeting,” Pao-yü remarked, “wouldn't it be better were you and I to go away together in the evening?”

“That worthy cousin of yours,” Hsiang-lien rejoined, “is as bad as ever,

page 372

and were I to stay any longer, trouble would inevitably arise. So it's as well that I should clear out of his way.”

Pao-yü communed with himself for a time. “In that case,” he then observed, “it's only right, that you should retire. But if you really be bent upon going on a distant tour, you must absolutely tell me something beforehand. Don't, on any account, sneak away quietly!”

As he spoke, the tears trickled down his cheeks.

“I shall, of course, say good-bye to you,” Liu Hsiang-lien rejoined. “But you must not let any one know anything about it!”

While uttering these words, he stood up to get away. “Go in at once,” he urged, “there's no need to see me off!”

Saying this, he quitted the study. As soon as he reached the main entrance, he came across Hsüeh P'an, bawling out boisterously, “Who let young Liu-erh go?”

The moment these shouts fell on Liu Hsiang-lien's ear, his anger flared up as if it had been sparks spurting wildly about, and he only wished he could strike him dead with one blow. But on second consideration, he pondered that a fight after the present festive occasion would be an insult to Lai Shang-jung, and he perforce felt bound to stifle his indignation.

When Hsüeh P'an suddenly espied him walking out, he looked as delighted as if he had come in for some precious gem. With staggering step he drew near him. Clutching him with one grip, “My dear brother,” he smirked. “where are you off to?”

“I'm going somewhere, but will be back soon,” Hsiang-lien said by way of response.

“As soon as you left,” Hsüeh P'an smiled, “all the fun went. But pray sit a while!

If you do so, it will be a proof of your regard for me! Don't flurry yourself. With such a senior brother as myself to stand by you, it will be as easy a job for you to become an official as to reap a fortune."

The sight of his repulsive manner filled the heart of Hsiang-lien with disgust and shame. But speedily devising a plan, he drew him to a secluded spot. "Is your friendship real," he smiled, "or is it only a sham?"

This question sent Hsüeh P'an into such raptures that he found it difficult to check himself from gratifying his longings. But glancing at him with the corner of his eye, "My dear brother," he smiled, "what makes you ask me such a thing? If my friendship for you is a sham, may I die this moment, before your very eyes."

"Well, if that be so," Hsiang-lien proceeded, "it isn't convenient in here, so sit down and wait a bit. I'll go ahead, but come out of this yourself by and bye, and follow me to my place, where we can drink the whole night

page 373

long. I've also got there two first-rate young fellows who never go out of doors. But don't bring so much as a single follower with you, as you'll find, when you get there, plenty of people ready at hand to wait on you."

So high did this assignation raise Hsüeh P'an's spirits that he recovered, to a certain extent, from the effects of wine. "Is it really so?" he asked.

"How is it," Hsiang-lien laughed, "that when people treat you with a sincere heart, you don't, after all, believe them?"

"I'm no fool," eagerly exclaimed Hsüeh P'an, "and how could I not believe you? But since this be the case, how am I, who don't even know the way, to find your whereabouts if you are to go ahead of me?"

"My place is outside the northern gate." Hsiang-lien explained. "But can you tear yourself away from your home to spend the night outside the city walls?"

"As long as you're there," Hsüeh P'an said, "what will I want my home for?"

“If that be so,” Hsiang-lien resumed, “I’ll wait for you on the bridge outside the northern gate. But let us meanwhile rejoin the banquet and have some wine. Come along, after you’ve seen me go; they won’t notice us then.”

“Yes!” shouted Hsüeh P’an with alacrity as he acquiesced to the proposal.

The two young fellows thereupon returned to the feast, and drank for a time. Hsüeh Pan, however, could with difficulty endure the suspense. He kept his gaze intent upon Hsiang-lien; and the more he pondered within himself upon what was coming, the more exuberance swelled in his heart. Now he emptied one wine-kettle; now another; and, without waiting for any one to press him, he, of his own accord, gulped down one drink after another, with the result that he unconsciously made himself nearly quite tipsy. Hsiang-lien then got up and quitted the room, and perceiving every one off his guard, he egressed out of the main entrance. “Go home ahead,” he directed his page Hsing Nu. “I’m going out of town, but I’ll be back at once.”

By the time he had finished giving him these directions, he had already mounted his horse, and straightway he proceeded to the bridge beyond the northern gate, and waited for Hsüeh P’an. A long while elapsed, however, before he espied Hsüeh P’an in the distance, hurrying along astride of a high steed, with gaping mouth, staring eyes, and his head, banging from side to side like a pedlar’s drum. Without intermission, he glanced confusedly about, sometimes to the left, and sometimes to the right; but, as soon as he got where he had to pass in front of Hsiang-lien’s horse, he kept his gaze fixed far away, and never troubled his mind with the immediate vicinity.

Hsiang-lien felt amused and angry with him, but forthwith giving his

page 374

horse also the rein, he followed in his track, while Hsüeh P’an continued to stare ahead.

Little by little the habitations got scantier and scantier, so pulling his horse round, (Hsüeh P’an) retraced his steps. The moment he turned back, he unawares caught sight of Hsiang-lien, and his spirits rose within him, as if he had got hold of some precious thing of an extraordinary value. “I knew well enough,” he eagerly smiled, “that you weren’t one to break faith.”

“Quick, let's go ahead!” Hsiang-lien smilingly urged. “Mind people might notice us and follow us. It won't then be nice!”

While instigating him, he took the lead, and letting his horse have the rein, he wended his way onwards, followed closely by Hsüeh P'an. But when Hsiang-lien perceived that the country ahead of them was already thinly settled and saw besides a stretch of water covered with a growth of weeds, he speedily dismounted, and tied his horse to a tree. Turning then round; “Get down!” he said, laughingly, to Hsüeh P'an. “You must first take an oath, so that in the event of your changing your mind in the future, and telling anything to anyone, the oath might be accomplished.”

“You're quite right!” Hsüeh P'an smiled; and jumping down with all despatch, he too made his horse fast to a tree, and then crouched on his knees.

“If I ever in days to come,” he exclaimed, “know any change in my feelings and breathe a word to any living soul, may heaven blast me and earth annihilate me!”

Scarcely had he ended this oath, when a crash fell on his ear, and lo, he felt as if an iron hammer had been brought down to bear upon him from behind. A black mist shrouded his eyes, golden stars flew wildly about before his gaze; and losing all control over himself, he sprawled on the ground.

Hsiang-lien approached and had a look at him; and, knowing how little he was accustomed to thrashings, he only exerted but little of his strength, and struck him a few blows on the face. But about this time a fruit shop happened to open, and Hsüeh P'an strained at first every nerve to rise to his feet, when another slight kick from Hsiang-lien tumbled him over again.

“Both parties should really be agreeable,” he shouted. “But if you were not disposed to accept my advances, you should have simply told me in a proper way. And why did you beguile me here to give me a beating?”

So speaking, he went on boisterously to heap invective upon his head.

“I'll take you, you blind fellow, and show you who Mr. Liu is,” Hsiang-lien cried. “You don't appeal to me with solicitous entreaties, but go on abusing me! To kill you would be of no use, so I'll merely give you a good lesson!”

With these words, he fetched his whip, and administered him, thirty or forty

page 375

blows from his back down to his shins.

Hsüeh P'an had sobered down considerably from the effects of wine, and found the stings of pain so intolerable, that little able to restrain himself, he gave way to groans.

“Do you go on in this way?” Hsiang-lien said, with an ironical smile. “Why, I thought you were not afraid of beatings.”

While uttering this taunt, he seized Hsüeh P'an by the left leg, and dragging him several steps into a miry spot among the reeds, he rolled him about till he was covered with one mass of mud. “Do you now know what stuff I'm made of?” he proceeded to ask.

Hsüeh P'an made no reply. But simply lay prostrate, and moaned. Then throwing away his whip Hsiang-lien gave him with his fist several thumps all over the body.

Hsüeh P'an began to wriggle violently and vociferate wildly. “Oh, my ribs are broken!” he shouted. “I know you're a proper sort of person! It's all because I made the mistake of listening to other people's gossip!”

“There's no need for you to drag in other people!” Hsiang-lien went on. “Just confine yourself to those present!”

“There's nothing up at present!” Hsüeh P'an cried. “From what you say, you're a person full of propriety. So it's I who am at fault.”

“You'll have to speak a little milder,” Hsiang-lien added, “before I let you off.”

“My dear younger brother,” Hsüeh P'an pleaded, with a groan.

Hsiang-lien at this struck him another blow with his fist.

“Ai!” ejaculated Hsüeh P'an. “My dear senior brother!” he exclaimed.

Hsiang-lien then gave him two more whacks, one after the other.

“Ai Yo!” Hsüeh P'an precipitately screamed. “My dear Sir, do spare me, an eyeless beggar; and henceforth I'll look up to you with veneration; I'll fear you!”

“Drink two mouthfuls of that water!” shouted Hsiang-lien.

“That water is really too foul,” Hsüeh P'an argued, in reply to this suggestion, wrinkling his eyebrows the while; “and how could I put any of it in my mouth?”

Hsiang-lien raised his fist and struck him.

“I'll drink it, I'll drink it!” quickly bawled Hsüeh P'an.

So saying, he felt obliged to lower his head to the very roots of the reeds and drink a mouthful. Before he had had time to swallow it, a sound of 'ai' became audible, and up came all the stuff he had put into his mouth only a few seconds back.

“You filthy thing!” exclaimed Hsiang-lien. “Be quick and finish

page 376

drinking; and I'll let you off.”

Upon hearing this, Hsüeh P'an bumped his head repeatedly on the ground. “Do please,” he cried, “lay up a store of meritorious acts for yourself and let me off! I couldn't take that were I even on the verge of death!”

“This kind of stench will suffocate me!” Hsiang-lien observed, and, with this remark, he abandoned Hsüeh Pan to his own devices; and, pulling his horse, he put his foot to the stirrup, and rode away.

Hsüeh Pan, meanwhile, became aware of his departure, and felt at last relieved in his mind. Yet his conscience pricked him for he saw that he should not misjudge people. He then made an effort to raise himself, but the racking torture he experienced all over his limbs was so sharp that he could with difficulty bear it.

Chia Chen and the other guests present at the banquet became, as it happened, suddenly alive to the fact that the two young fellows had disappeared; but though they extended their search everywhere, they saw nothing of them. Some one insinuated, in an uncertain way, that they had gone outside the northern gate; but as Hsüeh P'an's pages had ever lived in dread of him, who of them had the audacity to go and hunt him up after the injunctions, he had given them, that they were not to follow him? But waxing solicitous on his account, Chia Chen subsequently bade Chia Jung take a few servant-boys and go and discover some clue of him, or institute inquiries as to his whereabouts. Straightway therefore they prosecuted their search beyond the northern gate, to a distance of two li below the bridge, and it was quite by accident that they discerned Hsüeh P'an's horse made fast by the side of a pit full of reeds.

“That's a good sign!” they with one voice exclaimed; “for if the horse is there, the master must be there too!”

In a body, they thronged round the horse, when, from among the reeds, they caught the sound of human groans, so hurriedly rushing forward to ascertain for themselves, they, at a glance, perceived Hsüeh P'an, his costume all in tatters, his countenance and eyes so swollen and bruised that it was hard to make out the head and face, and his whole person, inside as well as outside his clothes, rolled like a sow in a heap of mud.

Chia Jung surmised pretty nearly the truth. Speedily dismounting, he told the servants to prop him up. “Uncle Hsüeh,” he laughed, “you daily go in for lewd dalliance; but have you to-day come to dissipate in a reed-covered pit? The King of the dragons in this pit must have also fallen in love with your charms, and enticed you to become his son-in-law that you've come and gored yourself on his horns like this!”

Hsüeh P'an was such a prey to intense shame that he would fain have grovelled into some fissure in the earth had he been able to detect any. But

page 377

so little able was he to get on his horse that Chia Jung directed a servant to run to the suburbs and fetch a chair. Enconced in this, Hsüeh P'an entered town along with the search party.

Chia Jung still insisted upon carrying him to Lai Ta's house to join the feast, so Hsüeh P'an had to make a hundred and one urgent appeals to him to tell no one, before Chia Jung eventually yielded to his solicitations and allowed him to have his own way and return home.

Chia Jung betook himself again to Lai Ta's house, and narrated to Chia Chen their recent experiences. When Chia Chen also learnt of the flogging (Hsüeh P'an) had received from Hsiang-lien, he laughed. "It's only through scrapes," he cried, "that he'll get all right!"

In the evening, after the party broke up, he came to inquire after him. But Hsüeh P'an, who was lying all alone in his bedroom, nursing himself, refused to see him, on the plea of indisposition.

When dowager lady Chia and the other inmates had returned home, and every one had retired into their respective apartments, Mrs. Hsüeh and Pao-ch'ai observed that Hsiang Ling's eyes were quite swollen from crying, and they questioned her as to the reason of her distress. (On being told), they hastily rushed to look up Hsüeh P'an; but, though they saw his body covered with scars, they could discover no ribs broken, or bones dislocated.

Mrs. Hsüeh fell a prey to anguish and displeasure. At one time, she scolded Hsüeh P'an; at another, she abused Liu Hsiang-lien. Her wish was to lay the matter before Madame Wang in order that some one should be despatched to trace Liu Hsiang-lien and bring him back, but Pao-ch'ai speedily dissuaded her. "It's nothing to make a fuss about," she represented. "They were simply drinking together; and quarrels after a wine bout are ordinary things. And for one who's drunk to get a few whacks more or less is nothing uncommon! Besides, there's in our home neither regard for God nor discipline. Every one knows it. If it's purely out of love, mother, that you desire to give vent to your spite, it's an easy matter enough. Have a little patience for three or five days, until brother is all right and can go out. Mr. Chia Chen and Mr. Chia Lien over there are not people likely to let the affair drop without doing anything! They'll, for a certainty, stand a treat, and ask that fellow, and make him apologise and admit his wrong in the presence of the whole company, so that everything will be properly settled. But were you now, ma, to begin making much of this occurrence, and telling every one, it would, on the contrary, look as if you had, in your motherly partiality and fond love for him, indulged him to stir up a row and provoke people! He has, on

this occasion, had unawares to eat humble pie, but will you, ma, put people to all this trouble and inconvenience and make use of the prestige

page 378

enjoyed by your relatives to oppress an ordinary person?"

"My dear child," Mrs. Hsüeh rejoined, "after listening to the advice proffered by her, you've, after all, been able to foresee all these things! As for me, that sudden fit of anger quite dazed me!"

"All will thus be square," Pao-ch'ai smiled, "for, as he's neither afraid of you, mother, nor gives an ear to people's exhortations, but gets wilder and wilder every day that goes by, he may, if he gets two or three lessons, turn over a new leaf."

While Hsüeh P'an lay on the stovecouch, he reviled Hsiang-lien with all his might. Next, he instigated the servant-boys to go and demolish his house, kill him and bring a charge against him. But Mrs. Hsüeh hindered the lads from carrying out his purpose, and explained to her son: "that Liu Hsiang-lien had casually, after drinking, behaved in a disorderly way, that now that he was over the effects of wine, he was exceedingly filled with remorse, and that, prompted by the fear of punishment, he had effected his escape."

But, reader, if you feel any interest to know what happened when Hsüeh P'an heard the version his mother gave him, listen to what you will find in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A sensual-minded man gets into such trouble through his sensuality that he entertains the idea of going abroad.

An estimable and refined girl manages, after great exertion, to compose verses at a refined meeting.

But to resume our story. After hearing his mother's arguments, Hsüeh P'an's indignation gradually abated. But notwithstanding that his pains and aches completely disappeared, in three or five days' time, the scars of his wounds were not yet healed and shamming illness, he remained at home; so ashamed was he to meet any of his relations or friends.

In a twinkle, the tenth moon drew near; and as several among the partners in the various shops, with which he was connected, wanted to go home, after the settlement of the annual accounts, he had to give them a farewell spread at home. In their number was one Chang Te-hui, who from his early years filled the post of manager in Hsüeh P'an's pawnshop; and who enjoyed in his home a living of two or three thousand taels. His purpose too was to visit his native place this year, and to return the following spring.

“Stationery and perfumery have been so scarce this year,” he consequently represented, “that prices will next year inevitably be high; so when

page 379

next year comes, what I'll do will be to send up my elder and younger sons ahead of me to look after the pawnshop, and when I start on my way back, before the dragon festival, I'll purchase a stock of paper, scents and fans and bring them for sale. And though we'll have to reduce the duties, payable at the barriers, and other expenses, there will still remain for us a considerable percentage of profit.”

This proposal set Hsüeh P'an musing, “With the dressing I've recently had,” he pondered, “I cannot very well, at present, appear before any one. Were the fancy to take me to get out of the way for half a year or even a year, there isn't a place where I can safely retire. And to sham illness, day after day, isn't again quite the right thing! In addition to this, here I've reached this grown-up age, and yet I'm

neither a civilian nor a soldier. It's true I call myself a merchant; but I've never in point of fact handled the scales or the abacus. Nor do I know anything about our territories, customs and manners, distances and routes. So wouldn't it be advisable that I should also get ready some of my capital, and go on a tour with Chang Te-hui for a year or so? Whether I earn any money or not, will be equally immaterial to me. More, I shall escape from all disgrace. It will, secondly, be a good thing for me to see a bit of country."

This resolution once arrived at in his mind, he waited until they rose from the banquet, when he, with calmness and equanimity, brought his plans to Chang Te-hui's cognizance, and asked him to postpone his departure for a day or two so that they should proceed on the journey together.

In the evening, he imparted the tidings to his mother. Mrs. Hsüeh, upon hearing his intention, was albeit delighted, tormented with fresh misgivings lest he should stir up trouble abroad,—for as far as the expense was concerned she deemed it a mere bagatelle,—and she consequently would not permit him to go. "You have," she reasoned with him, "to take proper care of me, so that I may be able to live in peace. Another thing is, that you can well dispense with all this buying and selling, for you are in no need of the few hundreds of taels, you may make."

Hsüeh P'an had long ago thoroughly resolved in his mind what to do and he did not therefore feel disposed to listen to her remonstrances. "You daily tax me," he pleaded, "with being ignorant of the world, with not knowing this, and not learning that, and now that I stir up my good resolution, with the idea of putting an end to all trifling, and that I wish to become a man, to do something for myself, and learn how to carry on business, you won't let me! But what would you have me do? Besides I'm not a girl that you should coop me up at home! And when is this likely to come to an end? Chang Te-hui is, moreover, a man well up in years; and he is an old friend of our family, so if I

page 380

go with him, how ever will I be able to do anything that's wrong? Should I at any time be guilty of any impropriety, he will be sure to speak to me, and to exhort me. He even knows the prices of things and customs of trade; and as I shall, as a matter of course, consult him in everything, what advantage won't I enjoy? But if you refuse to let me go, I'll wait for a couple of days, and, without breathing a

word to any one at home, I'll furtively make my preparations and start, and, when by next year I shall have made my fortune and come back, you'll at length know what stuff I'm made off!"

When he had done speaking, he flew into a huff and went off to sleep.

Mrs. Hsüeh felt impelled, after the arguments she heard him propound, to deliberate with Pao-ch'ai.

"If brother," Pao-ch'ai smilingly rejoined, "were in real earnest about gaining experience in some legitimate concerns, it would be well and good. But though he speaks, now that he is at home, in a plausible manner, the moment he gets abroad, his old mania will break out again, and it will be hard to exercise any check over him. Yet, it isn't worth the while distressing yourself too much about him! If he does actually mend his ways, it will be the happiness of our whole lives. But if he doesn't change, you won't, mother, be able to do anything more; for though, in part, it depends on human exertion, it, in part, depends upon the will of heaven! If you keep on giving way to fears that, with his lack of worldly experience, he can't be fit to go abroad and can't be up to any business, and you lock him up at home this year, why next year he'll be just the same! Such being the case, you'd better, ma,—since his arguments are right and specious enough,—make up your mind to sacrifice from eight hundred to a thousand taels and let him have them for a try. He'll, at all events, have one of his partners to lend him a helping hand, one who won't either think it a nice thing to play any of his tricks upon him. In the second place, there will be, when he's gone, no one to the left of him or to the right of him, to stand by him, and no one upon whom to rely, for when one goes abroad, who cares for any one else? Those who have, eat; and those who haven't starve. When he therefore casts his eyes about him and realises that there's no one to depend upon, he may, upon seeing this, be up to less mischief than were he to stay at home; but of course, there's no saying."

Mrs. Hsüeh listened to her, and communed within herself for a moment. "What you say is, indeed, right and proper!" she remarked. "And could one, by spending a small sum, make him learn something profitable, it will be well worth!"

They then matured their plans; and nothing further of any note transpired during the rest of the night.

The next day, Mrs. Hsüeh sent a messenger to invite Chang Te-hui to

page 381

come round. On his arrival, she charged Hsüeh P'an to regale him in the library. Then appearing, in person, outside the window of the covered back passage, she made thousand of appeals to Chang Te-hui to look after her son and take good care of him.

Chang Te-hui assented to her solicitations with profuse assurances, and took his leave after the collation.

“The fourteenth,” he went on to explain to Hsüeh P'an. “is a propitious day to start. So, worthy friend, you'd better be quick and pack up your baggage, and hire a mule, for us to begin our long journey as soon as the day dawns on the fourteenth.”

Hsüeh P'an was intensely gratified, and he communicated their plans to Mrs. Hsüeh. Mrs. Hsüeh then set to, and worked away, with the assistance of Pao-ch'ai, Hsiang Ling and two old nurses, for several consecutive days, before she got his luggage ready. She fixed upon the husband of Hsüeh P'an's nurse an old man with hoary head, two old servants with ample experience and long services, and two young pages, who acted as Hsüeh P'an's constant attendants, to go with him as his companions, so the party mustered, inclusive of master and followers, six persons in all. Three large carts were hired for the sole purpose of carrying the baggage and requisites; and four mules, suitable for long journeys, were likewise engaged. A tall, dark brown, home-bred mule was selected for Hsüeh P'an's use; but a saddle horse, as well, was provided for him.

After the various preparations had been effected, Mrs. Hsüeh, Pao-ch'ai and the other inmates tendered him, night after night, words of advice. But we can well dispense with dilating on this topic. On the arrival of the thirteenth, Hsüeh P'an went and bade good-bye to his maternal uncles. After which, he came and paid his farewell visit to the members of the Chia household. Chia Chen and the other male relatives unavoidably prepared an entertainment to speed him off. But to these festivities, there is likewise little need to allude with any minuteness.

On the fourteenth, at break of day, Mrs. Hsüeh, Pao-ch'ai and the other members of the family accompanied Hsüeh P'an beyond the ceremonial gate. Here his

mother and her daughter stood and watched him, their four eyes fixed intently on him, until he got out of sight, when they, at length, retraced their footsteps into the house.

Mrs. Hsüeh had, in coming up to the capital, only brought four or five family domestics and two or three old matrons and waiting-maids with her, so, after the departure on the recent occasion, of those, who followed Hsüeh P'an, no more than one or two men-servants remained in the outer quarters. Mrs. Hsüeh repaired therefore on the very same day into the study, and had the various

page 383

ornaments, bric-a-brac, curtains and other articles removed into the inner compound and put away. Then bidding the wives of the two male attendants, who had gone with Hsüeh P'an, likewise move their quarters inside, along with the other women, she went on to impress upon Hsiang Ling to put everything carefully away in her own room as well, and to lock the doors; "for," (she said), "you must come at night and sleep with me."

"Since you've got all these people to keep you company, ma," Pao-ch'ai remarked, "wouldn't it be as well to tell sister Ling to come and be my companion? Our garden is besides quite empty and the nights are so long! And as I work away every night, won't it be better for me to have an extra person with me?"

"Quite so!" smiled Mrs. Hsüeh, "I forgot that! I should have told her to go with you; it's but right. It was only the other day that I mentioned to your brother that: 'Wen Hsing too was young, and not fit to attend to everything that turns up, that Ying Erh could not alone do all the waiting, and that it was necessary to purchase another girl for your service.'"

"If we buy one, we won't know what she's really like!" Pao-ch'ai demurred. "If she gives us the slip, the money we may have spent on her will be a mere trifle, so long as she hasn't been up to any pranks! So let's quietly make inquiries, and, when we find one with well-known antecedents, we can purchase her, and, we'll be on the safe side then!"

While speaking, she told Hsiang Ling to collect her bedding and clothes; and desiring an old matron and Ch'in Erh to take them over to the Heng Wu Yüan,

Pao-ch'ai returned at last into the garden in company with Hsiang Ling.

“I meant to have proposed to my lady,” Hsiang Ling said to Pao-ch'ai, “that, when master left, I should be your companion, miss; but I feared lest her ladyship should, with that suspicious mind of hers, have maintained that I was longing to come into the garden to romp. But who'd have thought it, it was you, after all, who spoke to her about it!”

“I am well aware,” Pao-ch'ai smiled, “that you've been inwardly yearning for this garden, and that not for a day or two, but with the little time you can call your own, you would find it no fun, were you even able to run over once in a day, so long as you have to do it in a hurry-scurry! Seize therefore this opportunity of staying, better still, for a year; as I, on my side, will then have an extra companion; and you, on yours, will be able to accomplish your wishes.”

“My dear miss!” laughingly observed Hsiang Ling, “do let's make the best of this time, and teach me how to write verses!”

“I say,” Pao-ch'ai laughed, “you no sooner, get the Lung state than

page 383

you long for the Shu! I advise you to wait a bit. This is the first day that you spend in here, and you should, first and foremost, go out of the garden by the eastern side gate and look up and salute every one in her respective quarters commencing from our old lady. But you needn't make it a point of telling them that you've moved into the garden. If anyone does allude to the reason why you've shifted your quarters, you can simply explain cursorily that I've brought you in as a companion, and then drop the subject. On your return by and bye into the garden, you can pay a visit to the apartments of each of the young ladies.”

Hsiang Ling signified her acquiescence, and was about to start when she saw P'ing Erh rush in with hurried step. Hsiang Ling hastened to ask after her health, and P'ing Erh felt compelled to return her smile, and reciprocate her inquiry.

“I've brought her in to-day,” Pao-ch'ai thereupon smilingly said to P'ing Erh, “to make a companion of her. She was just on the point of going to tell your lady about it!”

“What is this that you're saying, Miss?” P'ing Erh rejoined, with a smile. “I really am at a loss what reply to make to you!”

“It's the right thing!” Pao-ch'ai answered. “In a house, there's the master, and in a temple there's the chief priest.' It's true, it's no important concern, but something must, in fact, be mentioned, so that those, who sit up on night duty in the garden, may be aware that these two have been added to my rooms, and know when to close the gates and when to wait. When you get back therefore do mention it, so that I mayn't have to send some one to tell them.”

P'ing Erh promised to carry out her wishes. “As you're moved in here,” she said to Hsiang Ling, “won't you go and pay your respects to your neighbours?”

“I had just this very moment,” Pao-ch'ai smiled, “told her to go and do so.”

“You needn't however go to our house,” P'ing Erh remarked, “our Mr. Secundus is laid up at home.”

Hsiang Ling assented and went off, passing first and foremost by dowager lady Chia's apartments. But without devoting any of our attention to her, we will revert to P'ing Erh.

Seeing Hsiang Ling walk out of the room, she drew Pao-ch'ai near her. “Miss! have you heard our news?” she inquired in a low tone of voice.

“I haven't heard any news,” Pao-ch'ai responded. “We've been daily so busy in getting my brother's things ready for his voyage abroad, that we know nothing whatever of any of your affairs in here. I haven't even seen

page 384

anything of my female cousins these last two days.”

“Our master, Mr. Chia She, has beaten our Mr. Secundus to such a degree that he can't budge,” P'ing Erh smiled. “But is it likely, miss, that you've heard nothing about it?”

“This morning,” Pao-ch'ai said by way of reply, “I heard a vague report on the subject, but I didn't believe it could be true. I was just about to go and look up

your mistress, when you unexpectedly arrived. But why did he beat him again?"

P'ing Erh set her teeth to and gave way to abuse. "It's all on account of some Chia Yü-ts'un or other; a starved and half-dead boorish bastard, who went yonder quite unexpectedly. It isn't yet ten years, since we've known him, and he has been the cause of ever so much trouble! In the spring of this year, Mr. Chia She saw somewhere or other, I can't tell where, a lot of antique fans; so, when on his return home, he noticed that the fine fans stored away in the house, were all of no use, he at once directed servants to go everywhere and hunt up some like those he had seen. Who'd have anticipated it, they came across a reckless creature of retribution, dubbed by common consent the 'stone fool,' who though so poor as to not even have any rice to put to his mouth, happened to have at home twenty antique fans. But these he utterly refused to take out of his main door. Our Mr. Secundus had thus a precious lot of bother to ask ever so many favours of people. But when he got to see the man, he made endless appeals to him before he could get him to invite him to go and sit in his house; when producing the fans, he allowed him to have a short inspection of them. From what our Mr. Secundus says, it would be really difficult to get any the like of them. They're made entirely of spotted black bamboo, and the stags and jadelike clusters of bamboo on them are the genuine pictures, drawn by men of olden times. When he got back, he explained these things to Mr. Chia She, who readily asked him to buy them, and give the man his own price for them. The 'stone fool,' however, refused. 'Were I even to be dying from hunger,' he said, 'or perishing from frostbites, and so much as a thousand taels were offered me for each single fan, I wouldn't part with them.' Mr. Chia She could do nothing, but day after day he abused our Mr. Secundus as a good-for-nothing. Yet he had long ago promised the man five hundred taels, payable cash down in advance, before delivery of the fans, but he would not sell them. 'If you want the fans,' he had answered, 'you must first of all take my life.' Now, miss, do consider what was to be done? But, Yü-ts'un is, as it happens, a man with no regard for divine justice. Well, when he came to hear of it, he at once devised a plan to lay hold of these fans, so fabricating the charge against him of letting a government debt drag on without payment, he had him arrested and brought before him

page 385

in the Yamen; when he adjudicated that his family property should be converted into money to make up the amount due to the public chest; and, confiscating the fans in question, he set an official value on them and sent them over here. And as

for that 'stone fool,' no one now has the faintest idea whether he be dead or alive. Mr. Chia She, however, taunted Mr. Secundus. 'How is it,' he said, 'that other people can manage to get them?' Our master simply rejoined 'that to bring ruin upon a person in such a trivial matter could not be accounted ability.' But, at these words, his father suddenly rushed into a fury, and averred that Mr. Secundus had said things to gag his mouth. This was the main cause. But several minor matters, which I can't even recollect, also occurred during these last few days. So, when all these things accumulated, he set to work and gave him a sound thrashing. He didn't, however, drag him down and strike him with a rattan or cane, but recklessly assaulted him, while he stood before him, with something or other, which he laid hold of, and broke his face open in two places. We understand that Mrs. Hsüeh has in here some medicine or other for applying on wounds, so do try, miss, and find a ball of it and let me have it!"

Hearing this, Pao-ch'ai speedily directed Ying Erh to go and look for some, and, on discovering two balls of it, she brought them over and handed them to P'ing Erh.

"Such being the case," Pao-ch'ai said, "do make, on your return, the usual inquiries for me, and I won't then need to go."

P'ing Erh turned towards Pao-ch'ai, and expressed her readiness to execute her commission, after which she betook herself home, where we will leave her without further notice.

After Hsiang Ling, for we will take up the thread of our narrative with her, completed her visits to the various inmates, she had her evening meal. Then when Pao-ch'ai and every one else went to dowager lady Chia's quarters, she came into the Hsiao Hsiang lodge. By this time Tai-yü had got considerably better. Upon hearing that Hsiang Ling had also moved into the garden, she, needless to say, was filled with delight.

"Now, that I've come in here," Hsiang Ling then smiled and said, "do please teach me, at your leisure, how to write verses. It will be a bit of good luck for me if you do."

"Since you're anxious to learn how to versify," Tai-yü answered with a smile, "you'd better acknowledge me as your tutor; for though I'm not a good hand at poetry, yet I know, after all, enough to be able to teach you."

“Of course you do!” Hsiang Ling laughingly remarked. “I’ll readily treat you as my tutor. But you mustn’t put yourself to any trouble!”

“Is there anything so difficult about this,” Tai-yü pursued, “as to make

page 386

it necessary to go in for any study? Why, it’s purely and simply a matter of openings, elucidations, embellishments and conclusions. The elucidations and embellishments, which come in the centre, should form two antithetical sentences, the even tones must pair with the uneven. Empty words must correspond with full words; and full words with empty words. In the event of any out-of-the-way lines, it won’t matter if the even and uneven tones, and the empty and full words do not pair.”

“Strange though it may appear,” smiled Hsiang Ling, “I often handle books with old poems, and read one or two stanzas, whenever I can steal the time; and some among these I find pair most skilfully, while others don’t. I have also heard that the first, third and fifth lines are of no consequence; and that the second, fourth and sixth must be clearly distinguished. But I notice that there are in the poetical works of ancient writers both those which accord with the rules, as well as those whose second, fourth and sixth lines are not in compliance with any rule. Hence it is that my mind has daily been full of doubts. But after the hints you’ve given me, I really see that all these formulas are of no account, and that the main requirement is originality of diction.”

“Yes, that’s just the principle that holds good,” Tai-yü answered. “But diction is, after all, a last consideration. The first and foremost thing is the choice of proper sentiments; for when the sentiments are correct, there’ll even be no need to polish the diction; it’s certain to be elegant. This is called versifying without letting the diction affect the sentiments.”

“What I admire,” Hsiang Ling proceeded with a smile; “are the lines by old Lu Fang;

*“The double portiere, when not raised, retains the fragrance long.
An old inkslab, with a slight hole, collects plenty of ink.”*

“Their language is so clear that it's charming.”

“You must on no account,” Tai-yü observed, “read poetry of the kind. It's because you people don't know what verses mean that you, no sooner read any shallow lines like these, than they take your fancy. But when once you get into this sort of style, it's impossible to get out of it. Mark my words! If you are in earnest about learning, I've got here Wang Mo-chieh's complete collection; so you'd better take his one hundred stanzas, written in the pentameter rule of versification, and carefully study them, until you apprehend them thoroughly. Afterwards, look over the one hundred and twenty stanzas of Lao T'u, in the heptameter rule; and next read a hundred or two hundred of the heptameter four-lined stanzas by Li Ch'ing-lieu. When you have, as a first step, digested these three authors, and made them your foundation, you can take T'ao Yuan-ming, Ying, Liu, Hsieh, Yüan, Yü, Pao and other writers and go through them once. And with those sharp and quick wits of yours, I've no doubt but that you will become a regular poet before a year's time.”

page 387

“Well, in that case,” Hsiang Ling smiled, after listening to her, “bring me the book, my dear miss, so that I may take it along. It will be a good thing if I can manage to read several stanzas at night.”

At these words, Tai-yü bade Tzu Chüan fetch Wang Tso-ch'eng's pentameter stanzas. When brought, she handed them to Hsiang Ling. “Only peruse those marked with red circles” she said. “They've all been selected by me. Read each one of them; and should there be any you can't fathom, ask your miss about them. Or when you come across me, I can explain them to you.”

Hsiang Ling took the poems and repaired back to the Heng Wu-Yüan. And without worrying her mind about anything she approached the lamp and began to con stanza after stanza. Pao-ch'ai pressed her, several consecutive times, to go to bed; but as even rest was far from her thoughts, Pao-ch'ai let her, when she perceived what trouble she was taking over her task, have her own way in the matter.

Tai-yü had one day just finished combing her hair and performing her ablutions, when she espied Hsiang Ling come with smiles playing about her lips, to return her the book and to ask her to let her have T'u's poetical compositions in

exchange.

“Of all these, how many stanzas can you recollect?” Tai-yü asked, smiling.

“I've read every one of those marked with a red circle,” Hsiang Ling laughingly rejoined.

“Have you caught the ideas of any of them, yes or no?” Tai-yü inquired.

“Yes, I've caught some!” Hsiang Ling smiled. “But whether rightly or not I don't know. Let me tell you.”

“You must really,” Tai-yü laughingly remarked, “minutely solicit people's opinions if you want to make any progress. But go on and let me hear you.”

“From all I can see,” Hsiang Ling smiled, “the beauty of poetry lies in certain ideas, which though not quite expressible in words are, nevertheless, found, on reflection, to be absolutely correct. Some may have the semblance of being totally devoid of sense, but, on second thought, they'll truly be seen to be full of sense and feeling.”

“There's a good deal of right in what you say,” Tai-yü observed. “But I wonder how you arrived at this conclusion?”

“I notice in that stanza on 'the borderland,' the antithetical couplet:

*In the vast desert reigns but upright mist.
In the long river setteth the round sun.*

“Consider now how ever can mist be upright? The sun is, of course, round. But the word 'upright' would seem to be devoid of common sense;

page 388

and 'round' appears far too commonplace a word. But upon throwing the whole passage together, and pondering over it, one fancies having seen the scenery alluded to. Now were any one to suggest that two other characters should be substituted for these two, one would verily be hard pressed to find any other two as suitable. Besides this, there's also the couplet:

*When the sun sets, rivers and lakes are white;
When the mist falls, the heavens and earth azure.*

“Both 'white' and 'azure', apparently too lack any sense; but reflection will show that these two words are absolutely necessary to bring out thoroughly the aspect of the scenery. And in conning them over, one feels just as if one had an olive, weighing several thousands of catties, in one's mouth, so much relish does one derive from them. But there's this too:

*At the ferry stays the setting sun,
O'er the mart hangs the lonesome mist.*

“And how much trouble must these words 'stay,' and 'over,' have caused the author in their conception! When the boats made fast, in the evening of a certain day of that year in which we came up to the capital, the banks were without a trace of human beings; and there were only just a few trees about; in the distance loomed the houses of several families engaged in preparing their evening meal, and the mist was, in fact, azure like jade, and connected like clouds. So, when I, as it happened, read this couplet last night, it actually seemed to me as if I had come again to that spot!”

But in the course of their colloquy, Pao-yü and T'an Ch'un arrived; and entering the room, they seated themselves, and lent an ear to her arguments on the verses.

“Seeing that you know so much,” Pao-yü remarked with a smiling face, “you can dispense with reading poetical works, for you're not far off from proficiency. To hear you expatiate on these two lines, makes it evident to my mind that you've even got at their secret meaning.”

“You say,” argued Tai-yü with a significant smile, “that the line:

“'O'er (the mart) hangs the lonesome mist,'

“is good; but aren't you yet aware that this is only plagiarised from an ancient writer? But I'll show you the line I'm telling you of. You'll find it far plainer and clearer than this.”

While uttering these words, she turned up T'ao Yüan-ming's,

*Dim in the distance lies a country place;
Faint in the hamlet-market hangs the mist;*

and handed it to Hsiang Ling.

Hsiang Ling perused it, and, nodding her head, she eulogised it. “Really,” she smiled, the word 'over' is deduced from the two characters implying 'faint.'

page 389

Pao-yü burst out into a loud fit of exultant laughter. “You've already got it!” he cried. “There's no need of explaining anything more to you! Any further explanations will, in lieu of benefiting you, make you unlearn what you've learnt. Were you therefore to, at once, set to work, and versify, your lines are bound to be good.”

“To-morrow,” observed T'an ch'un with a smile; “I'll stand an extra treat and invite you to join the society.”

“Why make a fool of me, miss?” Hsiang Ling laughingly ejaculated. “It's merely that mania of mine that made me apply my mind to this subject at all; just for fun and no other reason.”

T'an Ch'un and Tai-yü both smiled. “Who doesn't go in for these things for fun?” they asked. “Is it likely that we improvise verses in real earnest? Why, if any one treated our verses as genuine verses, and took them outside this garden, people would have such a hearty laugh at our expense that their very teeth would drop.”

“This is again self-violence and self-abasement!” Pao-yü interposed. The other day, I was outside the garden, consulting with the gentlemen about paintings, and, when they came to hear that we had started a poetical society, they begged of me to let them have the rough copies to read. So I wrote out several stanzas, and gave them to them to look over, and who did not praise them with all sincerity? They even copied them and took them to have the blocks cut.”

“Are you speaking the truth?” T'an Ch'un and Tai-yü eagerly inquired.

“If I'm telling a lie,” Pao-yü laughed, “I'm like that cockatoo on that frame!”

“You verily do foolish things!” Tai-yü and T'an Ch'un exclaimed with one voice, at these words. “But not to mention that they were doggerel lines, had they even been anything like what verses should be, our writings shouldn't have been hawked about outside.”

“What's there to fear?” Pao-yü smiled. “Hadn't the writings of women of old been handed outside the limits of the inner chambers, why, there would, at present, be no one with any idea of their very existence.”

While he passed this remark, they saw Ju Hua arrive from Hsi Ch'un's quarters to ask Pao-yü to go over; and Pao-yü eventually took his departure.

Hsiang Ling then pressed (Tai-yü) to give her T'u's poems. “Do choose some theme,” she also asked Tai-yü and T'an Ch'un, “and let me go and write on it. When I've done, I'll bring it for you to correct.”

“Last night,” Tai-yü observed, “the moon was so magnificent, that I meant to improvise a stanza on it; but as I haven't done yet, go at once and write one using the fourteenth rhyme, 'han,' (cool). You're at liberty to make

page 390

use of whatever words you fancy.”

Hearing this, Hsiang Ling was simply delighted, and taking the poems, she went back. After considerable exertion, she succeeded in devising a couplet, but so little able was she to tear herself away from the 'T'u' poems, that she perused another couple of stanzas, until she had no inclination for either tea or food, and she felt in an unsettled mood, try though she did to sit or recline.

“Why,” Pao-ch'ai remonstrated, “do you bring such trouble upon yourself? It's that P'in Erh, who has led you on to it! But I'll settle accounts with her! You've all along been a thick-headed fool; but now that you've burdened yourself with all this, you've become a greater fool.”

“Miss,” smiled Hsiang Ling, “don't confuse me.”

So saying, she set to work and put together a stanza, which she first and foremost handed to Pao-ch'ai to look over.

“This isn't good!” Pao-ch'ai smilingly said. “This isn't the way to do it! Don't fear of losing face, but take it and give it to her to peruse. We'll see what she says.”

At this suggestion, Hsiang Ling forthwith went with her verses in search of Tai-yü. When Tai-yü came to read them, she found their text to be:

*The night grows cool, what time Selene reacheth the mid-heavens.
Her radiance pure shineth around with such a spotless sheen.
Bards oft for inspiration raise on her their thoughts and eyes.
The rustic daren't see her, so fears he to enhance his grief.
Jade mirrors are suspended near the tower of malachite.
An icelike plate dangles outside the gem-laden portiere.
The eve is fine, so why need any silvery candles burn?
A clear light shines with dazzling lustre on the painted rails.*

“There's a good deal of spirit in them,” Tai-yü smiled, “but the language is not elegant. It's because you've only read a few poetical works that you labour under restraint. Now put this stanza aside and write another. Pluck up your courage and go and work away.”

After listening to her advice, Hsiang Ling quietly wended her way back, but so much the more (preoccupied) was she in her mind that she did not even enter the house, but remaining under the trees, planted by the side of the pond, she either seated herself on a rock and plunged in a reverie, or squatted down and dug the ground, to the astonishment of all those, who went backwards and forwards. Li wan, Pao-ch'ai, T'an Ch'un, Pao-yü and some others heard about her; and, taking their position some way off on the mound, they watched her, much amused. At one time, they saw her pucker up her eyebrows; and at another smile to herself.

“That girl must certainly be cracked!” Pao-ch'ai laughed. “Last night she kept on muttering away straight up to the fifth watch, when she at last

page 391

turned in. But shortly, daylight broke, and I heard her get up and comb her hair, all in a hurry, and rush after P'in Erh. In a while, however, she returned; and, after acting like an idiot the whole day, she managed to put together a stanza.

But it wasn't after all, good, so she's, of course, now trying to devise another.”

“This indeed shows,” Pao-yü laughingly remarked, “that the earth is spiritual, that man is intelligent, and that heaven does not in the creation of human beings bestow on them natural gifts to no purpose. We've been sighing and lamenting that it was a pity that such a one as she, should, really, be so unpolished; but who could ever have anticipated that things would, in the long run, reach the present pass? This is a clear sign that heaven and earth are most equitable!”

“If only,” smiled Pao-ch'ai, at these words, “you could be as painstaking as she is, what a good thing it would be. And would you fail to attain success in anything you might take up?”

Pao-yü made no reply. But realising that Hsiang Ling had crossed over in high spirits to find Tai-yü again, T'an Ch'un laughed and suggested, “Let's follow her there, and see whether her composition is any good.”

At this proposal, they came in a body to the Hsiao Hsiang lodge. Here they discovered Tai-yü holding the verses and explaining various things to her.

“What are they like?” they all thereupon inquired of Tai-yü.

“This is naturally a hard job for her!” Tai-yü rejoined. “They're not yet as good as they should be. This stanza is far too forced; you must write another.”

One and all however expressed a desire to look over the verses. On perusal, they read:

*'Tis not silver, neither water that on the windows shines so cold.
Selene, mark! covers, like a jade platter, the clear vault of heaven.
What time the fragrance faint of the plum bloom is fain to tinge the
air,
The dew-bedecked silken willow trees begin to lose their leaves.
'Tis the remains of powder which methinks besmear the golden steps.
Her lustrous rays enshroud like light hoar-frost the jadelike
balustrade.
When from my dreams I wake, in the west tower, all human trace is
gone.
Her slanting orb can yet clearly be seen across the bamboo screen.*

“It doesn't sound like a song on the moon,” Pao-ch'ai smilingly observed. “Yet were, after the word 'moon', that of 'light' supplied, it would be better; for, just see, if each of these lines treated of the moonlight, they would be all right. But poetry primarily springs from nonsensical language. In a few days longer, you'll be able to do well.”

Hsiang Ling had flattered herself that this last stanza was perfect, and the criticisms, that fell on her ear, damped her spirits again. She was not however disposed to relax in her endeavours, but felt eager to commune with her

page 392

own thoughts, so when she perceived the young ladies chatting and laughing, she betook herself all alone to the bamboo-grove at the foot of the steps; where she racked her brain, and ransacked her mind with such intentness that her ears were deaf to everything around her and her eyes blind to everything beyond her task.

“Miss Ling,” T'an Ch'un presently cried, smiling from inside the window, “do have a rest!”

“The character 'rest;“ Hsiang Ling nervously replied, “comes from lot N. deg. 15, under 'shan', (to correct); so it's the wrong rhyme.”

This rambling talk made them involuntarily burst out laughing.

“In very fact,” Pao-sh'ai laughed, “she's under a poetical frenzy, and it's all P'in Erh who has incited her.”

“The holy man says,” Tai-yü smilingly rejoined, “that 'one must not be weary of exhorting people'; and if she comes, time and again, to ask me this and that how can I possibly not tell her?”

“Let's take her to Miss Quarta's rooms,” Li Wan smiled, “and if we could coax her to look at the painting, and bring her to her senses, it will be well.”

Speaking the while, she actually walked out of the room, and laying hold of her, she brought her through the Lotus Fragrance arbour to the bank of Warm Fragrance. Hsi Ch'un was tired and languid, and was lying on the window,

having a midday siesta. The painting was resting against the partition-wall, and was screened with a gauze cover. With one voice, they roused Hsi Ch'un, and raising the gauze cover to contemplate her work, they saw that three tenths of it had already been accomplished. But their attention was attracted by the representation of several beautiful girls, inserted in the picture, so pointing at Hsiang Ling: "Every one who can write verses is to be put here," they said, "so be quick and learn."

page 393

But while conversing, they played and laughed for a time, after which, each went her own way.

Hsiang Ling was meanwhile preoccupied about her verses, so, when evening came, she sat facing the lamp absorbed in thought. And the third watch struck before she got to bed. But her eyes were so wide awake, that it was only after the fifth watch had come and gone, that she, at length, felt drowsy and fell fast asleep.

Presently, the day dawned, and Pao-ch'ai woke up; but, when she lent an ear, she discovered (Hsiang Ling) in a sound sleep. "She has racked her brains the whole night long," she pondered. "I wonder, however, whether she has succeeded in finishing her task. She must be tired now, so I won't disturb her."

But in the midst of her cogitations, she heard Hsiang Ling laugh and exclaim in her sleep: "I've got it. It cannot be that this stanza too won't be worth anything."

"How sad and ridiculous!" Pao-ch'ai soliloquised with a smile. And, calling her by name, she woke her up. "What have you got?" she asked. "With that firmness of purpose of yours, you could even become a spirit! But before you can learn how to write poetry, you'll be getting some illness."

Chiding her the while, she combed her hair and washed; and, this done, she repaired, along with her cousins, into dowager lady Chia's quarters.

Hsiang Ling made, in fact, such desperate efforts to learn all about poetry that her system got quite out of order. But although she did not in the course of the day hit upon anything, she quite casually succeeded in her dreams in devising eight lines; so concluding her toilette and her ablutions, she hastily jotted them

down, and betook herself into the Hsin Fang pavilion. Here she saw Li Wan and the whole bevy of young ladies, returning from Madame Wang's suite of apartments.

Pao-ch'ai was in the act of telling them of the verses composed by Hsiang Ling, while asleep, and of the nonsense she had been talking, and every one of them was convulsed with laughter. But upon raising their heads, and perceiving that she was approaching, they vied with each other in pressing her to let them see her composition.

But, reader, do you wish to know any further particulars? If you do; read those given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XLIX.

*White snow and red plum blossom in the crystal world.
The pretty girl, fragrant with powder, cuts some meat and eats it.*

Hsiang Ling, we will now proceed, perceived the young ladies engaged in chatting and laughing, and went up to them with a smiling countenance. "Just you look at this stanza!" she said. "If it's all right, then I'll continue my studies; but if it isn't worth any thing, I'll banish at once from my mind all idea of going in for versification."

With these words, she handed the verses to Tai-yü and her companions. When they came to look at them, they found this to be their burden:

*If thou would'st screen Selene's beauteous sheen, thou'lt find it
hard.*

Her shadows are by nature full of grace, frigid her form.

A row of clothes-stones batter, while she lights a thousand li.

*When her disc's half, and the cock crows at the fifth watch, 'tis
cold.*

Wrapped in my green cloak in autumn, I hear flutes on the stream.

page 394

While in the tower the red-sleeved maid leans on the rails at night.

She feels also constrained to ask of the goddess Ch'ang O:

'Why it is that she does not let the moon e'er remain round?'

"This stanza is not only good," they with one voice exclaimed, after perusing it, "but it's original, it's charming. It bears out the proverb: 'In the world, there's nothing difficult; the only thing hard to get at is a human being with a will.' We'll certainly ask you to join our club."

Hsiang Ling caught this remark; but so little did she credit it that fancying that they were making fun of her, she still went on to press Tai-yü, Pao-ch'ai and the other girls to give her their opinions. But while engaged in speaking, she spied a number of young waiting-maids, and old matrons

come with hurried step. "Several young ladies and ladies have come," they announced smilingly, "but we don't know any of them. So your ladyship and you, young ladies, had better come at once and see what relatives they are."

"What are you driving at?" Li Wan laughed. "You might, after all, state distinctly whose relatives they are."

"Your ladyship's two young sisters have come," the matrons and maids rejoined smiling. "There's also another young lady, who says she's miss Hsüeh's cousin, and a gentleman who pretends to be Mr. Hsüeh P'an's junior cousin. We are now off to ask Mrs. Hsüeh to meet them. But your ladyship and the young ladies might go in advance and greet them." As they spoke, they straightway took their leave.

"Has our Hsüeh K'o come along with his sisters?" Pao-ch'ai inquired, with a smile.

"My aunt has probably also come to the capital," Li Wan laughed. "How is it they've all arrived together? This is indeed a strange thing!" Then adjourning in a body into Madame Wang's drawing rooms, they saw the floor covered with a black mass of people.

Madame Hsing's sister-in-law was there as well. She had entered the capital with her daughter, Chou Yen, to look up madame Hsing. But lady Feng's brother, Wang Jen, had, as luck would have it, just been preparing to start for the capital, so the two family connexions set out in company for their common destination. After accomplishing half their journey, they encountered, while their boats were lying at anchor, Li Wan's widowed sister-in-law, who also was on her way to the metropolis, with her two girls, the elder of whom was Li Wen and the younger Li Ch'i. They all then talked matters over, and, induced by the ties of relationship, the three families prosecuted their voyage together. But subsequently, Hsüeh P'an's cousin Hsüeh K'o,—whose father had, when on a visit years ago to the capital, engaged his uterine sister to the son of the Han-lin Mei, whose residence was in the metropolis,—came while

planning to go and consummate the marriage, to learn of Wang Jen's departure, so taking his sister with him, he kept in his track till he managed to catch him up. Hence it happened that they all now arrived in a body to look up their respective relatives. In due course, they exchanged the conventional salutations; and these over, they had a chat.

Dowager lady Chia and madame Wang were both filled with ineffable delight.

“Little wonder is it,” smiled old lady Chia, “if the snuff of the lamp crackled time and again; and if it formed and reformed into a head! It was, indeed, sure to come to this to-day!”

While she conversed on every-day topics, the presents had to be put away; and, as she, at the same time, expressed a wish to keep the new arrivals to partake of some wine and eatables, lady Feng had, needless to say, much extra work added to her ordinary duties.

Li Wan and Pao-ch'ai descanted, of course, with their aunts and cousins on the events that had transpired since their separation. But Tai-yü, though when they first met, continued in cheerful spirits, could not again, when the recollection afterwards flashed through her mind that one and all had their relatives, and that she alone had not a soul to rely upon, avoid withdrawing out of the way, and giving vent to tears.

Pao-yü, however, read her feelings, and he had to do all that lay in his power to exhort her and to console her for a time before she cheered up. Pao-yü then hurried into the I Hung court. Going up to Hsi Jen, She Yüeh and Chi'ng Wen: “Don't you yet hasten to go and see them?” he smiled. “Who'd ever have fancied that cousin Pao-ch'ai's own cousin would be what he is? That cousin of hers is so unique in appearance and in deportment. He looks as if he were cousin Pao-ch'ai's uterine younger brother. But what's still more odd is, that you should have kept on saying the whole day long that cousin Pao-ch'ai is a very beautiful creature. You should now see her cousin, as well as the two girls of her senior sister-in-law. I couldn't adequately tell you what they're like. Good heavens! Good heavens! What subtle splendour and spiritual beauty must you possess to produce beings like them, so superior to other human creatures! How plain it is that I'm like a frog wallowing at the bottom of a well! I've

throughout every hour of the day said to myself that nowhere could any girls be found to equal those at present in our home; but, as it happens, I haven't had far to look! Even in our own native sphere, one would appear to eclipse the other! Here I have now managed to add one more stratum to my store of learning! But can it possibly be that outside these few, there can be any more like them?"

As he uttered these sentiments, he smiled to himself. But Hsi Jen

page 396

noticed how much under the influence of his insane fits he once more was, and she promptly abandoned all idea of going over to pay her respects to the visitors.

Ch'ing Wen and the other girls had already gone and seen them and come back. Putting on a smile, "You'd better," they urged Hsi Jen, "be off at once and have a look at them. Our elder mistress' niece, Miss Pao's cousin, and our senior lady's two sisters resemble a bunch of four leeks so pretty are they!"

But scarcely were these words out of their lips, than they perceived T'an Ch'un too enter the room, beaming with smiles. She came in quest of Pao-yü.

"Our poetical society is in a flourishing way," she remarked.

"It is," smiled Pao-yü. "Here no sooner do we, in the exuberance of our spirits, start a poetical society, than the devils and gods bring through their agency, all these people in our midst! There's only one thing however. Have they, I wonder, ever learnt how to write poetry or not?"

"I just now asked every one of them," T'an Ch'un replied. "Their ideas of themselves are modest, it's true, yet from all I can gather there's not one who can't versify. But should there even be any who can't, there's nothing hard about it. Just look at Hsiang Ling. Her case will show you the truth of what I say."

"Of the whole lot," smiled Ch'ing Wen, "Miss Hsüeh's cousin carries the

palm. What do you think about her, Miss Tertia?"

"It's really so!" T'an Ch'un responded. "In my own estimation, even her elder cousin and all this bevy of girls are not fit to hold a candle to her!"

Hsi Jen felt much surprise at what she heard. "This is indeed odd!" she smiled. "Whence could one hunt up any better? We'd like to go and have a peep at her."

"Our venerable senior," T'an Ch'un observed, "was at the very first sight of her so charmed with her that there's nothing she wouldn't do. She has already compelled our Madame Hsing to adopt her as a godchild. Our dear ancestor wishes to bring her up herself; this point was settled a little while back."

Pao-yü went into ecstasies. "Is this a fact?" he eagerly inquired.

"How often have I gone in for yarns?" T'an Ch'un said. "Now that our worthy senior," continuing, she laughed, "has got this nice granddaughter, she has banished from her mind all thought of a grandson like you!"

"Never mind," answered Pao-yü smiling. "It's only right that girls should be more doated upon. But to-morrow is the sixteenth, so we should have a meeting."

page 397

"That girl Lin Tai-yü is no sooner out of bed," T'an Ch'un remarked, "than cousin Secunda falls ill again. Everything is, in fact, up and down!"

"Our cousin Secunda," Pao-yü explained, "doesn't also go in very much for verses, so, what would it matter if she were left out?"

"It would be well to wait a few days," T'an Ch'un urged, "until the new comers have had time to see enough of us to become intimate. We can then invite them to join us. Won't this be better? Our senior sister-in-law and cousin Pao have now no mind for poetry. Besides, Hsiang-yün has not arrived. P'in Erh is just over her sickness. The members are not all

therefore in a fit state, so wouldn't it be preferable if we waited until that girl Yün came? The new arrivals will also have a chance of becoming friendly. P'in Erh will likewise recover entirely. Our senior sister-in-law and cousin Pao will have time to compose their minds; and Hsiang Ling to improve in her verses. We shall then be able to convene a full meeting; and won't it be better? You and I must now go over to our worthy ancestor's, on the other side, and hear what's up. But, barring cousin Pao-ch'ai's cousin,—for we needn't take her into account, as it's sure to have been decided that she should live in our home,—if the other three are not to stay here with us, we should entreat our grandmother to let them as well take up their quarters in the garden. And if we succeed in adding a few more to our number, won't it be more fun for us?"

Pao-yü at these words was so much the more gratified that his very eyebrows distended, and his eyes laughed. "You've got your wits about you!" he speedily exclaimed. "My mind is ever so dull! I've vainly given way to a fit of joy. But to think of these contingencies was beyond me!"

So saying the two cousins repaired together to their grandmother's suite of apartments; where, in point of fact, Madame Wang had already gone through the ceremony of recognizing Hsüeh Pao-ch'in as her godchild. Dowager lady Chia's fascination for her, however, was so much out of the common run that she did not tell her to take up her quarters in the garden. Of a night, she therefore slept with old lady Chia in the same rooms; while Hsüeh K'o put up in Hsüeh P'an's study.

"Your niece needn't either return home," dowager lady Chia observed to Madame Hsing. "Let her spend a few days in the garden and see the place before she goes."

Madame Hsing's brother and sister-in-law were, indeed, in straitened circumstances at home. So much so that they had, on their present visit to the capital, actually to rely upon such accommodation as Madame Hsing could procure for them and upon such help towards their travelling expenses as she could afford to give them. When she consequently heard her proposal, Madame Hsing

was, of course, only too glad to comply with her wishes, and readily she handed Hsing Chou-yen to the charge of lady Feng. But lady Feng, bethinking herself of the number of young ladies already in the garden, of their divergent dispositions and, above all things, of the inconvenience of starting a separate household, deemed it advisable to send her to live along with Ying Ch'un; for in the event, (she thought), of Hsing Chou-yen meeting afterwards with any contrarities, she herself would be clear of all responsibility, even though Madame Hsing came to hear about them. Deducting, therefore any period, spent by Hsing Chou-yen on a visit home, lady Feng allowed Hsing Chou-yen as well, if she extended her stay in the garden of Broad Vista for any time over a month, an amount equal to that allotted to Ying Ch'un.

Lady Feng weighed with unprejudiced eye Hsing Chou-yen's temperament and deportment. She found in her not the least resemblance to Madame Hsing, or even to her father and mother; but thought her a most genial and love-inspiring girl. This consideration actuated lady Feng (not to deal harshly with her), but to pity her instead for the poverty, in which they were placed at home, and for the hard lot she had to bear, and to treat her with far more regard than she did any of the other young ladies. Madame Hsing, however, did not lavish much attention on her.

Dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang and the rest had all along been fond of Li Wan for her virtuous and benevolent character. Besides, her continence in remaining a widow at her tender age commanded general esteem. When they therefore now saw her husbandless sister-in-law come to pay her a visit, they would not allow her to go and live outside the mansion. Her sister-in-law was, it is true, extremely opposed to the proposal, but as dowager lady Chia was firm in her determination, she had no other course but to settle down, along with Li Wen and Li Ch'i, in the Tao Hsiang village.

They had by this time assigned quarters to all the new comers, when, who would have thought it, Shih Ting, Marquis of Chung Ching, was once again appointed to a high office in another province, and he had shortly to take his family and proceed to his post. But so little could old lady Chia brook the separation from Hsiang-yün that she kept her behind and received her in her own home. Her original idea was to have asked lady

Feng to have separate rooms arranged for her, but Shih Hsiang-yün was so obstinate in her refusal, her sole wish being to put up with Pao-ch'ai, that the idea had, in consequence, to be abandoned.

At this period, the garden of Broad Vista was again much more full of life than it had ever been before. Li Wan was the chief inmate. The rest consisted of Ying Ch'un, T'an Ch'un, Hsi Ch'un, Pao-ch'ai, Tai-yü, Hsiang-yün, Li Wen, Li Ch'i, Pao Ch'in and Hsing Chou-yen. In addition to

page 399

these, there were lady Feng and Pao-yü, so that they mustered thirteen in all. As regards age, irrespective of Li Wan, who was by far the eldest, and lady Feng, who came next, the other inmates did not exceed fourteen, sixteen or seventeen. But the majority of them had come into the world in the same year, though in different months, so they themselves could not remember distinctly who was senior, and who junior. Even dowager lady Chia, Madame Wang and the matrons and maids in the household were unable to tell the differences between them with any accuracy, given as they were to the simple observance of addressing themselves promiscuously and quite at random by the four words representing 'female cousin' and 'male cousin.'

Hsiang Ling was gratifying her wishes to her heart's content and devoting her mind exclusively to the composition of verses, not presuming however to make herself too much of a nuisance to Pao-ch'ai, when, by a lucky coincidence, Shih Hsiang-yün came on the scene. But how was it possible for one so loquacious as Hsiang-yün to avoid the subject of verses, when Hsiang Ling repeatedly begged her for explanations? This inspirited her so much the more, that not a day went by, yea not a single night, on which she did not start some loud argument and lengthy discussion.

"You really," Pao-ch'ai felt impelled to laugh, "kick up such a din, that it's quite unbearable! Fancy a girl doing nothing else than turning poetry into a legitimate thing for raising an argument! Why, were some literary persons to hear you, they would, instead of praising you, have a laugh at your expense, and say that you don't mind your own business. We hadn't

yet got rid of Hsiang Ling with all her rubbish, and here we have a chatterbox like you thrown on us! But what is it that that mouth of yours keeps on jabbering? What about the bathos of Tu Kung-pu; and the unadorned refinement of Wei Su-chou? What also about Wen Pa-ch'a's elegant diction; and Li I-shan's abstruseness? A pack of silly fools that you are! Do you in any way behave like girls should?"

These sneers evoked laughter from both Hsiang Ling and Hsiang-yün. But in the course of their conversation, they perceived Pao-ch'in drop in, with a waterproof wrapper thrown over her, so dazzling with its gold and purplish colours, that they were at a loss to make out what sort of article it could be.

"Where did you get this?" Pao-ch'ai eagerly inquired.

"It was snowing," Pao-ch'in smilingly replied, "so her venerable ladyship turned up this piece of clothing and gave it to me."

Hsiang Ling drew near and passed it under inspection. "No wonder," she exclaimed, "it looks so handsome! It's verily woven with peacock's feathers."

page 400

"What about peacock's feathers?" Hsiang-yün laughed. "It's made of the feathers plucked from the heads of wild ducks. This is a clear sign that our worthy ancestor is fond of you, for with all her love for Pao-yü, she hasn't given it to him to wear."

"Truly does the proverb say: 'that every human being has his respective lot.'" Pao-ch'ai smiled. "Nothing ever was further from my thoughts than that she would, at this juncture, drop on the scene! Come she may, but here she also gets our dear ancestor to lavish such love on her!"

"Unless you stay with our worthy senior," Hsiang-yün said, "do come into the garden. You may romp and laugh and eat and drink as much as you like in these two places. But when you get over to Madame Hsing's rooms, talk and joke with her, if she be at home, to your heart's content; it won't matter if you tarry ever so long. But should she not be in, don't put

your foot inside; for the inmates are many in those rooms and their hearts are evil. All they're up to is to do us harm."

These words much amused Pao-ch'ai, Pao-ch'in, Hsiang-Ling, Ying Erh and the others present.

"Were one to say," Pao-ch'ai smiled, "that you're heartless, (it wouldn't do); for you've got a heart. But despite your having a heart, your tongue is, in fact, a little too outspoken! You should really to-day acknowledge this Ch'in Erh of ours as your own sister!"

"This article of clothing," Hsiang-yün laughed, casting another glance at Pao-ch'in, "is only meet for her to wear. It wouldn't verily look well on any one else."

Saying this, she espied Hu Po enter the room. "Our old mistress," she put in smiling, "bade me tell you, Miss Pao-ch'ai, not to keep too strict a check over Miss Ch'in, for she's yet young; that you should let her do as she pleases, and that whatever she wants you should ask for, and not be afraid."

Pao-ch'ai hastily jumped to her feet and signified her obedience. Pushing Pao-ch'in, she laughed. "Even you couldn't tell whence this piece of good fortune hails from," she said. "Be off now; for mind, we might hurt your feelings. I can never believe myself so inferior to you!"

As she spoke, Pao-yü and Tai-yü walked in. But as Pao-ch'ai continued to indulge in raillery to herself, "Cousin Pao," Hsiang-yün smilingly remonstrated, "you may, it's true, be jesting, but what if there were any one to entertain such ideas in real earnest?"

"If any one took things in earnest," Hu Po interposed laughing, "why, she'd give offence to no one else but to him." Pointing, as she uttered this remark, at Pao-yü.

"He's not that sort of person!" Pao-ch'ai and Hsiang-yün simultaneously

ventured, with a significant smile.

“If it isn't he,” Hu Po proceeded still laughing, “it's she.” Turning again her finger towards Tai-yü.

Hsiang-yün expressed not a word by way of rejoinder.

“That's still less likely,” Pao-ch'ai smiled, “for my cousin is like her own sister; and she's far fonder of her than of me. How could she therefore take offence? Do you credit that nonsensical trash uttered by Yün-erh! Why what good ever comes out of that mouth of hers?”

Pao-yü was ever well aware that Tai-yü was gifted with a somewhat mean disposition. He had not however as yet come to learn anything of what had recently transpired between Tai-yü and Pao-ch'ai. He was therefore just giving way to fears lest his grandmother's fondness for Pao-ch'in should be the cause of her feeling dejected. But when he now heard the remarks passed by Hsiang-yün, and the rejoinders made, on the other hand, by Pao-ch'ai, and, when he noticed how different Tai-yü's voice and manner were from former occasions, and how they actually bore out Pao-ch'ai's insinuation, he was at a great loss how to solve the mystery. “These two,” he consequently pondered, “were never like this before! From all I can now see, they're, really, a hundred times far more friendly than any others are!” But presently he also observed Lin Tai-yü rush after Pao-ch'in, and call out 'Sister,' and, without even making any allusion to her name or any mention to her surname, treat her in every respect, just as if she were her own sister.

This Pao-ch'in was young and warm-hearted. She was naturally besides of an intelligent disposition. She had, from her very youth up, learnt how to read and how to write. After a stay, on the present occasion, of a couple of days in the Chia mansion, she became acquainted with nearly every inmate. And as she saw that the whole bevy of young ladies were not of a haughty nature, and that they kept on friendly terms with her own cousin, she did not feel disposed to treat them with any discourtesy. But she had likewise found out for herself that Lin Tai-yü was the best among the whole lot, so she started with Tai-yü, more than with any one else, a friendship of unusual fervour. This did not escape Pao-yü's notice; but all he could do was to secretly give way to amazement.

Shortly, however, Pao-ch'ai and her cousin repaired to Mrs. Hsüeh's quarters. Hsiang-yün then betook herself to dowager lady Chia's apartments, while Lin Tai-yü returned to her room and lay down to rest.

Pao-yü thereupon came to look up Tai-yü.

“Albeit I've read the 'Record of the Western Side-room,’” he smiled, “and understood a few passages of it, yet when I quoted some in order to make you laugh, you flew into a huff! But I now remember that there is, indeed,

page 402

a passage, which is not intelligible to me; so let me quote it for you to explain it for me!”

Hearing this, Tai-yü immediately concluded that his words harboured some secret meaning, so putting on a smile, “Recite it and let me hear it,” she said.

“In the 'Confusion' chapter,” Pao-yü laughingly began, “there's a line couched in most beautiful language. It's this: 'What time did Meng Kuang receive Liang Hung's candlestick?' (When did you and Pao-ch'ai get to be such friends?) These five characters simply bear on a stock story; but to the credit of the writer be it, the question contained in the three empty words representing, 'What time' is set so charmingly! When did she receive it? Do tell me!”

At this inquiry, Tai-yü too could not help laughing. “The question was originally nicely put,” she felt urged to rejoin with a laugh. “But though the writer sets it gracefully, you ask it likewise with equal grace!”

“At one time,” Pao-yü. observed, “all you knew was to suspect that I (was in love with Pao-ch'ai); and have you now no faults to find?”

“Who ever could have imagined her such a really nice girl!” Tai-yü smiled. “I've all along thought her full of guile!” And seizing the occasion, she told Pao-yü with full particulars how she had, in the game of forfeits, made an

improper quotation, and what advice Pao-ch'ai had given her on the subject; how she had even sent her some birds' nests, and what they had said in the course of the chat they had had during her illness.

Pao-yü then at length came to see why it was that such a warm friendship had sprung up between them. "To tell you the truth," he consequently remarked smilingly, "I was just wondering when Meng Kuang had received Liang Hung's candlestick; and, lo, you, indeed, got it, when a mere child and through some reckless talk, (and your friendship was sealed)."

As the conversation again turned on Pao-ch'in, Tai-yü recalled to mind that she had no sister, and she could not help melting once more into tears.

Pao-yü hastened to reason with her. "This is again bringing trouble upon yourself!" he argued. "Just see how much thinner you are this year than you were last; and don't you yet look after your health? You deliberately worry yourself every day of your life. And when you've had a good cry, you feel at last that you've acquitted yourself of the duties of the day."

"Of late," Tai-yü observed, drying her tears, "I feel sore at heart. But my tears are scantier by far than they were in years gone by. With all the grief and anguish, which gnaw my heart, my tears won't fall plentifully."

"This is because weeping has become a habit with you," Pao-yü added.

page 403

"But though you fancy to yourself that it is so, how can your tears have become scantier than they were?"

While arguing with her, he perceived a young waiting-maid, attached to his room, bring him a red felt wrapper. "Our senior mistress, lady Chia Chu," she went on, "has just sent a servant to say that, as it snows, arrangements should be made for inviting people to-morrow to write verses."

But hardly was this message delivered, than they saw Li Wan's maid

enter, and invite Tai-yü to go over. Pao-yü then proposed to Tai-yü to accompany him, and together they came to the Tao Hsiang village. Tai-yü changed her shoes for a pair of low shoes made of red scented sheep skin, ornamented with gold, and hollowed clouds. She put on a deep red crape cloak, lined with white fox fur; girdled herself with a lapis-lazuli coloured sash, decorated with bright green double rings and four sceptres; and covered her head with a hat suitable for rainy weather. After which, the two cousins trudged in the snow, and repaired to this side of the mansion. Here they discovered the young ladies assembled, dressed all alike in deep red felt or camlet capes, with the exception of Li Wan, who was clad in a woollen jacket, buttoning in the middle.

Hsüeh Pao-ch'ai wore a pinkish-purple twilled pelisse, lined with foreign 'pa' fur, worked with threads from abroad, and ornamented with double embroidery. Hsing Chou-yen was still attired in an old costume, she ordinarily used at home, without any garment for protection against the rain. Shortly, Shih Hsiang-yün arrived. She wore the long pelisse, given her by dowager lady Chia, which gave warmth both from the inside and outside, as the top consisted of martin-head fur, and the lining of the long-haired coat of the dark grey squirrel. On her head, she had a deep red woollen hood, made a la Chao Chün, with designs of clouds scooped out on it. This was lined with gosling-yellow, gold-streaked silk. Round her neck, she had a collar of sable fur.

“Just see here!” Tai-yü was the first to shout with a laugh. “Here comes Sun Hsing-che the 'monkey-walker!' Lo, like him, she holds a snow cloak, and purposely puts on the air of a young bewitching ape!”

“Look here, all of you!” Hsiang-yün laughed. “See what I wear inside!”

So saying, she threw off her cloak. This enabled them to notice that she wore underneath a half-new garment with three different coloured borders on the collar and cuffs, consisting of a short pelisse of russet material lined with ermine and ornamented with dragons embroidered in variegated silks whose coils were worked with golden threads. The lapel was narrow. The sleeves were short. The folds buttoned on the side. Under this, she had a very short light-red brocaded satin bodkin, lined with fur from foxes' ribs. Round her

waist was lightly attached a many-hued palace sash, with butterfly knots and long tassels. On her feet, she too wore a pair of low shoes made of deer leather. Her waist looked more than ever like that of a wasp, her back like that of the gibbon. Her bearing resembled that of a crane, her figure that of a mantis.

“Her weak point,” they laughed unanimously, “is to get herself up to look like a young masher. But she does, there's no denying, cut a much handsomer figure like this, than when she's dressed up like a girl!”

“Lose no time,” Hsiang-yün smiled, “in deliberating about writing verses, for I'd like to hear who is to stand treat.”

“According to my idea,” Li Wan chimed in, “I think that as the legitimate day, which was yesterday, has gone by, it would be too long to wait for another proper date. As luck would have it, it's snowing again to-day, so won't it be well to raise contributions among ourselves and have a meeting? We'll thus be able to give the visitors a greeting; and to get an opportunity of writing a few verses. But what are your views on the subject?”

“This proposal is excellent!” Pao-yü was the first to exclaim. “The only thing is that it's too late to-day; and if it clears up by to-morrow, there will be really no fun.”

“It isn't likely,” cried out the party with one voice, “that this snowy weather will clear up. But even supposing it does, the snow which will fall during this night will be sufficient for our enjoyment.”

“This place of mine is nice enough, it's true,” Li Wan added, “yet it isn't up to the Lu Hsüeh Pavilion. I've already therefore despatched workmen to raise earthen couches, so that we should all be able to sit round the fire and compose our verses. Our venerable senior, I fancy, is not sure about caring to join us. Besides, this is only a small amusement between ourselves so if we just let that hussy Feng know something about it, it will be quite enough. A tael from each of you will be ample, but send your money to me here! As regards Hsiang Ling, Pao-ch'in, Li Wen, Li Ch'i

and Chou-yen, the five of them, we needn't count them. Neither need we include the two girls of our number, who are ill; nor take into account the four girls who've asked for leave. If you will let me have your four shares, I'll undertake to see that five or six taels be made to suffice."

Pao-ch'ai and the others without exception signified their acquiescence. They consequently proceeded to propose the themes and to fix upon the rhymes.

"I've long ago," smiled Li Wan, "settled them in my own mind, so tomorrow at the proper time you'll really know all about them."

At the conclusion of this remark, they indulged in another chat on

page 405

irrelevant topics; and this over, they came into old lady Chia's quarters.

Nothing of any note transpired during the course of that day. At an early hour on the morrow, Pao-yü—for he had been looking forward with such keen expectation to the coming event that he had found it impossible to have any sleep during the night,—jumped out of bed with the first blush of dawn. Upon raising his curtain and looking out, he observed that, albeit the doors and windows were as yet closed, a bright light shone on the lattice sufficient to dazzle the eyes, and his mind began at once to entertain misgivings, and to feel regrets, in the assurance that the weather had turned out fine, and that the sun had already risen. In a hurry, he simultaneously sprung to his feet, and flung the window-frame open, then casting a glance outside, from within the glass casement, he realised that it was not the reflection of the sun, but that of the snow, which had fallen throughout the night to the depth of over a foot, and that the heavens were still covered as if with twisted cotton and unravelled floss. Pao-yü got, by this time, into an unusual state of exhilaration. Hastily calling up the servants, and completing his ablutions, he robed himself in an egg-plant-coloured camlet, fox-fur lined pelisse; donned a short-sleeved falconry surtout ornamented with water dragons; tied a sash round his waist; threw over his shoulders a fine bamboo waterproof; covered his head with a golden rattan rain-hat; put on a pair of 'sha t'ang' wood clogs, and rushed out with precipitate step towards the direction of

the Lu Hsüeh Pavilion.

As soon as he sallied out of the gate of the courtyard, he gazed on all four quarters. No trace whatever of any other colour (but white) struck his eye. In the distance stood the green fir-trees and the kingfisherlike bamboos. They too looked, however, as if they were placed in a glass bowl.

Forthwith he wended his way down the slope and trudged along the foot of the hill. But the moment he turned the bend, he felt a whiff of cold fragrance come wafted into his nostrils. Turning his head, he espied ten and more red plum trees, over at Miao Yü's in the Lung Ts'ui monastery. They were red like very rouge. And, reflecting the white colour of the snow, they showed off their beauty to such an extraordinary degree as to present a most pleasing sight.

Pao-yü quickly stood still, and gazed, with all intentness, at the landscape for a time. But just as he was proceeding on his way, he caught sight of some one on the "Wasp waist" wooden bridge, advancing in his direction, with an umbrella in hand. It was the servant, despatched by Li Wan, to request lady Peng to go over.

On his arrival in the Lu Hsüeh pavilion, Pao-yü found the maids and matrons engaged in sweeping away the snow and opening a passage. This Lu

page 406

Hsüeh (Water-rush snow) pavilion was, we might explain, situated on a side hill, in the vicinity of a stream and spanned the rapids formed by it. The whole place consisted of several thatched roofs, mud walls, side fences, bamboo lattice windows and pushing windows, out of which fishing-lines could be conveniently dropped. On all four sides flourished one mass of reeds, which concealed the single path out of the pavilion. Turning and twisting, he penetrated on his way through the growth of reeds until he reached the spot where stretched the bamboo bridge leading to the Lotus Fragrance Arbour.

The moment the maids and matrons saw him approach with his

waterproof-wrapper thrown over his person and his rain-hat on his head, they with one voice laughed, "We were just remarking that what was lacking was a fisherman, and lo, now we've got everything that was wanted! The young ladies are coming after their breakfast; you're in too impatient a mood!"

At these words, Pao-yü had no help but to retrace his footsteps. As soon as he reached the Hsin Tang pavilion, he perceived T'an Ch'un, issuing from the Ch'iu Shuang Study, wrapped in a deep red woollen waterproof, and a 'Kuan Yin' hood on her head, supporting herself on the arm of a young maid. Behind her, followed a married woman, holding a glazed umbrella made of green satin.

Pao-yü knew very well that she was on her way to his grandmother's, so speedily halting by the side of the pavilion, he waited for her to come up. The two cousins then left the garden together, and betook themselves to the front part of the mansion. Pao-ch'in was at the time in the inner apartments, combing her hair, washing her hands and face and changing her apparel. Shortly, the whole number of girls arrived. "I feel peckish!" Pao-yü shouted; and again and again he tried to hurry the meal. It was with great impatience that he waited until the eatables could be laid on the table.

One of the dishes consisted of kid, boiled in cow's milk. "This is medicine for us, who are advanced in years," old lady Chia observed. "They're things that haven't seen the light! The pity is that you young people can't have any. There's some fresh venison to-day as an extra course, so you'd better wait and eat some of that!"

One and all expressed their readiness to wait. Pao-yü however could not delay having something to eat. Seizing a cup of tea, he soaked a bowlful of rice, to which he added some meat from a pheasant's leg, and gobbled it down in a scramble.

"I'm well aware," dowager lady Chia said, "that as you're up to something again to-day, you people have no mind even for your meal. Let them keep," she therefore cried, "that venison for their evening repast!"

"What an idea!" lady Feng promptly put in. "We'll have enough with

what remains of it.”

Shih Hsiang-yün thereupon consulted with Pao-yü. “As there's fresh venison,” she said, “wouldn't it be nice to ask for a haunch and take it into the garden and prepare it ourselves? We'll thus be able to sate our hunger, and have some fun as well.”

At this proposal, Pao-yü actually asked lady Feng to let them have a haunch, and he bade a matron carry it into the garden.

Presently, they all got up from table. After a time, they entered the garden and came in a body to the Lu Hsüeh pavilion to hear Li Wan give out the themes, and fix upon the rhymes. But Hsiang-yün and Pao-yü were the only two of whom nothing was seen.

“Those two,” Tai-yü observed, “can't get together! The moment they meet, how much trouble doesn't arise! They must surely have now gone to hatch their plans over that haunch of venison.”

These words were still on her lips when she saw 'sister-in-law' Li coming also to see what the noise was all about. “How is it,” she then inquired of Li Wan, “that that young fellow, with the jade, and that girl, with the golden unicorn round her neck, both of whom are so cleanly and tidy, and have besides ample to eat, are over there conferring about eating raw meat? There they are chatting, saying this and saying that; but I can't see how meat can be eaten raw!”

This remark much amused the party. “How dreadful!” they exclaimed, “Be quick and bring them both here!”

“All this fuss,” Tay-yü smiled, “is the work of that girl Yün. I'm not far off again in my surmises.”

Li Wan went out with precipitate step in search of the cousins. “If you two are bent upon eating raw meat,” she cried, “I'll send you over to our old senior's; you can do so there. What will I care then if you have a whole

deer raw and make yourselves ill over it? It won't be any business of mine. But it's snowing hard and it's bitterly cold, so be quick and go and write some verses for me and be off!"

"We're doing nothing of the kind," Pao-yü hastily rejoined. "We're going to eat some roasted meat."

"Well, that won't matter!" Li Wan observed. And seeing the old matrons bring an iron stove, prongs and a gridiron of iron wire, "Mind you don't cut your hands," Li Wan resumed, "for we won't have any crying!"

This remark concluded, she walked in.

Lady Feng had sent P'ing Erh from her quarters to announce that she was unable to come, as the issue of the customary annual money gave her just at present, plenty to keep her busy.

page 408

Hsiang-yün caught sight of P'ing Erh and would not let her go on her errand. But P'ing Erh too was fond of amusement, and had ever followed lady Feng everywhere she went, so, when she perceived what fun was to be got, and how merrily they joked and laughed, she felt impelled to take off her bracelets (and to join them). The trio then pressed round the fire; and P'ing Erh wanted to be the first to roast three pieces of venison to regale themselves with.

On the other side, Pao-ch'ai and Tai-yü had, even in ordinary times, seen enough of occasions like the present. They did not therefore think it anything out of the way; but Pao-ch'in and the other visitors, inclusive of 'sister-in-law' Li, were filled with intense wonder.

T'an Ch'un had, with the help of Li Wan, and her companions, succeeded by this time in choosing the subjects and rhymes. "Just smell that sweet fragrance," T'an Ch'un remarked. "One can smell it even here! I'm also going to taste some."

So speaking, she too went to look them up. But Li Wan likewise followed her out. "The guests are all assembled," she observed. "Haven't you

people had enough as yet?"

While Hsiang-yün munched what she had in her mouth, she replied to her question. "Whenever," she said, "I eat this sort of thing, I feel a craving for wine. It's only after I've had some that I shall be able to rhyme. Were it not for this venison, I would to-day have positively been quite unfit for any poetry." As she spoke, she discerned Pao-ch'in, standing and laughing opposite to her, in her duck-down garment.

"You idiot," Hsiang-yün laughingly cried, "come and have a mouthful to taste."

"It's too filthy!" Pao-ch'in replied smiling.

"You go and try it." Pao-ch'ai added with a laugh. "It's capital! Your cousin Lin is so very weak that she couldn't digest it, if she had any. Otherwise she too is very fond of this."

Upon hearing this, Pao-ch'in readily crossed over and put a piece in her mouth; and so good did she find it that she likewise started eating some of it.

In a little time, however, lady Feng sent a young maid to call P'ing Erh. "Miss Shih," P'ing Erh explained, "won't let me go. So just return ahead of me."

The maid thereupon took her leave; but shortly after they saw lady Feng arrive; she too with a wrapper over her shoulders.

"You're having," she smiled; "such dainties to eat, and don't you tell me?"

Saying this, she also drew near and began to eat.

page 409

"Where has this crowd of beggars turned up from?" Tai-yü put in with a laugh. "But never mind, never mind! Here's the Lu Hsüeh pavilion come in for this calamity to-day, and, as it happens, it's that chit Yün by whom it has been polluted! But I'll have a good cry for the Lu Hsüeh pavilion."

Hsiang-yün gave an ironical smile. "What do you know?" she exclaimed. "A genuine man of letters is naturally refined. But as for the whole lot of you, your poor and lofty notions are all a sham! You are most loathsome! We may now be frowzy and smelly, as we munch away lustily with our voracious appetites, but by and bye we'll prove as refined as scholars, as if we had cultured minds and polished tongues."

"If by and bye," Pao-ch'ai laughingly interposed, "the verses you compose are not worth anything, I'll tug out that meat you've eaten, and take some of these snow-buried weeds and stuff you up with. I'll thus put an end to this evil fortune!"

While bandying words, they finished eating. For a time, they busied themselves with washing their hands. But when P'ing Erh came to put on her bracelets, she found one missing. She looked in a confused manner, at one time to the left, at another to the right; now in front of her, and then behind her for ever so long, but not a single vestige of it was visible. One and all were therefore filled with utter astonishment.

"I know where this bracelet has gone to," lady Feng suggested smilingly. "But just you all go and attend to your poetry. We too can well dispense with searching for it, and repair to the front. Before three days are out, I'll wager that it turns up. What verses are you writing to-day?" continuing she went on to inquire. "Our worthy senior says that the end of the year is again nigh at hand, and that in the first moon some more conundrums will have to be devised to be affixed on lanterns, for the recreation of the whole family."

"Of course we'll have to write a few," they laughingly rejoined, upon hearing her remarks. "We forgot all about it. Let's hurry up now, and compose a few fine ones, so as to have them ready to enjoy some good fun in the first moon."

Speaking the while, they came in a body into the room with the earthen couches, where they found the cups, dishes and eatables already laid out in readiness. On the walls had been put up the themes, metre, and specimen verses. Pao-yü and Hsiang-yün hastened to examine what was written. They saw that they had to take for a theme something on the

present scenery and indite a stanza with antithetical pentameter lines; that the word 'hsiao,' second (in the book of metre), had been fixed upon as a rhyme; but that there was, below that, no mention, as yet, made of any precedence.

page 410

“I can't write verses very well,” Li Wan pleaded, “so all I'll do will be to devise three lines, and the one, who'll finish the task first, we'll have afterwards to pair them.”

“We should, after all,” Pao-ch'ai urged, “make some distinction with regard to order.”

But, reader, if you entertain any desire to know the sequel, peruse the particulars recorded in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER L.

*In the Lu Hsüeh pavilion, they vie with each other in pairing verses
on the scenery.*

*In the Nuan Hsiang village, they compose, in beautiful style, riddles for
the spring lanterns.*

But to continue. "We should, after all," Pao-ch'ai suggested, "make some distinction as to order. Let me write out what's needful."

After uttering this proposal, she urged every one to draw lots and determine the precedence. The first one to draw was Li Wan. After her, a list of the respective names was made in the order in which they came out.

"Well, in that case," lady Feng rejoined, "I'll also give a top line."

The whole party laughed in chorus. "It will be ever so much better like this," they said.

Pao-ch'ai supplied above 'the old labourer of Tao Hsiang' the word 'Feng,' whereupon Li Wan went on to explain the theme to her.

"You musn't poke fun at me!" lady Feng smiled, after considerable reflection. "I've only managed to get a coarse line. It consists of five words. As for the rest, I have no idea how to manage them."

"The coarser the language, the better it is," one and all laughed. "Out with it! You can then go and attend to your legitimate business!"

"I fancy," lady Feng observed, "that when it snows there's bound to be northerly wind, for last night I heard the wind blow from the north the whole night long. I've got a line, it's:

"The whole night long the northern wind was high;"

"but whether it will do or not, I am not going to worry my mind about it."

One and all, upon hearing this, exchanged looks. “This line is, it's true, coarse,” they smiled, “and gives no insight into what comes below, but it's just the kind of opening that would be used by such as understand versification. It's not only good, but it will afford to those, who come after you, inexhaustible scope for writing. In fact, this line will take the lead, so 'old

page 411

labourer of Tao Hsiang' be quick and indite some more to tag on below.”

Lady Feng, 'sister-in-law' Li, and P'ing Erh had then another couple of glasses, after which each went her own way. During this while Li Wan wrote down:

The whole night long the northern wind was high;

and then she herself subjoined the antithetical couplet:

*The door I ope, and lo the flakes of snow are still toss'd by the
wind,
And drop into the slush. Oh, what a pity they're so purely white!*

Hsiang Ling recited:

*All o'er the ground is spread, alas, this bright, refulgent gem;
But with an aim; for it is meant dry herbage to revive.*

T'an Ch'un said:

*Without design the dying sprouts of grain it nutrifies.
But in the villages the price of mellow wine doth rise.*

Li Ch'i added:

*In a good year, grain in the house is plentiful.
The bulrush moves and the ash issues from the tube.*

Li Wen continued:

*What time spring comes the handle of the Dipper turns.
The bleaky hills have long ago their verdure lost.*

Chou-yen proceeded:

*On a frost-covered stream, no tide can ever rise.
Easy the snow hangs on the sparse-leaved willow twigs.*

Hsiang-yün pursued:

*Hard 'tis for snow to pile on broken plantain leaves.
The coal, musk-scented, burns in the precious tripod.*

Pao-ch'in recited:

*Th' embroidered sleeve enwraps the golden sable in its folds.
The snow transcends the mirror by the window in lustre.*

Pao-yü suggested:

*The fragrant pepper clings unto the wall.
The side wind still in whistling gusts doth blow.*

Tai-yü added:

*A quiet dream becomes a cheerless thing.
Where is the fife with plum bloom painted on?*

Pao-ch'ai continued:

*In whose household is there a flute made of green jade?
The fish fears lest the earth from its axis might drop.*

“I'll go and see that the wine is warm for you people,” Li Wan smiled.

But when Pao-ch'ai told Pao-ch'in to connect some lines, she caught sight of Hsiang-yün rise to her feet and put in:

*What time the dragon wages war, the clouds dispel.
Back to the wild shore turns the man with single scull.*

Pao-ch'in thereupon again appended the couplet:

*The old man hums his lines, and with his whip he points at the 'Pa'
bridge.
Fur coats are, out of pity, on the troops at the frontiers bestowed.*

page 412

But would Hsiang-yün allow any one to have a say? The others could not besides come up to her in quickness of wits so that, while their eyes were fixed on her, she with eyebrows uplifted and figure outstretched proceeded to say:

*More cotton coats confer, for bear in memory th' imperial serfs!
The rugged barbarous lands are (on account of snow) with dangers
fraught.*

Pao-ch'ai praised the verses again and again, and next contributed the distich:

*The twigs and branches live in fear of being tossed about.
With what whiteness and feath'ry step the flakes of snow descend!*

Tai-yü eagerly subjoined the lines:

*The snow as nimbly falls as moves the waist of the 'Sui' man when
brandishing the sword.
The tender leaves of tea, so acrid to the taste, have just been newly
brewed and tried.*

As she recited this couplet, she gave Pao-yü a shove and urged him to go on. Pao-yü was, at the moment, enjoying the intense pleasure of watching the three girls Pao-ch'ai, Pao-ch'in and Tai-yü make a joint onslaught on Hsiang-yün, so that he had of course not given his mind to tagging any antithetical verses. But when he now felt Tai-yü push him he at length chimed in with:

*The fir is the sole tree which is decreed for ever to subsist.
The wild goose follows in the mud the prints and traces of its steps.*

Pao-ch'in took up the clue, adding:

*In the forest, the axe of the woodcutter may betimes be heard.
With (snow) covered contours, a thousand peaks their heads jut in the
air.*

Hsiang-yün with alacrity annexed the verses:

*The whole way tortuous winds like a coiled snake.
The flowers have felt the cold and ceased to bud.*

Pao-ch'ai and her companions again with one voice eulogised their fine diction.

T'an Ch'un then continued:

*Could e'er the beauteous snow dread the nipping of frost?
In the deep court the shivering birds are startled by its fall.*

Hsiang-yün happened to be feeling thirsty and was hurriedly swallowing a cup of tea, when her turn was at once snatched by Chou-yen, who gave out the lines,

*On the bare mountain wails the old man Hsiao.
The snow covers the steps, both high and low.*

Hsiang-yün immediately put away the tea-cup and added:

*On the pond's surface, it allows itself to float.
At the first blush of dawn with effulgence it shines.*

Tai-yü recited with alacrity the couplet:

*In confused flakes, it ceaseless falls the whole night long.
Troth one forgets that it implies three feet of cold.*

Hsiang-yün hastened to smilingly interpose with the distich:

Its auspicious descent dispels the Emperor's grief.

page 413

There lies one frozen-stiff, but who asks him a word?

Pao-ch'in too speedily put on a smile and added:

*Glad is the proud wayfarer when he's pressed to drink.
Snapped is the weaving belt in the heavenly machine.*

Hsiang-yün once again eagerly quoted the line:

In the seaside market is lost a silk kerchief.

But Lin Tai-yü would not let her continue, and taking up the thread, she forthwith said:

With quiet silence, it enshrouds the raised kiosque.

Hsiang-yün vehemently gave the antithetical verse:

The utter poor clings to his pannier and his bowl.

Pao-ch'in too would not give in as a favour to any one, so hastily she exclaimed:

The water meant to brew the tea with gently bubbles up.

Hsiang-yün saw how excited they were getting and she thought it naturally great fun. Laughing, she eagerly gave out:

When wine is boiled with leaves 'tis not easy to burn.

Tai-yü also smiled while suggesting:

The broom, with which the bonze sweepeth the hill, is sunk in snow.

Pao-ch'in too smilingly cried:

The young lad takes away the lute interred in snow.

Hsiang-yün laughed to such a degree that she was bent in two; and she muttered a line with such rapidity that one and all inquired of her: "What are you, after all, saying?"

In the stone tower leisurely sleeps the stork.

Hsiang-yün repeated.

Tai-yü clasped her breast so convulsed was she with laughter. With loud voice she bawled out:

Th' embroidered carpet warms the affectionate cat.

Pao-ch'in quickly, again laughingly, exclaimed:

Inside Selene's cave lo, roll the silvery waves.

Hsiang-yün added, with eager haste:

Within the city walls at eve was hid a purple flag.

Tai-yü with alacrity continued with a smile:

The fragrance sweet, which penetrates into the plums, is good to eat.

Pao-ch'ai smiled. "What a fine line!" she ejaculated; after which, she hastened to complete the couplet by saying:

The drops from the bamboo are meet, when one is drunk, to mix with wine.

Pao-ch'in likewise made haste to add:

Betimes, the hymeneal girdle it moistens.

Hsiang-yün eagerly paired it with:

Of, it freezeth on the kingfisher shoes.

Tai-yü once more exclaimed with vehemence:

page 414

No wind doth blow, but yet there is a rush.

Pao-ch'in promptly also smiled, and strung on:

No rain lo falls, but still a patter's heard.

Hsiang-yün was leaning over, indulging in such merriment that she was quite doubled up in two. But everybody else had realised that the trio was struggling for mastery, so without attempting to versify they kept their gaze fixed on them and gave way to laughter.

Tai-yü gave her another push to try and induce her to go on. "Do you also sometimes come to your wits' ends; and run to the end of your tether?" she went on to say. "I'd like to see what other stuff and nonsense you can come out with!"

Hsiang-yün however simply fell forward on Pao-ch'ai's lap and laughed incessantly.

"If you've got any gumption about you," Pao-ch'ai exclaimed, shoving her up, "take the second rhymes under 'Hsiao' and exhaust them all, and I'll then bend the knee to you."

"It isn't as if I were writing verses," Hsiang-yün laughed rising to her feet; "it's really as if I were fighting for very life."

"It's for you to come out with something," they all cried with a laugh.

T'an Ch'un had long ago determined in her mind that there could be no other antithetical sentences that she herself could possibly propose, and she forthwith set to work to copy out the verses. But as she passed the

remark: "They haven't as yet been brought to a proper close," Li Wen took up the clue, as soon as she caught her words, and added the sentiment:

My wish is to record this morning's fun.

Li Ch'i then suggested as a finale the line:

By these verses, I'd fain sing th' Emperor's praise.

"That's enough, that will do!" Li Wan cried. "The rhymes haven't, I admit, been exhausted, but any outside words you might introduce, will, if used in a forced sense, be worth nothing at all."

While continuing their arguments, the various inmates drew near and kept up a searching criticism for a time.

Hsiang-yün was found to be the one among them, who had devised the largest number of lines.

"This is mainly due," they unanimously laughed, "to the virtue of that piece of venison!"

"Let's review them line by line as they come," Li Wan smilingly proposed, "but yet as if they formed one continuous poem. Here's Pao-yü last again!"

"I haven't, the fact is, the knack of pairing sentences," Pao-yü rejoined with a smile. "You'd better therefore make some allowance for me!"

page 415

"There's no such thing as making allowances for you in meeting after meeting," Li Wan demurred laughing, "that you should again after that give out the rhymes in a reckless manner, waste your time and not show yourself able to put two lines together. You must absolutely bear a penalty today. I just caught a glimpse of the red plum in the Lung Ts'ui monastery; and how charming it is! I meant to have plucked a twig to put in a vase, but so loathsome is the way in which Miao Yü goes on, that I

won't have anything to do with her! But we'll punish him by making him, for the sake of fun, fetch a twig for us to put in water.”

“This penalty,” they shouted with one accord, “is both excellent as well as pleasant.”

Pao-yü himself was no less delighted to carry it into execution, so signifying his readiness to comply with their wishes, he felt desirous to be off at once.

“It's exceedingly cold outside,” Hsiang-yün and Tai-yü simultaneously remarked, “so have a glass of warm wine before you go.”

Hsiang-yün speedily took up the kettle, and Tai-yü handed him a large cup, filled to the very brim.

“Now swallow the wine we give you,” Hsiang-yün smiled. “And if you don't bring any plum blossom, we'll inflict a double penalty.”

Pao-yü gulped down hurry-scurry the whole contents of the cup and started on his errand in the face of the snow.

“Follow him carefully.” Li Wan enjoined the servants.

Tai-yü, however, hastened to interfere and make her desist. “There's no such need,” she cried. “Were any one to go with him, he'll contrariwise not get the flowers.”

Li Wan nodded her head. “Yes!” she assented, and then went on to direct a waiting-maid to bring a vase, in the shape of a beautiful girl with high shoulders, to fill it with water, and get it ready to put the plum blossom in. “And when he comes back,” she felt induced to add, “we must recite verses on the red plum.”

“I'll indite a stanza in advance,” eagerly exclaimed Hsiang-yün.

“We'll on no account let you indite any more to-day,” Pao-ch'ai laughed. “You beat every one of us hollow; so if we sit with idle hands, there won't be any fun. But by and bye we'll fine Pao-yü; and, as he says that he

can't pair antithetical lines, we'll now make him compose a stanza himself."

"This is a capital idea!" Tai-yü smiled. "But I've got another proposal. As the lines just paired are not sufficient, won't it be well to pick out those who've put together the fewest distiches, and make them versify on the red plum blossom?"

page 416

"An excellent proposal!" Pao-ch'ai ventured laughing. "The three girls Hsing Chou-yen, Li Wen and Li Ch'i, failed just now to do justice to their talents; besides they are visitors; and as Ch'in Erh, P'in Erh and Yün Erh got the best of us by a good deal, it's only right that none of us should compose any more, and that that trio should only do so."

"Ch'i Erh," Li Wan thereupon retorted, "is also not a very good hand at verses, let therefore cousin Ch'in have a try!"

Pao-ch'ai had no alternative but to express her acquiescence.

"Let the three words 'red plum blossom,'" she then suggested, "be used for rhymes; and let each person compose an heptameter stanza. Cousin Hsing to indite on the word 'red;' your elder cousin Li on 'plum;' and Ch'in Erh on 'blossom.'"

"If you let Pao-yü off," Li Wan interposed, "I won't have it!"

"I've got a capital theme," Hsiung-yün eagerly remarked, "so let's make him write some!"

"What theme is it?" one and all inquired.

"If we made him," Hsiang-yün resumed, "versify on: 'In search of Miao Yü to beg for red plum blossom,' won't it be full of fun?"

"That will be full of zest," the party exclaimed, upon hearing the theme propounded by her. But hardly had they given expression to their approval than they perceived Pao-yü come in, beaming with smiles and

glee, and holding with both hands a branch of red plum blossom. The maids hurriedly relieved him of his burden and put the branch in the vase, and the inmates present came over in a body to feast their eyes on it.

“Well, may you look at it now,” Pao-yü smiled. “You've no idea what an amount of trouble it has cost me!”

As he uttered these words, T'an Ch'un handed him at once another cup of warm wine; and the maids approached, and took his wrapper and hat, and shook off the snow.

But the servant-girls attached to their respective quarters then brought them over extra articles of clothing. Hsi Jen, in like manner, despatched a domestic with a pelisse, the worse for wear, lined with fur from foxes' ribs, so Li Wan, having directed a servant to fill a plate with steamed large taros, and to make up two dishes with red-skinned oranges, yellow coolie oranges, olives and other like things, bade some one take them over to Hsi Jen.

Hsiang-yün also communicated to Pao-yü the subject for verses they had decided upon a short while back. But she likewise urged Pao-yü to be quick and accomplish his task.

“Dear senior cousin, dear junior cousin,” pleaded Pao-yü, “let me use my own rhymes. Don't bind me down to any.”

page 417

“Go on as you like,” they replied with one consent.

But conversing the while, they passed the plum blossom under inspection.

This bough of plum blossom was, in fact, only two feet in height; but from the side projected a branch, crosswise, about two or three feet in length the small twigs and stalks on which resembled coiled dragons, or crouching earthworms; and were either single and trimmed pencil-like, or thick and bushy grove-like. Indeed, their appearance was as if the blossom spurted cosmetic. This fragrance put orchids to the blush. So

every one present contributed her quota of praise.

Chou-yen, Li Wen and Pao-ch'in had, little though it was expected, all three already finished their lines and each copied them out for herself, so the company began to peruse their compositions, subjoined below, in the order of the three words: 'red plum blossom.'

Verses to the red plum blossom by Hsing Chou-yen.

The peach tree has not donned its fragrance yet, the almond is not red.

What time it strikes the cold, it's first joyful to smile at the east wind.

When its spirit to the Yü Ling hath flown, 'tis hard to say 'tis spring.

The russet clouds across the 'Lo Fu' lie, so e'en to dreams it's closed.

The green petals add grace to a coiffure, when painted candles burn.

The simple elf when primed with wine doth the waning rainbow bestride.

Does its appearance speak of a colour of ordinary run?

Both dark and light fall of their own free will into the ice and snow.

The next was the production of Li Wen, and its burden was:

To write on the white plum I'm not disposed, but I'll write on the red.

Proud of its beauteous charms, 'tis first to meet the opening drunken eye.

On its frost-nipped face are marks; and these consist wholly of blood.

Its heart is sore, but no anger it knows; to ashes too it turns.

By some mistake a pill (a fairy) takes and quits her real frame.

From the fairyland pool she secret drops, and casts off her old form.

In spring, both north and south of the river, with splendour it doth bloom.

Send word to bees and butterflies that they need not give way to fears!

This stanza came next from the pen of Hsüeh Pao-ch'in,

*Far distant do the branches grow; but how beautiful the blossom
blooms!*

*The maidens try with profuse show to compete in their spring
head-dress.*

No snow remains on the vacant pavilion and the tortuous rails.

Upon the running stream and desolate hills descend the russet clouds.

*When cold prevails one can in a still dream follow the lass-blown
fife.*

*The wandering elf roweth in fragrant spring, the boat in the red
stream.*

In a previous existence, it must surely have been of fairy form.

No doubt need 'gain arise as to its beauty differing from then.

The perusal over, they spent some time in heaping, smiling the while, eulogiums upon the compositions. And they pointed at the last stanza as the best of the lot; which made it evident to Pao-yü that Pao-ch'in, albeit the youngest in years, was, on the other hand, the quickest in wits.

Tai-yü and Hsiang-yün then filled up a small cup with wine and simultaneously offered their congratulations to Pao-ch'in.

page 418

“Each of the three stanzas has its beauty,” Pao-ch'ai remarked, a smile playing round her lips. “You two have daily made a fool of me, and are you now going to fool her also?”

“Have you got yours ready?” Li Wan went on to inquire of Pao-yü.

“I'd got them,” Pao-yü promptly answered, “but the moment I read their three stanzas, I once more became so nervous that they quite slipped from my mind. But let me think again.”

Hsiang-yün, at this reply, fetched a copper poker, and, while beating on the hand-stove, she laughingly said: “I shall go on tattooing. Now mind if when the drumming ceases, you haven't accomplished your task, you'll have to bear another fine.”

“I've already got them!” Pao-yü rejoined, smilingly.

Tai-yü then picked up a pencil. "Recite them," she smiled, "and I'll write them down."

Hsiang-yün beat one stroke (on the stove). "The first tattoo is over," she laughed.

"I'm ready," Pao-yü smiled. "Go on writing."

At this, they heard him recite:

The wine bottle is not opened, the line is not put into shape.

Tai-yü noted it down, and shaking her head, "They begin very smoothly," she said, as she smiled.

"Be quick!" Hsiang-yün again urged.

Pao-yü laughingly continued:

To fairyland I speed to seek for spring, and the twelfth moon to find

Tai-yü and Hsiang-yün both nodded. "It's rather good," they smiled. Pao-yü resumed, saying:

*I will not beg the high god for a bottle of the (healing) dew,
But pray Shuang O to give me some plum bloom beyond the rails.*

Tai-yü jotted the lines down and wagged her head to and fro. "They're ingenious, that's all," she observed.

Hsiang-yün gave another rap with her hand.

Pao-yü thereupon smilingly added:

*I come into the world and, in the cold, I pick out some red snow.
I leave the dusty sphere and speed to pluck the fragrant purple
clouds.
I bring a jagged branch, but who in pity sings my shoulders thin?*

On my clothes still sticketh the moss from yon Buddhistic court.

As soon as Tai-yü had done writing, Hsiang-yün and the rest of the company began to discuss the merits of the verses; but they then saw several servant-maids rush in, shouting: "Our venerable mistress has come."

One and all hurried out with all despatch to meet her. "How comes it that she is in such good cheer?" every one also laughed.

Speaking the while, they discerned, at a great distance, their grandmother

page 419

Chia seated, enveloped in a capacious wrapper, and rolled up in a warm hood lined with squirrel fur, in a small bamboo sedan-chair with an open green silk glazed umbrella in her hand. Yüan Yang, Hu Po and some other girls, mustering in all five or six, held each an umbrella and pressed round the chair, as they advanced.

Li Wan and her companions went up to them with hasty step; but dowager lady Chia directed the servants to make them stop; explaining that it would be quite enough if they stood where they were.

On her approach, old lady Chia smiled. "I've given," she observed, "your Madame Wang and that girl Feng the slip and come. What deep snow covers the ground! For me, I'm seated in this, so it doesn't matter; but you mustn't let those ladies trudge in the snow."

The various followers rushed forward to take her wrapper and to support her, and as they did so, they expressed their acquiescence.

As soon as she got indoors old lady Chia was the first to exclaim with a beaming face: "What beautiful plum blossom! You well know how to make merry; but I too won't let you off!"

But in the course of her remarks, Li Wan quickly gave orders to a domestic to fetch a large wolf skin rug, and to spread it in the centre, so

dowager lady Chia made herself comfortable on it. "Just go on as before with your romping and joking, drinking and eating," she then laughed. "As the days are so short, I did not venture to have a midday siesta. After therefore playing at dominoes for a time, I bethought myself of you people, and likewise came to join the fun."

Li Wan soon also presented her a hand-stove, while T'an Ch'un brought an extra set of cups and chopsticks, and filling with her own hands, a cup with warm wine, she handed it to her grandmother Chia. Old lady Chia swallowed a sip. "What's there in that dish?" she afterwards inquired.

The various inmates hurriedly carried it over to her, and explained that 'they were pickled quails.'

"These won't hurt me," dowager lady Chia said, "so cut off a piece of the leg and give it to me."

"Yes!" promptly acquiesced Li Wan, and asking for water, she washed her hands, and then came in person to carve the quail.

"Sit down again," dowager lady Chia said, pressing them, "and go on with your chatting and laughing. Let me hear you, and feel happy. Just you also seat yourself," continuing, she remarked to Li Wan, "and behave as if I were not here. If you do so, well and good. Otherwise, I shall take myself off at once."

But it was only when they heard how persistent she was in her solicitations

page 420

that they all resumed the seats, which accorded with their age, with the exception of Li Wan, who moved to the furthest side.

"What were you playing at?" old lady Chia thereupon asked.

"We were writing verses," answered the whole party.

"Wouldn't it be well for those who are up to poetry," dowager lady Chia

suggested; "to devise a few puns for lanterns so that the whole lot of us should be able to have some fun in the first moon?"

With one voice, they expressed their approval. But after they had jested for a little time; "It's damp in here," old lady Chia said, "so don't you sit long, for mind you might be catching cold. Where it's nice and warm is in your cousin Quarta's over there, so let's all go and see how she is getting on with her painting, and whether it will be ready or not by the end of the year."

"How could it be completed by the close of the year?" they smiled. "She could only, we fancy, get it ready by the dragon boat festival next year."

"This is dreadful!" old lady Chia exclaimed. "Why, she has really wasted more labour on it than would have been actually required to lay out this garden!"

With these words still on her lips, she ensconced herself again in the bamboo sedan, and closed in or followed by the whole company, she repaired to the Lotus Fragrance Arbour, where they got into a narrow passage, flanked on the east as well as the west, with doors from which they could cross the street. Over these doorways on the inside as well as outside were inserted alike tablets made of stone. The door they went in by, on this occasion, lay on the west. On the tablet facing outwards, were cut out the two words representing: 'Penetrating into the clouds.' On that inside, were engraved the two characters meaning: 'crossing to the moon.' On their arrival at the hall, they walked in by the main entrance, which looked towards the south. Dowager lady Chia then alighted from her chair. Hsi Ch'un had already made her appearance out of doors to welcome her, so taking the inner covered passage, they passed over to the other side and reached Hsi Ch'un's bedroom; on the door posts of which figured the three words: 'Warm fragrance isle.' Several servants were at once at hand; and no sooner had they raised the red woollen portiere, than a soft fragrance wafted itself into their faces. The various inmates stepped into the room. Old lady Chia, however, did not take a seat, but simply inquired where the painting was.

"The weather is so bitterly cold," Hsi Ch'un consequently explained smiling, "that the glue, whose property is mainly to coagulate, cannot be

moistened, so I feared that, were I to have gone on with the painting, it wouldn't be worth looking at; and I therefore put it away.”

“I must have it by the close of the year,” dowager lady Chia laughed,

page 421

“so don't idle your time away. Produce it at once and go on painting for me, as quick as you can.”

But scarcely had she concluded her remark, than she unexpectedly perceived lady Feng arrive, smirking and laughing, with a purple pelisse, lined with deer fur, thrown over her shoulders. “Venerable senior!” she shouted, “You don't even so much as let any one know to-day, but sneak over stealthily. I've had a good hunt for you!”

When old lady Chia saw her join them, she felt filled with delight. “I was afraid,” she rejoined, “that you'd be feeling cold. That's why, I didn't allow any one to tell you. You're really as sharp as a spirit to have, at last, been able to trace my whereabouts! But according to strict etiquette, you shouldn't show filial piety to such a degree!”

“Is it out of any idea of filial piety that I came after you? Not at all!” lady Feng added with a laugh. “But when I got to your place, worthy senior, I found everything so quiet that not even the caw of a crow could be heard, and when I asked the young maids where you'd gone, they wouldn't let me come and search in the garden. So I began to give way to surmises. Suddenly also arrived two or three nuns; and then, at length, I jumped at the conclusion that these women must have come to bring their yearly prayers, or to ask for their annual or incense allowance, and that, with the amount of things you also, venerable ancestor, have to do for the end of the year, you had for certain got out of the way of your debts. Speedily therefore I inquired of the nuns what it was that brought them there, and, for a fact, there was no mistake in my surmises. So promptly issuing the annual allowances to them, I now come to report to you, worthy senior, that your creditors have gone, and that there's no need for you to skulk away. But I've had some tender pheasant prepared; so please come, and have your evening meal; for if you delay any longer, it will get quite stale.”

As she spoke, everybody burst out laughing. But lady Feng did not allow any time to dowager lady Chia to pass any observations, but forthwith directed the servants to bring the chair over. Old lady Chia then smilingly laid hold of lady Feng's hand and got again into her chair; but she took along with her the whole company of relatives for a chat and a laugh.

Upon issuing out of the gate on the east side of the narrow passage, the four quarters presented to their gaze the appearance of being adorned with powder, and inlaid with silver. Unawares, they caught sight of Pao-ch'in, in a duck down cloak, waiting at a distance at the back of the hill slope; while behind her stood a maid, holding a vase full of red plum blossoms.

“Strange enough,” they all exclaimed laughingly, “two of us were missing! But she's waiting over there. She's also been after some plum-blossom.”

page 422

“Just look,” dowager lady Chia eagerly cried out joyfully, “that human creature has been put there to match with the snow-covered hill! But with that costume, and the plum-blossom at the back of her, to what does she bear a resemblance?”

“She resembles,” one and all smiled, “Chou Shih-ch'ou's beautiful snow picture, suspended in your apartments, venerable ancestor.”

“Is there in that picture any such costume?” Old lady Chia demurred, nodding her head and smiling. “What's more the persons represented in it could never be so pretty!”

Hardly had this remark dropped from her mouth, than she discerned some one else, clad in a deep red woollen cloak, appear to view at the back of Pao-ch'in. “What other girl is that?” dowager lady Chia asked.

“We girls are all here.” they laughingly answered. “That's Pao-yü.”

“My eyes,” old lady Chia smiled, “are getting dimmer and dimmer!”

So saying, they drew near, and of course, they turned out to be Pao-yü

and Pao-ch'in.

"I've just been again to the Lung Ts'ui monastery," Pao-yü smiled to Pao-ch'ai, Tai-yü and his other cousins, "and Miao Yü gave me for each of you a twig of plum blossom. I've already sent a servant to take them over."

"Many thanks for the trouble you've been put to," they, with one voice, replied.

But speaking the while, they sallied out of the garden gate, and repaired to their grandmother Chia's suite of apartments. Their meal over, they joined in a further chat and laugh, when unexpectedly they saw Mrs. Hsüeh also arrive.

"With all this snow," she observed, "I haven't been over the whole day to see how you, venerable senior, were getting on. Your ladyship couldn't have been in a good sort of mood to-day, for you should have gone and seen the snow."

"How not in a good mood?" old lady Chia exclaimed. "I went and looked up these young ladies and had a romp with them for a time."

"Last night," Mrs. Hsüeh smiled, "I was thinking of getting from our Madame Wang to-day the loan of the garden for the nonce and spreading two tables with our mean wine, and inviting you, worthy senior, to enjoy the snow; but as I saw that you were having a rest, and I heard, at an early hour, that Pao-yü had said that you were not in a joyful frame of mind, I did not, in consequence, presume to come and disturb you to-day. But had I known sooner the real state of affairs, I would have felt it my bounden duty to have asked you round."

"This is," rejoined dowager lady Chia with a smile, "only the first fall

page 423

of snow in the tenth moon. We'll have, after this, plenty of snowy days so there will be ample time to put your ladyship to wasteful expense."

“Verily in that case,” Mrs. Hsüeh laughingly added, “my filial intentions may well be looked upon as having been accomplished.”

“Mrs. Hsüeh,” interposed lady Feng smiling, “mind you don't forget it! But you might as well weigh fifty taels this very moment, and hand them over to me to keep, until the first fall of snow, when I can get everything ready for the banquet. In this way, you will neither have anything to bother you, aunt, nor will you have a chance of forgetting.”

“Well, since that be so,” old lady Chia remarked with a laugh, “your ladyship had better give her fifty taels, and I'll share it with her; each one of us taking twenty-five taels; and on any day it might snow, I'll pretend I don't feel in proper trim and let it slip by. You'll have thus still less occasion to trouble yourself, and I and lady Feng will reap a substantial benefit.”

Lady Feng clapped her hands. “An excellent idea,” she laughed. “This quite falls in with my views.”

The whole company were much amused.

“Pshaw!” dowager lady Chia laughingly ejaculated. “You barefaced thing! (You're like a snake, which) avails itself of the rod, with which it is being beaten, to crawl up (and do harm)! You don't try to convince us that it properly devolves upon us, as Mrs. Hsüeh is our guest and receives such poor treatment in our household, to invite her; for with what right could we subject her ladyship to any reckless outlay? but you have the impudence, of impressing upon our minds to insist upon the payment, in advance, of fifty taels! Are you really not thoroughly ashamed of yourself?”

“Oh, worthy senior,” lady Feng laughed, “you're most sharp-sighted! You try to see whether Mrs. Hsüeh will be soft enough to produce fifty taels for you to share with me, but fancying now that it's of no avail, you turn round and begin to rate me by coming out with all these grand words! I won't however take any money from you, Mrs. Hsüeh. I'll, in fact, contribute some on your ladyship's account, and when I get the banquet ready and invite you, venerable ancestor, to come and partake of it, I'll also wrap fifty taels in a piece of paper, and dutifully present them to you, as a penalty for my officious interference in matters that don't concern

me. Will this be all right or not?"

Before these words were brought to a close, the various inmates were so convulsed with hearty laughter that they reeled over on the stove-couch.

Dowager lady Chia then went on to explain how much nicer Pao-ch'in was, plucking plum blossom in the snow, than the very picture itself; and she next minutely inquired what the year, moon, day and hour of her birth were, and how things were getting on in her home.

page 424

Mrs. Hsüeh conjectured that the object she had in mind was, in all probability, to seek a partner for her. In the secret recesses of her heart, Mrs. Hsüeh on this account fell in also with her views. (Pao-ch'in) had, however, already been promised in marriage to the Mei family. But as dowager lady Chia had made, as yet, no open allusion to her intentions, (Mrs. Hsüeh) did not think it nice on her part to come out with any definite statement, and she accordingly observed to old lady Chia in a vague sort of way: "What a pity it is that this girl should have had so little good fortune as to lose her father the year before last. But ever since her youth up, she has seen much of the world, for she has been with her parent to every place of note. Her father was a man fond of pleasure; and as he had business in every direction, he took his family along with him. After tarrying in this province for a whole year, he would next year again go to that province, and spend half a year roaming about it everywhere. Hence it is that he had visited five or six tenths of the whole empire. The other year, when they were here, he engaged her to the son of the Hanlin Mei. But, as it happened, her father died the year after, and here is her mother too now ailing from a superfluity of phlegm."

Lady Feng gave her no time to complete what she meant to say. "Hai!" she exclaimed, stamping her foot. "What you say isn't opportune! I was about to act as a go-between. But is she too already engaged?"

"For whom did you mean to act as go-between?" old lady Chia smiled.

"My dear ancestor," lady Feng remarked, "don't concern yourself about it! I had determined in my mind that those two would make a suitable

match. But as she has now long ago been promised to some one, it would be of no use, were I even to speak out. Isn't it better that I should hold my peace, and drop the whole thing?"

Dowager lady Chia herself was cognizant of lady Feng's purpose, so upon hearing that she already had a suitor, she at once desisted from making any further reference to the subject. The whole company then continued another chat on irrelevant matters for a time, after which, they broke up.

Nothing of any interest transpired the whole night. The next day, the snowy weather had cleared up. After breakfast, her grandmother Chia again pressed Hsi Ch'un. "You should go on," she said, "with your painting, irrespective of cold or heat. If you can't absolutely finish it by the end of the year, it won't much matter! The main thing is that you must at once introduce in it Ch'in Erh and the maid with the plum blossom, as we saw them yesterday, in strict accordance with the original and without the least discrepancy of so much as a stroke."

Hsi Ch'un listened to her and felt it her duty to signify her assent, in

page 425

spite of the task being no easy one for her to execute.

After a time, a number of her relatives came, in a body, to watch the progress of the painting. But they discovered Hsi Ch'un plunged in a reverie. "Let's leave her alone," Li Wan smilingly observed to them all, "to proceed with her meditations; we can meanwhile have a chat among ourselves. Yesterday our worthy senior bade us devise a few lantern-conundrums, so when we got home, I and Ch'i Erh and Wen Erh did not turn in (but set to work). I composed a couple on the Four Books; but those two girls also managed to put together another pair of them."

"We should hear what they're like," they laughingly exclaimed in chorus, when they heard what they had done. "Tell them to us first, and let's have a guess!"

"The goddess of mercy has not been handed down by any ancestors."

Li Ch'i smiled. "This refers to a passage in the Four Books."

"In one's conduct, one must press towards the highest benevolence."

Hsiang-yün quickly interposed; taking up the thread of the conversation.

"You should ponder over the meaning of the three words implying: 'handed down by ancestors'," Pao-ch'ai smiled, "before you venture a guess."

"Think again!" Li Wan urged with a smile.

"I've guessed it!" Tai-yü smiled. "It's:

"If, notwithstanding all that benevolence, there be no outward visible sign..."

"That's the line," one and all unanimously exclaimed with a laugh.

"The whole pond is covered with rush."

"Now find the name of the rush?" Li Wan proceeded.

"This must certainly be the cat-tail rush!" hastily again replied Hsiang-yün. "Can this not be right?"

"You've succeeded in guessing it," Li Wan smiled. "Li Wen's is:

*"Cold runs the stream along the stones;
'bearing on the name of a man of old."*

"Can it be Shan T'ao?" T'an Ch'un smilingly asked.

"It is!" answered Li Wan.

"Ch'i Erh's is the character 'Yung' (glow-worm). It refers to a single word," Li Wan resumed.

The party endeavoured for a long time to hit upon the solution.

“The meaning of this is certainly deep,” Pao-ch'in put in. “I wonder whether it's the character, 'hua,' (flower) in the combination, 'hua ts'ao, (vegetation).”

“That's just it!” Li Ch'i smiled.

“What has a glow-worm to do with flowers?” one and all observed.

“It's capital!” Tai-yü ventured with a smile. “Isn't a glow-worm transformed from plants?”

page 426

The company grasped the sense; and, laughing the while, they, with one consent, shouted out, “splendid!”

“All these are, I admit, good,” Pao-ch'ai remarked, “but they won't suit our venerable senior's taste. Won't it be better therefore to compose a few on some simple objects; some which all of us, whether polished or unpolished, may be able to enjoy?”

“Yes,” they all replied, “we should also think of some simple ones on ordinary objects.”

“I've devised one on the 'Tien Chiang Ch'un' metre,” Hsiang-yün pursued, after some reflection. “But it's really on an ordinary object. So try and guess it.”

Saying this, she forthwith went on to recite:

*The creeks and valleys it leaves;
Travelling the world, it performs.
In truth how funny it is!
But renown and gain are still vain;
Ever hard behind it is its fate.*

A conundrum.

None of those present could fathom what it could be. After protracted thought, some made a guess, by saying it was a bonze. Others maintained that it was a Taoist priest. Others again divined that it was a marionette.

“All your guesses are wrong,” Pao-yü chimed in, after considerable reflection. “I’ve got it! It must for a certainty be a performing monkey.”
“That’s really it!” Hsiang-yün laughed.

“The first part is all right,” the party observed, “but how do you explain the last line?”

“What performing monkey,” Hsiang-yün asked, “has not had its tail cut off?”

Hearing this, they exploded into a fit of merriment. “Even,” they argued, “the very riddles she improvises are perverse and strange!”

“Mrs. Hsüeh mentioned yesterday that you, cousin Ch’in, had seen much of the world,” Li Wan put in, “and that you had also gone about a good deal. It’s for you therefore to try your hand at a few conundrums. What’s more your poetry too is good. So why shouldn’t you indite a few for us to guess?”

Pao-ch’in, at this proposal, nodded her head, and while repressing a smile, she went off by herself to give way to thought.

Pao-ch’ai then also gave out this riddle:

*Carved sandal and cut cedar rise layer upon layer.
Have they been piled and fashioned by workmen of skill!
In the mid-heavens it’s true, both wind and rain fleet by;
But can one hear the tingling of the Buddhists’ bell?*

While they were giving their mind to guessing what it could be, Pao-yü too

*Both from the heavens and from the earth, it's indistinct to view.
What time the 'Lang Ya' feast goes past, then mind you take great
care.
When the 'luan's' notes you catch and the crane's message thou'lt look
up:
It is a splendid thing to turn and breathe towards the vault of
heaven, (a kite)*

Tai-yü next added:

*Why need a famous steed be a with bridle e'er restrained?
Through the city it speeds; the moat it skirts; how fierce it looks.
The master gives the word and wind and clouds begin to move.
On the 'fish backs' and the 'three isles' it only makes a name, (a
rotating lantern).*

T'an Ch'un had also one that she felt disposed to tell them, but just as she was about to open her lips, Pao-ch'in walked up to them. "The relics of various places I've seen since my youth," she smiled, "are not few, so I've now selected ten places of historic interest, on which I've composed ten odes, treating of antiquities. The verses may possibly be coarse, but they bear upon things of the past, and secretly refer as well to ten commonplace articles. So, cousins, please try and guess them!"

"This is ingenious!" they exclaimed in chorus, when they heard the result of her labour. "Why not write them out, and let us have a look at them?"

But, reader, peruse the next chapter, if you want to learn what follows.

CHAPTER LI.

The young maiden Hsüeh Pao-ch'in devises, in novel style, odes bearing on antiquities.

A stupid doctor employs, in reckless manner, drugs of great strength.

When the party heard, the story goes, that Pao-ch'in had made the old places of interest she had, in days gone by, visited in the various provinces, the theme of her verses, and that she had composed ten stanzas with four lines in each, which though referring to relics of antiquity, bore covertly on ten common objects, they all opined that they must be novel and ingenious, and they vied with each other in examining the text. On perusal, they read:

On the relics of Ch'ih Pi:

*Deep in Ch'ih Pi doth water lie concealed which does not onward flow.
There but remains a name and surname contained in an empty boat.
When with a clamorous din the fire breaks out, the sad wind waxes
cold.
An endless host of eminent spirits wander about inside.*

On the ancient remains in Chiao Chih:

*Posts of copper and walls of gold protect the capital.
Its fame is spread beyond the seas, scattered in foreign lands.
How true it is that Ma Yüan's achievements have been great.
The flute of iron need not trouble to sing of Tzu Fang.*

page 428

On the vestiges of former times in Chung Shan:

*Renown and gain do they, at any time, fall to a woman's share?
For no reason have I been bidden come into the mortal world.
How hard a task, in point of fact, it is to stop solicitude!
Don't bear a grudge against such people as may oft times jeer at you!*

On things of historic interest in Huai Yin:

*The sturdy man must ever mind the insults of the vicious dog.
Th' official's rank in San Ch'i was but fixed when his coffin was
closed
Tell all people that upon earth do dwell to look down upon none.
The bounty of one single bowl of rice should be treasured till death.*

On events of old in Kuang Lin:

*Cicadas chirp; crows roost; but, in a twinkle, they are gone.
How fares these latter days the scenery in Sui T'i?
It's all because he has so long enjoyed so fine a fame,
That he has given rise around to so many disputes.*

On the ancient remains of the T'ao Yeh ferry:

*Dry grass and parched plants their reflex cast upon the shallow pond.
The peach tree branches and peach leaves will bid farewell at last.
What a large number of structures in Liu Ch'ao raise their heads.
A small picture with a motto hangs on the hollow wall.*

On the antique vestiges of Ch'ing Chung:

*The black stream stretches far and wide, but hindered is its course.
What time were no more thrummed the frozen cords, the songs waxed
sad.
The policy of the Han dynasty was in truth strange!
A worthless officer must for a thousand years feel shame.*

On things of historic renown in Ma Wei:

*Quiet the spots of rouge with sweat pile up and shine.
Gentleness in a moment vanishes and goes.
It is because traces remain of his fine looks,
That to this day his clothes a fragrance still emit.*

On events of the past connected with the Pu Tung temple:

*The small red lamp is wholly made of thin bone, and is light.
Furtively was it brought along but by force was it stol'n.
Oft was it, it is true, hung by the mistress' own hands,
But long ere this has she allured it to speed off with her.*

On the scenery about the Mei Hua (Plum Bloom) monastery.

*If not by the plum trees, then by the willows it must be.
Has any one picked up in there the likeness of a girl?
Don't fret about meeting again; in spring its scent returns.
Soon as it's gone, and west winds blow, another year has flown.*

When the party had done reading the verses, they with perfect unanimity extolled their extraordinary excellence. Pao-ch'ai was, however, the first to raise any objections. "The first eight stanzas," she said, "are founded upon the testimony of the historical works. But as for the last two stanzas, there's no knowing where they come from. Besides, we don't quite fathom their meaning. Wouldn't it be better then if two other stanzas were written?"

Tai-yü hastened to interrupt her. "The lines composed by cousin Pao

page 429

ch'in are indeed devised in a too pigheaded and fast-and-loose sort of way," she observed. "The two stanzas are, I admit, not to be traced in the historical works, but though we've never read such outside traditions, and haven't any idea what lies at the bottom of them, have we not likely seen a couple of plays? What child of three years old hasn't some notion about them, and how much more such as we?"

"What she says is perfectly correct," T'an Ch'un chimed in.

"She has besides," Li Wan then remarked, "been to these places herself. But though there be no mention anywhere of these two references, falsehoods have from old till now been propagated, and busybodies have, in fact, intentionally invented such relics of ancient times with a view of bamboozling people. That year, for instance, in which we travelled up here to the capital, we came across graves raised to Kuan,

the sage, in three or four distinct places. Now the circumstances of the whole existence of Kuan the sage are established by actual proof, so how could there again in his case exist a lot of graves? This must arise from the esteem in which he is held by posterity for the way he acquitted himself of his duties during his lifetime. And it is presumably to this esteem that this fiction owes its origin. This is quite possible enough. Even in the 'Kuang Yü Chi', you will see that not only are numerous tombs of the sage Kuan spoken of, but that bygone persons of note are assigned tombs not few in number. But there are many more relics of antiquity, about which no testimony can be gathered. The matter treated in the two stanzas, now in point, is, of course, not borne out by any actual record; yet in every story, that is told, in every play, that is sung, and on the various slips as well used for fortune telling, it is invariably to be found. Old and young, men and women, do all understand it and speak of it, whether in proverbs or in their everyday talk. They don't resemble, besides, the ballads encountered in the 'Hsi Hsiang Chi,' and 'Mou Tan T'ing,' to justify us to fear that we might be setting eyes upon some corrupt text. They are quite harmless; so we'd better keep them!"

Pao-ch'ai, after these arguments, dropped at length all discussion. They thereupon tried for a time to guess the stanzas. None, however, of their solutions turned out to be correct. But as the days in winter are short, and they saw that it was time for their evening meal, they adjourned to the front part of the compound for their supper.

The servants at this stage announced to Madame Wang that Hsi Jen's elder brother, Hua Tzu-fang, was outside, and reported to her that he had entered the city to say that his mother was lying in bed dangerously ill, and that she was so longing to see her daughter that he had come to beg for the favour of taking Hsi Jen home on a visit. As soon as Madame Wang heard

page 430

the news, she dilated for a while upon people's mothers and daughters, and of course she did not withhold her consent. Sending therefore at the same time for lady Feng, she communicated the tidings to her, and enjoined her to deliberate, and take suitable action.

Lady Feng signified her willingness to do what was necessary, and, returning to her quarters, she there and then commissioned Chou Jui's wife to go and break the news to Hsi Jen. "Send also," she went on to direct Mrs. Chou, "for one of the married-women, who are in attendance when we go out-of-doors, and let you two, together with a couple of young maids, follow Hsi Jen home. But despatch four cart attendants, well up in years, to look everywhere for a spacious curricle for you as well as her, and a small carriage for the maids."

"All right!" acquiesced Chou Jui's wife. But just as she was about to start, lady Feng continued her injunctions. "Hsi Jen," she added; "is a person not fond of any fuss, so tell her that it's I who have given the orders; and impress upon her that she must put on several nice, coloured clothes, and pack up a large valise full of wearing apparel. Her valise, must be a handsome one; and she must take a decent hand-stove. Bid her too first come and look me up here when she's about to start."

Mrs. Chou promised to execute her directions and went on her way.

After a long interval, (lady Feng) actually saw Hsi Jen arrive, got up in full costume and head-gear, and with her two waiting-maids and Chou Jui's wife, who carried the hand-stove and the valise packed up with clothes. Lady Feng's eye was attracted by several golden hairpins and pearl ornaments of great brilliancy and beauty, which Hsi Jen wore in her coiffure. Her gaze was further struck by the peach-red stiff silk jacket she had on, brocaded with all sorts of flowers and lined with ermine, by her leek-green wadded jupe, artistically ornamented with coils of gold thread, and by the bluish satin and grey squirrel pelisse she was wrapped in.

"These three articles of clothing, given to you by our dowager lady," lady Feng smiled, "are all very nice; but this pelisse is somewhat too plain. If you wear this, you'll besides feel cold, so put on one with long fur."

"Our Madame Wang," Hsi Jen laughingly rejoined, "gave me this one with the grey squirrel. I've also got one with ermine. She says that when the end of the year draws nigh, she'll let me have one with long fur."

"I've got one with long fur," lady Feng proceeded with a smile. "I don't fancy it much as the fringe does not hang with grace. I was on the point

of having it changed; but, never mind, I'll let you first use it; and, when at the close of the year, Madame Wang has one made for you, I can then have mine altered, and it will come to the same thing as if you were

page 431

returning it like that to me.”

One and all laughed. “That's the way of talking into which her ladyship has got!” they observed. “There she is the whole year round recklessly carelessly and secretly making good, on Madame Wang's account, ever so many things; how many there is no saying; for really the things for which compensation is made, cannot be so much as enumerated; and does she ever go, and settle scores with Madame Wang? and here she comes, on this occasion, and gives vent again to this mean language, in order to poke fun at people!”

“How could Madame Wang,” lady Feng laughed, “ever give a thought to such trifles as these? They are, in fact, matters of no consequence. Yet were I not to look after them, it would be a disgrace to all of us, and needless to say, I would myself get into some scrape. It's far better that I should dress you all properly, and so get a fair name and finish; for were each of you to cut the figure of a burnt cake, people would first and foremost ridicule me, by saying that in looking after the household I have, instead of doing good, been the means of making beggars of you!”

After hearing her out, the whole party heaved a sigh. “Who could ever be,” they exclaimed, “so intuitively wise as you, to show, above, such regard for Madame Wang, and below, such consideration for her subordinates?”

In the course of these remarks, they noticed lady Feng bid P'ing Erh find the dark green stiff silk cloak with white fox, she had worn the day before, and give it to Hsi Jen. But perceiving, also, that in the way of a valise, she only had a double one made of black spotted, figured sarcenet, with a lining of light red pongee silk, and that its contents consisted merely of two wadded jackets, the worse for wear, and a pelisse, lady Feng went on to tell P'ing Erh to fetch a woollen wrapper, lined with jade-green pongee. But she ordered her besides to pack up a snow-cloak for her.

P'ing Erh walked away and produced the articles. The one was made of deep-red felt, and was old. The other was of deep-red soft satin, neither old nor new.

"I don't deserve so much as a single one of these," Hsi Jen said.

"Keep this felt one for yourself," P'ing Erh smiled, "and take this one along with you and tell some one to send it to that elderly girl, who while every one, in that heavy fall of snow yesterday, was rolled up in soft satin, if not in felt, and while about ten dark red dresses were reflected in the deep snow and presented such a fine sight, was the only one attired in those shabby old clothes. She seems more than ever to raise her shoulders and double her back. She is really to be pitied; so take this now and give it to her!"

"She surreptitiously wishes to give my things away!" lady Feng laughed. "I haven't got enough to spend upon myself and here I have you, better

page 432

still, to instigate me to be more open-handed!"

"This comes from the filial piety your ladyship has ever displayed towards Madame Wang," every one laughingly remarked, "and the fond love for those below you. For had you been mean and only thought of making much of things and not cared a rap for your subordinates, would that girl have presumed to behave in this manner?"

"If any one therefore has read my heart, it's she," lady Feng rejoined with a laugh, "but yet she only knows it in part."

At the close of this rejoinder, she again spoke to Hsi Jen. "If your mother gets well, all right," she said; "but if anything happens to her, just stay over, and send some one to let me know so that I may specially despatch a servant to bring you your bedding. But whatever you do, don't, use their bedding, nor any of their things to comb your hair with. As for you people," continuing, she observed to Mrs. Chou Jui, "you no doubt are aware of the customs, prevailing in this establishment, so that I can

dispense with giving you any injunctions.”

“Yes, we know them all,” Mrs. Chou Jui assented. “As soon as we get there, we'll, of course, request their male inmates to retire out of the way. And in the event of our having to stay over, we'll naturally apply for one or two extra inner rooms.”

With these words still on her lips, she followed Hsi Jen out of the apartment. Then directing the servant-boys to prepare the lanterns, they, in due course, got into their curricule, and came to Hua Tzu-fang's quarters, where we will leave them without any further comment.

Lady Feng, meanwhile, sent also for two nurses from the I Hung court. “I am afraid,” she said to them, “that Hsi Jen won't come back, so if there be any elderly girl, who has to your knowledge, so far, had her wits about her, depute her to come and keep night watch in Pao-yü's rooms. But you nurses must likewise take care and exercise some control, for you mustn't let Pao-yü recklessly kick up any trouble!”

“Quite so,” answered the two nurses, agreeing to her directions, after which, they quitted her presence. But not a long interval expired before they came to report the result of their search. “We've set our choice upon Ch'ing Wen and She Yüeh to put up in his rooms,” they reported. “We four will take our turn and look after things during the night.”

When lady Feng heard these arrangements, she nodded her head. “At night,” she observed, “urge him to retire to bed soon; and in the morning press him to get up at an early hour.”

The nurses replied that they would readily carry out her orders and returned alone into the garden.

page 433

In a little time Chou Jui's wife actually brought the news, which she imparted to lady Feng, that: “as her mother was already beyond hope, Hsi Jen could not come back.”

Lady Feng then explained things to Madame Wang, and sent, at the

same time, servants to the garden of Broad Vista to fetch (Hsi Jen's) bedding and toilet effects.

Pao-yü watched Ch'ing Wen and She Yüeh get all her belongings in proper order. After the things had been despatched, Ch'ing Wen and She Yüeh divested themselves of their remaining fineries and changed their jupes and jackets. Ch'ing Wen seated herself round a warming-frame.

“Now,” She Yüeh smiled, “you're not to put on the airs of a young lady! I advise you to also move about a bit.”

“When you're all clean gone,” Ch'ing Wen returned for answer, “I shall have ample time to budge. But every day that you people are here, I shall try and enjoy peace and quiet.”

“My dear girl,” She Yüeh laughed, “I'll make the bed, but drop the cover over that cheval-glass and put the catches right; you are so much taller than I.”

So saying, she at once set to work to arrange the bed for Pao-yü.

“Hai!” ejaculated Ch'ing Wen smiling, “one just sits down to warm one's self, and here you come and disturb one!”

Pao-yü had at this time been sitting, plunged in a despondent mood. The thought of Hsi Jen's mother had crossed through his mind and he was wondering whether she could be dead or alive, when unexpectedly overhearing Ch'ing Wen pass the remarks she did, he speedily sprung up, and came out himself and dropped the cover of the glass, and fastened the contrivance, after which he walked into the room. “Warm yourselves,” he smiled, “I've done all there was to be done.”

“I can't manage,” Ch'ing Wen rejoined smiling, “to get warm at all. It just also strikes me that the warming-pan hasn't yet been brought.”

“You've had the trouble to think of it!” She Yüeh observed. “But you've never wanted a chafing-dish before. It's so warm besides on that warming-frame of ours; not like the stove-couch in that room, which is so cold; so we can very well do without it to-day.”

“If both of you are to sleep on that,” Pao-yü smiled, “there won't be a soul with me outside, and I shall be in an awful funk. Even you won't be able to have a wink of sleep during the whole night!”

“As far as I'm concerned,” Ch'ing Wen put in, “I'm going to sleep in here. There's She Yüeh, so you'd better induce her to come and sleep outside.”

But while they kept up this conversation, the first watch drew near,

page 434

and She Yüeh at once lowered the mosquito-curtain, removed the lamp, burnt the joss-sticks, and waited upon Pao-yü until he got into bed. The two maids then retired to rest. Ch'ing Wen reclined all alone on the warming-frame, while She Yüeh lay down outside the winter apartments.

The third watch had come and gone, when Pao-yü, in the midst of a dream, started calling Hsi Jen. He uttered her name twice, but no one was about to answer him. And it was after he had stirred himself out of sleep that he eventually recalled to mind that Hsi Jen was not at home, and he had a hearty fit laughter to himself.

Ch'ing Wen however had been roused out of her sleep, and she called She Yüeh. “Even I,” she said, “have been disturbed, fast asleep though I was; and, lo, she keeps a look-out by his very side and doesn't as yet know anything about his cries! In very deed she is like a stiff corpse!”

She Yüeh twisted herself round and yawned. “He calls Hsi Jen,” she smilingly rejoined, “so what's that to do with me? What do you want?” proceeding, she then inquired of him.

“I want some tea,” Pao-yü replied.

She Yüeh hastily jumped out of bed, with nothing on but a short wadded coat of red silk.

“Throw my pelisse over you;” Pao-yü cried; “for mind it's cold!”

She Yüeh at these words put back her hands, and, taking the warm pelisse, lined even up to the lapel, with fur from the neck of the sable, which Pao-yü had put on on getting up, she threw it over her shoulders and went below and washed her hands in the basin. Then filling first a cup with tepid water, she brought a large cuspidor for Pao-yü to wash his mouth. Afterwards, she drew near the tea-case, and getting a cup, she first rinsed it with lukewarm water, and pouring half a cup of tea from the warm teapot, she handed it to Pao-yü. After he had done, she herself rinsed her mouth, and swallowed half a cupful of tea.

“My dear girl,” Ch'ing Wen interposed smiling, “do give me also a sip.”

“You put on more airs than ever,” She Yüeh laughed.

“My dear girl;” Ch'ing Wen added, “to-morrow night, you needn't budge; I'll wait on you the whole night long. What do you say to that?”

Hearing this, She Yüeh had no help but to attend to her as well, while she washed her mouth, and to pour a cup of tea and give it to her to drink.

“Won't you two go to sleep,” She Yüeh laughed, “but keep on chatting? I'll go out for a time; I'll be back soon.”

“Are there any evil spirits waiting for you outside?” Ch'ing Wen smiled.

“It's sure to be bright moonlight out of doors,” Pao-yü observed, “so

page 435

go, while we continue our chat.”

So speaking, he coughed twice.

She Yüeh opened the back-door, and raising the woollen portiere and looking out, she saw what a beautiful moonlight there really was.

Ch'ing Wen allowed her just time enough to leave the room, when she felt a wish to frighten her for the sake of fun. But such reliance did she have in her physique, which had so far proved better than that of others, that little worrying her mind about the cold, she did not even throw a cloak over her, but putting on a short jacket, she descended, with gentle

tread and light step, from the warming-frame and was making her way out to follow in her wake, when "Hallo!" cried Pao-yü warning her. "It's freezing; it's no joke!"

Ch'ing Wen merely responded with a wave of the hand and sallied out of the door to go in pursuit of her companion. The brilliancy of the moon, which met her eye, was as limpid as water. But suddenly came a slight gust of wind. She felt it penetrate her very flesh and bore through her bones. So much so, that she could not help shuddering all over. "Little wonder is it," she argued within herself, "if people say 'that one mustn't, when one's body is warm, expose one's self to the wind.' This cold is really dreadful!" She was at the same time just on the point of giving (She Yüeh) a start, when she heard Pao-yü shout from inside, "Ch'ing Wen has come out."

Ch'ing Wen promptly turned back and entered the room. "How could I ever frighten her to death?" she laughed. "It's just your way; you're as great a coward as an old woman!"

"It isn't at all that you might do her harm by frightening her," Pao-yü smiled, "but, in the first place, it wouldn't be good for you to get frost-bitten; and, in the second, you would take her so much off her guard that she won't be able to prevent herself from uttering a shout. So, in the event of rousing any of the others out of their sleep, they won't say that we are up to jokes, but maintain instead that just as Hsi Jen is gone, you two behave as if you'd come across ghosts or seen evil spirits. Come and tuck in the coverlets on this side!"

When Ch'ing Wen heard what he wanted done she came accordingly and tucked in the covers, and, putting out her hands, she inserted them under them, and set to work to warm the bedding.

"How cold your hand is!" Pao-yü laughingly exclaimed. "I told you to look out or you'd freeze!"

Noticing at the same time that Ch'ing Wen's cheeks were as red as rouge, he rubbed them with his hands. But as they felt icy cold to his touch, "Come at once under the cover and warm yourself!" Pao-yü urged.

Hardly, however, had he concluded these words, than a sound of 'lo teng' reached their ears from the door, and She Yüeh rushed in all in a tremor,

page 436

laughing the while.

"I've had such a fright," she smiled, as she went on speaking. "Goodness me! I saw in the black shade, at the back of the boulders on that hill, some one squatting, and was about to scream, when it turned out to be nothing else than that big golden pheasant. As soon as it caught sight of a human being, it flew away. But it was only when it reached a moonlit place that I at last found out what it was. Had I been so heedless as to scream, I would have been the means of getting people out of their beds!"

Recounting her experiences, she washed her hands.

"Ch'ing Wen, you say, has gone out," she proceeded laughing, "but how is it I never caught a glimpse of her? She must certainly have gone to frighten me!"

"Isn't this she?" Pao-yü inquired with a smile. "Is she not here warming herself? Had I not been quick in shouting, she would verily have given you a fright."

"There was no need for me to go and frighten her," Ch'ing Wen laughingly observed. "This hussy has frightened her own self."

With these words she ensconced herself again under her own coverlet. "Did you forsooth go out," She Yüeh remarked, "in this smart dress of a circus-performer?"

"Why, of course, she went out like this!" Pao-yü smiled.

"You wouldn't know, for the life of you, how to choose a felicitous day!" She Yüeh added. "There you go and stand about on a fruitless errand. Won't your skin get chapped from the frost?"

Saying this, she again raised the copper cover from the brasier, and, picking up the shovel, she buried the live charcoal deep with ashes, and taking two bits of incense of Cambodia fragrant wood, she threw them over them. She then re-covered the brasier, and repairing to the back of the screen, she gave the lamp a thorough trimming to make it throw out more light; after which, she once more laid herself down.

As Ch'ing Wen had some time before felt cold, and now began to get warm again, she unexpectedly sneezed a couple of times.

“How about that?” sighed Pao-yü. “There you are; you've after all caught a chill!”

“Early this morning,” She Yüeh smiled, “she shouted that she wasn't feeling quite herself. Neither did she have the whole day a proper bowl of food. And now, not to speak of her taking so little care of herself, she is still bent upon playing larks upon people! But if she falls ill by and bye, we'll let her suffer what she will have brought upon herself.”

“Is your head hot?” Pao-yü asked.

page 437

“It's nothing at all!” Ch'ing Wen rejoined, after coughing twice. “When did I get so delicate?”

But while she spoke, they heard the striking clock, suspended on the partition wall in the outer rooms, give two sounds of 'tang, tang,' and the matron, on the night watch outside, say: “Now, young girls, go to sleep. To-morrow will be time enough for you to chat and laugh!”

“Don't let's talk!” Pao-yü then whispered, “for, mind, we'll also induce them to start chattering.” After this, they at last went to sleep.

The next day, they got up at an early hour. Ch'ing Wen's nose was indeed considerably stopped. Her voice was hoarse; and she felt no inclination to move.

“Be quick,” urged Pao-yü, “and don't make a fuss, for your mistress, my

mother, may come to know of it, and bid you also shift to your house and nurse yourself. Your home might, of course, be all very nice, but it's in fact somewhat cold. So isn't it better here? Go and lie down in the inner rooms, and I'll give orders to some one to send for the doctor to come quietly by the back door and have a look at you. You'll then get all right again."

"In spite of what you say," Ch'ing Wen demurred, "you must really say something about it to our senior lady, Mrs. Chia Chu; otherwise the doctor will be coming unawares, and people will begin to ask questions; and what answer could one give them?"

Pao-yü found what she said so full of reason that he called an old nurse. "Go and deliver this message to your senior mistress," he enjoined her. "Tell her that Ch'ing Wen got a slight chill yesterday. That as it's nothing to speak of, and Hsi Jen is besides away, there would be, more than ever, no one here to look after things, were she to go home and attend to herself, so let her send for a doctor to come quietly by the back entrance and see what's the matter with her; but don't let her breathe a word about it to Madame Wang, my mother."

The old nurse was away a considerable time on the errand. On her return, "Our senior mistress," she reported, "has been told everything. She says that: 'if she gets all right, after taking a couple of doses of medicine, it will be well and good. But that in the event of not recovering, it would, really, be the right thing for her to go to her own home. That the season isn't healthy at present, and that if the other girls caught her complaint it would be a small thing; but that the good health of the young ladies is a vital matter.'"

Ch'ing Wen was lying in the winter apartment, coughing and coughing, when overhearing (Li Wan's) answer, she lost control over her temper. "Have I got such a dreadful epidemic," she said, "that she fears that I shall bring it

page 438

upon others? I'll clear off at once from this place; for mind you don't get any headaches and hot heads during the course of your lives."

“While uttering her grievances, she was bent upon getting up immediately, when Pao-yü hastened to smile and to press her down.

“Don't lose your temper,” he advised her. “This is a responsibility which falls upon her shoulders, so she is afraid lest Madame Wang might come to hear of it, and call her to task. She only made a harmless remark. But you've always been prone to anger, and now, as a matter of course your spleen is larger than ever.”

But in the middle of his advice to her, a servant came and told him that the doctor had arrived. Pao-yü accordingly crossed over to the off side, and retired behind the bookcase; from whence he perceived two or three matrons, whose duty it was to keep watch at the back door, usher the doctor in.

The waiting-maids, meanwhile, withdrew out of the way. Three or four old nurses dropped the deep-red embroidered curtain, suspended in the winter apartment. Ch'ing Wen then simply stretched out her hand from among the folds of the curtain. But the doctor noticed that on two of the fingers of her hand, the nails, which measured fully two or three inches in length, still bore marks of the pure red dye from the China balsam, and forthwith he turned his head away. An old nurse speedily fetched a towel and wiped them for her, when the doctor set to work and felt her pulse for a while, after which he rose and walked into the outer chamber.

“Your young lady's illness,” he said to the old nurses, “arises from external sources, and internal obstructive influences, caused by the unhealthiness of the season of late. Yet it's only a slight chill, after all. Fortunately, the young lady has ever been moderate in her drinking and eating. The cold she has is nothing much. It's mainly because she has a weak constitution that she has unawares got a bit of a chill. But if she takes a couple of doses of medicine to dispel it with, she'll be quite right.”

So saying, he followed once more the matron out of the house.

Li Wan had, by this time, sent word to the various female domestics at the back entrance, as well as to the young maids in the different parts of the establishment to keep in retirement. All therefore that the doctor

perceived as he went along was the scenery in the garden. But not a single girl did he see.

Shortly, he made his exit out of the garden gate, and taking a seat in the duty-lodge of the servant-lads, who looked after the garden-entrance, he wrote a prescription.

“Sir,” urged an old nurse, “don't go yet. Our young master is fretful and there may be, I fancy, something more to ask you.”

page 439

“Wasn't the one I saw just now a young lady,” the doctor exclaimed with eagerness, “but a young man, eh? Yet the rooms were such as are occupied by ladies. The curtains were besides let down. So how could the patient I saw have ever been a young man?”

“My dear sir,” laughed the old nurse, “it isn't strange that a servant-girl said just now that a new doctor had been sent for on this occasion, for you really know nothing about our family matters. That room is that of our young master, and that is a girl attached to the apartments; but she's really a servant-maid. How ever were those a young lady's rooms? Had a young lady fallen ill, would you ever have penetrated inside with such ease?”

With these words, she took the prescription and wended her way into the garden.

When Pao-yü came to peruse it, he found, above, such medicines mentioned as sweet basil, platycodon, carraway seeds, mosla dianthera, and the like; and, below, citrus fusca and sida as well.

“He deserves to be hanged! He deserves death!” Pao-yü shouted. “Here he treats girls in the very same way as he would us men! How could this ever do? No matter what internal obstruction there may be, how could she ever stand citrus and sida? Who asked him to come? Bundle him off at once; and send for another, who knows what he's about.”

“Whether he uses the right medicines or not,” the old nurse pleaded, “we

are not in a position to know. But we'll now tell a servant-lad to go and ask Dr. Wang round. It's easy enough! The only thing is that as this doctor wasn't sent for through the head manager's office his fee must be paid to him."

"How much must one give him?" Pao-yü inquired.

"Were one to give him too little, it wouldn't look nice," a matron ventured. "He should be given a tael. This would be quite the thing with such a household as ours."

"When Dr. Wang comes," Pao-yü asked, "how much is he given?"

"Whenever Dr. Wang and Dr. Chang come," a matron smilingly explained, "no money is ever given them. At the four seasons of each year however presents are simply sent to them in a lump. This is a fixed annual custom. But this new doctor has come only this once so he should be given a tael."

After this explanation, Pao-yü readily bade She Yüeh go and fetch the money.

"I can't make out where sister Hua put it;" She Yüeh rejoined.

"I've often seen her take money out of that lacquered press, ornamented with designs made with shells;" Pao-yü added; "so come along with me, and let's go and search."

page 440

As he spoke, he and She Yüeh came together into what was used as a store-room by Hsi Jen. Upon opening the shell-covered press, they found the top shelf full of pens, pieces of ink, fans, scented cakes, various kinds of purses, handkerchiefs and other like articles, while on the lower shelf were piled several strings of cash. But, presently they pulled out the drawer, when they saw, in a small wicker basket, several pieces of silver, and a steelyard.

She Yüeh quickly snatched a piece of silver. Then raising the steelyard,

“Which is the one tael mark?” she asked.

Pao-yü laughed. “It's amusing that you should appeal to me!” he said. “You really behave as if you had only just come!”

She Yüeh also laughed, and was about to go and make inquiries of some one else, when Pao-yü interfered. “Choose a piece out of those big ones and give it to him, and have done,” he said. “We don't go in for buying and selling, so what's the use of minding such trifles!”

She Yüeh, upon hearing this, dropped the steelyard, and selected a piece, which she weighed in her hand. “This piece,” she smiled, “must, I fancy, be a tael. But it would be better to let him have a little more. Don't let's give too little as those poor brats will have a laugh at our expense. They won't say that we know nothing about the steelyard; but that we are designedly mean.”

A matron who stood at the threshold of the door, smilingly chimed in. “This ingot,” she said, “weighs five taels. Even if you cut half of it off, it will weigh a couple of taels, at least. But there are no sycee shears at hand, so, miss, put this piece aside and choose a smaller one.”

She Yüeh had already closed the press and walked out. “Who'll go and fumble about again?” she laughed. “If there's a little more, well, you take it and finish.”

“Be quick,” Pao-yü remarked, “and tell Pei Ming to go for another doctor. It will be all right.”

The matron received the money and marched off to go and settle matters.

Presently, Dr. Wang actually arrived, at the invitation of Pei Ming. First and foremost he felt the pulse and then gave the same diagnosis of the complaint (as the other doctor did) in the first instance. The only difference being that there was, in fact, no citrus or sida or other similar drugs, included in the prescription. It contained, however, false sarsaparilla roots, dried orange peel, peonia albifora, and other similar medicines. But the quantities were, on the other hand, considerably

smaller, as compared with those of the drugs mentioned in the former prescription.

“These are the medicines,” Pao-yü ejaculated exultingly, “suitable for girls! They should, it's true, be of a laxative nature, but never over and

page 441

above what's needful. When I fell ill last year, I suffered from a chill, but I got such an obstruction in the viscera that I could neither take anything liquid or substantial, yet though he saw the state I was in, he said that I couldn't stand sida, ground gypsum, citrus and other such violent drugs. You and I resemble the newly-opened white begonia, Yün Erh sent me in autumn. And how could you resist medicines which are too much for me? We're like the lofty aspen trees, which grow in people's burial grounds. To look at, the branches and leaves are of luxuriant growth, but they are hollow at the core.”

“Do only aspen trees grow in waste burial grounds?” She Yüeh smiled. “Is it likely, pray, that there are no fir and cypress trees? What's more loathsome than any other is the aspen. For though a lofty tree, it only has a few leaves; and it makes quite a confused noise with the slightest puff of wind! If you therefore deliberately compare yourself to it, you'll also be ranging yourself too much among the common herd!”

“I daren't liken myself to fir or cypress;” Pao-yü laughingly retorted. “Even Confucius says: 'after the season waxes cold, one finds that the fir and cypress are the last to lose their foliage,' which makes it evident that these two things are of high excellence. Thus it's those only, who are devoid of every sense of shame, who foolishly liken themselves to trees of the kind!”

While engaged in this colloquy, they perceived the old matron bring the drugs, so Pao-yü bade her fetch the silver pot, used for boiling medicines in, and then he directed her to prepare the decoction on the brasier.

“The right thing would be,” Ch'ing Wen suggested, “that you should let them go and get it ready in the tea-room; for will it ever do to fill this room with the smell of medicines?”

“The smell of medicines,” Pao-yü rejoined, “is far nicer than that emitted by the whole lot of flowers. Fairies pick medicines and prepare medicines. Besides this, eminent men and cultured scholars gather medicines and concoct medicines; so that it constitutes a most excellent thing. I was just thinking that there's everything and anything in these rooms and that the only thing that we lack is the smell of medicines; but as luck would have it, everything is now complete.”

Speaking, he lost no time in giving orders to a servant to put the medicines on the fire. Next, he advised She Yüeh to get ready a few presents and bid a nurse take them and go and look up Hsi Jen, and exhort her not to give way to excessive grief. And when he had settled everything that had to be seen to, he repaired to the front to dowager lady Chia's and Madame Wang's quarters, and paid his respects and had his meal.

Lady Feng, as it happened, was just engaged in consulting with old lady Chia and Madame Wang. “The days are now short as well as cold,” she

page 442

argued, “so wouldn't it be advisable that my senior sister-in-law, Mrs. Chia Chu, should henceforward have her repasts in the garden, along with the young ladies? When the weather gets milder, it won't at all matter, if they have to run backward and forward.”

“This is really a capital idea!” Madame Wang smiled. “It will be so convenient during windy and rainy weather. To inhale the chilly air after eating isn't good. And to come quite empty, and begin piling up a lot of things in a stomach full of cold air isn't quite safe. It would be as well therefore to select two cooks from among the women, who have, anyhow, to keep night duty in the large five-roomed house, inside the garden back entrance, and station them there for the special purpose of preparing the necessary viands for the girls. Fresh vegetables are subject to some rule of distribution, so they can be issued to them from the general manager's office. Or they might possibly require money or be in need of some things or other. And it will be all right if a few of those pheasants, deer, and every kind of game, be apportioned to them.”

“I too was just thinking about this,” dowager lady Chia observed. “The only thing I feared was that with the extra work that would again be thrown upon the cook-house, they mightn't have too much to do.”

“There'll be nothing much to do,” lady Feng replied. “The same apportionment will continue as ever. In here, something may be added; but in there something will be reduced. Should it even involve a little trouble, it will be a small matter. If the girls were exposed to the cold wind, every one else might stand it with impunity; but how could cousin Lin, first and foremost above all others, resist anything of the kind? In fact, brother Pao himself wouldn't be proof against it. What's more, none of the various young ladies can boast of a strong constitution.”

What rejoinder old lady Chia made to lady Feng, at the close of her representations, is not yet ascertained; so, reader, listen to the explanations you will find given in the next chapter.

CHAPTER LII.

*The beautiful P'ing Erh endeavours to conceal the loss of the bracelet, made of work as fine as the feelers of a shrimp.
The brave Ch'ing Wen mends the down-cloak during her indisposition.*

But let us return to our story.

“Quite so!” was the reply with which dowager lady Chia (greeted lady Feng's proposal). “I meant the other day to have suggested this arrangement,

page 443

but I saw that every one of you had so many urgent matters to attend to, (and I thought) that although you would not presume to bear me a grudge, were several duties now again superadded, you would unavoidably imagine that I only regarded those young grandsons and granddaughters of mine, and had no consideration for any of you, who have to look after the house. But since you make this suggestion yourself, it's all right.”

And seeing that Mrs. Hsüeh, and 'sister-in-law' Li were sitting with her, and that Madame Hsing, and Mrs. Yu and the other ladies, who had also crossed over to pay their respects, had not as yet gone to their quarters, old lady Chia broached the subject with Madame Wang, and the rest of the company. “I've never before ventured to give utterance to the remarks that just fell from my lips,” she said, “as first of all I was in fear and trembling lest I should have made that girl Feng more presumptuous than ever, and next, lest I should have incurred the displeasure of one and all of you. But since you're all here to-day, and every one of you knows what brothers' wives and husbands' sisters mean, is there (I ask) any one besides her as full of forethought?”

Mrs. Hsüeh, 'sister-in-law' Li and Mrs. Yu smiled with one consent. “There are indeed but few like her!” they cried. “That of others is simply a conventional 'face' affection, but she is really fond of her husband's sisters and his young brother. In fact, she's as genuinely filial with you,

venerable senior.”

Dowager lady Chia nodded her head. “Albeit I’m fond of her,” she sighed, “I can’t, on the other hand, help distrusting that excessive shrewdness of hers, for it isn’t a good thing.”

“You’re wrong there, worthy ancestor,” lady Feng laughed with alacrity. “People in the world as a rule maintain that ‘too shrewd and clever a person can’t, it is feared, live long.’ Now what people of the world invariably say people of the world invariably believe. But of you alone, my dear senior, can no such thing be averred or believed. For there you are, ancestor mine, a hundred times sharper and cleverer than I; and how is it that you now enjoy both perfect happiness and longevity? But I presume that I shall by and bye excel you by a hundredfold, and die at length, after a life of a thousand years, when you venerable senior shall have departed from these mortal scenes!”

“After every one is dead and gone,” dowager lady Chia laughingly observed, “what pleasure will there be, if two antiquated elves, like you and I will be, remain behind?”

This joke excited general mirth.

But so concerned was Pao-yü about Ch’ing Wen and other matters that he was the first to make a move and return into the garden. On his arrival at

page 444

his quarters, he found the rooms full of the fragrance emitted by the medicines. Not a soul did he, however, see about. Ch’ing Wen was reclining all alone on the stove-couch. Her face was feverish and red. When he came to touch it, his hand experienced a scorching sensation. Retracing his steps therefore towards the stove, he warmed his hands and inserted them under the coverlet and felt her. Her body as well was as hot as fire.

“If the others have left,” he then remarked, “there’s nothing strange about it, but are She Yüeh and Ch’iu Wen too so utterly devoid of feeling as to

have each gone after her own business?”

“As regards Ch'iu Wen,” Ch'ing Wen explained, “I told her to go and have her meal. And as for She Yüeh, P'ing Erh came just now and called her out of doors and there they are outside confabbing in a mysterious way! What the drift of their conversation can be I don't know. But they must be talking about my having fallen ill, and my not leaving this place to go home.”

“P'ing Erh isn't that sort of person,” Pao-yü pleaded. “Besides, she had no idea whatever about your illness, so that she couldn't have come specially to see how you were getting on. I fancy her object was to look up She Yüeh to hobnob with her, but finding unexpectedly that you were not up to the mark, she readily said that she had come on purpose to find what progress you were making. This was quite a natural thing for a person with so wily a disposition to say, for the sake of preserving harmony. But if you don't go home, it's none of her business. You two have all along been, irrespective of other things, on such good terms that she could by no means entertain any desire to injure the friendly relations which exist between you, all on account of something that doesn't concern her.”

“Your remarks are right enough,” Ch'ing Wen rejoined, “but I do suspect her, as why did she too start, all of a sudden, imposing upon me?”

“Wait, I'll walk out by the back door,” Pao-yü smiled, “and go to the foot of the window, and listen to what she's saying. I'll then come and tell you.”

Speaking the while, he, in point of fact, sauntered out of the back door; and getting below the window, he lent an ear to their confidences.

“How did you manage to get it?” She Yüh inquired with gentle voice.

“When I lost sight of it on that day that I washed my hands,” P'ing Erh answered, “our lady Secunda wouldn't let us make a fuss. But the moment she left the garden, she there and then sent word to the nurses, stationed in the various places, to institute careful search. Our suspicions, however, fell upon Miss Hsing's maid, who has ever also been poverty-stricken; surmising that a young girl of her age, who had

never set eyes upon anything of the kind, may possibly have picked it up and taken it. But never did we

page 445

positively believe that it could be some one from this place of yours! Happily, our lady Secunda wasn't in the room, when that nurse Sung who is with you here went over, and said, producing the bracelet, 'that the young maid, Chui Erh, had stolen it, and that she had detected her, and come to lay the matter before our lady Secunda. I promptly took over the bracelet from her; and recollecting how imperious and exacting Pao-yü is inclined to be, fond and devoted as he is to each and all of you; how the jade which was prigged the other year by a certain Liang Erh, is still, just as the matter has cooled down for the last couple of years, canvassed at times by some people eager to serve their own ends; how some one has now again turned up to purloin this gold trinket; how it was filched, to make matters worse, from a neighbour's house; how as luck would have it, she took this of all things; and how it happened to be his own servant to give him a slap on his mouth, I hastened to enjoin nurse Sung to, on no account whatever, let Pao-yü know anything about it, but simply pretend that nothing of the kind had transpired, and to make no mention of it to any single soul. In the second place,' (I said), 'our dowager lady and Madame Wang would get angry, if they came to hear anything. Thirdly, Hsi Jen as well as yourselves would not also cut a very good figure.' Hence it was that in telling our lady Secunda, I merely explained 'that on my way to our senior mistress,' the bracelet got unclasped, without my knowing it; that it fell among the roots of the grass; that there was no chance of seeing it while the snow was deep, but that when the snow completely disappeared to-day there it glistened, so yellow and bright, in the rays of the sun, in precisely the very place where it had dropped, and that I then picked it up.' Our lady Secunda at once credited my version. So here I come to let you all know so as to be henceforward a little on your guard with her, and not get her a job anywhere else. Wait until Hsi Jen's return, and then devise means to pack her off, and finish with her."

"This young vixen has seen things of this kind before," She Yüeh ejaculated, "and how is it that she was so shallow-eyed?"

“What could, after all, be the weight of this bracelet?” P'ing Erh observed. “It was once our lady Secunda's. She says that this is called the 'shrimp-feeler'-bracelet. But it's the pearl, which increases its weight. That minx Ch'ing Wen is as fiery as a piece of crackling charcoal, so were anything to be told her, she may, so little able is she to curb her temper, flare up suddenly into a huff, and beat or scold her, and kick up as much fuss as she ever has done before. That's why I simply tell you. Exercise due care, and it will be all right.”

With this warning, she bid her farewell and went on her way.

page 446

Her words delighted, vexed and grieved Pao-yü. He felt delighted, on account of the consideration shown by P'ing Erh for his own feelings. Vexed, because Chui Erh had turned out a petty thief. Grieved, that Chui Erh, who was otherwise such a smart girl, should have gone in for this disgraceful affair. Returning consequently into the house, he told Ch'ing Wen every word that P'ing Erh had uttered. “She says,” he went on to add, “that you're so fond of having things all your own way that were you to hear anything of this business, now that you are ill, you would get worse, and that she only means to broach the subject with you, when you get quite yourself again.”

Upon hearing this, Ch'ing Wen's ire was actually stirred up, and her beautiful moth-like eyebrows contracted, and her lovely phoenix eyes stared wide like two balls. So she immediately shouted out for Chui Erh.

“If you go on bawling like that,” Pao-yü hastily remonstrated with her, “won't you show yourself ungrateful for the regard with which P'ing Erh has dealt with you and me? Better for us to show ourselves sensible of her kindness and by and bye pack the girl off, and finish.”

“Your suggestion is all very good,” Ch'ing Wen demurred, “but how could I suppress this resentment?”

“What's there to feel resentment about?” Pao-yü asked. “Just you take good care of yourself; it's the best thing you can do.”

Ch'ing Wen then took her medicine. When evening came, she had another couple of doses. But though in the course of the night, she broke out into a slight perspiration, she did not see any change for the better in her state. Still she felt feverish, her head sore, her nose stopped, her voice hoarse. The next day, Dr. Wang came again to examine her pulse and see how she was getting on. Besides other things, he increased the proportions of certain medicines in the decoction and reduced others; but in spite of her fever having been somewhat brought down, her head continued to ache as much as ever.

“Go and fetch the snuff,” Pao-yü said to She Yüeh, “and give it to her to sniff. She'll feel more at ease after she has had several strong sneezes.”

She Yüeh went, in fact, and brought a flat crystal bottle, inlaid with a couple of golden stars, and handed it to Pao-yü.

Pao-yü speedily raised the cover of the bottle. Inside it, he discovered, represented on western enamel, a fair-haired young girl, in a state of nature, on whose two sides figured wings of flesh. This bottle contained some really first-rate foreign snuff.

Ch'ing Wen's attention was fixedly concentrated on the representation.

“Sniff a little!” Pao-yü urged. “If the smell evaporates, it won't be worth anything.”

page 447

Ch'ing Wen, at his advice, promptly dug out a little with her nail, and applied it to her nose. But with no effect. So digging out again a good quantity of it, she pressed it into her nostrils. Then suddenly she experienced a sensation in her nose as if some pungent matter had penetrated into the very duct leading into the head, and she sneezed five or six consecutive times, until tears rolled down from her eyes and mucus trickled from her nostrils.

Ch'ing Wen hastily put the bottle away. “It's dreadfully pungent!” she laughed. “Bring me some paper, quick!”

A servant-girl at once handed her a pile of fine paper.

Ch'ing Wen extracted sheet after sheet, and blew her nose.

“Well,” said Pao-yü smiling, “how are you feeling now?”

“I'm really considerably relieved.” Ch'ing Wen rejoined laughing. “The only thing is that my temples still hurt me.”

“Were you to treat yourself exclusively with western medicines, I'm sure you'd get all right,” Pao-yü added smilingly. Saying this, “Go,” he accordingly desired She Yüeh, “to our lady Secunda, and ask her for some. Tell her that I spoke to you about them. My cousin over there often uses some western plaster, which she applies to her temples when she's got a headache. It's called 'I-fo-na.' So try and get some of it!”

She Yüeh expressed her readiness. After a protracted absence, she, in very deed, came back with a small bit of the medicine; and going quickly for a piece of red silk cutting, she got the scissors and slit two round slips off as big as the tip of a finger. After which, she took the medicine, and softening it by the fire, she spread it on them with a hairpin.

Ch'ing Wen herself laid hold of a looking-glass with a handle and stuck the bits on both her temples.

“While you were lying sick,” She Yüeh laughed, “you looked like a mangy-headed devil! But with this stuff on now you present a fine sight! As for our lady Secunda she has been so much in the habit of sticking these things about her that they don't very much show off with her!”

This joke over, “Our lady Secunda said,” she resumed, addressing herself to Pao-yü, “that to-morrow is your maternal uncle's birthday, and that our mistress, your mother, asked her to tell you to go over. That whatever clothes you will put on to-morrow should be got ready to-night, so as to avoid any trouble in the morning.”

“Anything that comes first to hand,” Pao-yü observed, “will do well enough! There's no getting, the whole year round, at the end of all the fuss of birthdays!”

Speaking the while, he rose to his feet and left the room with the idea of repairing to Hsi Ch'un's quarters to have a look at the painting. As soon

page 448

as he got outside the door of the court-yard, he unexpectedly spied Pao-ch'in's young maid, Hsiao Lo by name, crossing over from the opposite direction. Pao-yü, with rapid step, strode up to her, and inquired of her whither she was going.

"Our two young ladies," Hsiao Lo answered with a smile, "are in Miss Lin's rooms; so I'm also now on my way thither."

Catching this answer, Pao-yü wheeled round and came at once with her to the Hsiao Hsiang Lodge. Here not only did he find Pao-ch'ai and her cousin, but Hsing Chou-yen as well. The quartet was seated in a circle on the warming-frame; carrying on a friendly chat on everyday domestic matters; while Tzu Chüan was sitting in the winter apartment, working at some needlework by the side of the window.

The moment they caught a glimpse of him, their faces beamed with smiles. "There comes some one else!" they cried. "There's no room for you to sit!"

"What a fine picture of beautiful girls, in the winter chamber!" Pao-yü smiled. "It's a pity I come a trifle too late! This room is, at all events, so much warmer than any other, that I won't feel cold if I plant myself on this chair."

So saying, he made himself comfortable on a favourite chair of Tai-yü's over which was thrown a grey squirrel cover. But noticing in the winter apartment a jadestone bowl, full of single narcissi, in clusters of three or five, Pao-yü began praising their beauty with all the language he could command. "What lovely flowers!" he exclaimed. "The warmer the room gets, the stronger is the fragrance emitted by these flowers! How is it I never saw them yesterday?"

"These are," Tai-yü laughingly explained, "from the two pots of narcissi,

and two pots of allspice, sent to Miss Hsüeh Secunda by the wife of Lai Ta, the head butler in your household. Of these, she gave me a pot of narcissi; and to that girl Yün, a pot of allspice. I didn't at first mean to keep them, but I was afraid of showing no consideration for her kind attention. But if you want them, I'll, in my turn, present them to you. Will you have them; eh?"

"I've got two pots of them in my rooms," Pao-yü replied, "but they're not up to these. How is it you're ready to let others have what cousin Ch'in has given you? This can on no account do!"

"With me here," Tai-yü added, "the medicine pot never leaves the fire, the whole day long. I'm only kept together by medicines. So how could I ever stand the smell of flowers bunging my nose? It makes me weaker than ever. Besides, if there's the least whiff of medicines in this

page 449

room, it will, contrariwise, spoil the fragrance of these flowers. So isn't it better that you should have them carried away? These flowers will then breathe a purer atmosphere, and won't have any mixture of smells to annoy them."

"I've also got now some one ill in my place," Pao-yü retorted with a smile, "and medicines are being decocted. How comes it you happen to know nothing about it?"

"This is strange!" Tai-yü laughed. "I was really speaking quite thoughtlessly; for who ever knows what's going on in your apartments? But why do you, instead of getting here a little earlier to listen to old stories, come at this moment to bring trouble and vexation upon your own self?"

Pao-yü gave a laugh. "Let's have a meeting to-morrow," he proposed, "for we've also got the themes. Let's sing the narcissus and allspice."

"Never mind, drop that!" Tai-yü rejoined, upon hearing his proposal. "I can't venture to write any more verses. Whenever I indite any, I'm mulcted. So I'd rather not be put to any great shame."

While uttering these words she screened her face with both hands.

“What's the matter?” Pao-yü smiled. “Why are you again making fun of me? I'm not afraid of any shame, but, lo, you screen your face.”

“The next time,” Pao-ch'ai felt impelled to interpose laughingly, “I convene a meeting, we'll have four themes for odes and four for songs; and each one of us will have to write four odes and four roundelays. The theme of the first ode will treat of the plan of the great extreme; the rhyme fixed being 'hsien,' (first), and the metre consisting of five words in each line. We'll have to exhaust every one of the rhymes under 'hsien,' and mind, not a single one may be left out.”

“From what you say,” Pao-ch'in smilingly observed, “it's evident that you're not in earnest, cousin, in setting the club on foot. It's clear enough that your object is to embarrass people. But as far as the verses go, we could forcibly turn out a few, just by higgledy-piggledy taking several passages from the 'Canon of Changes,' and inserting them in our own; but, after all, what fun will there be in that sort of thing? When I was eight years of age, I went with my father to the western seaboard to purchase foreign goods. Who'd have thought it, we came across a girl from the 'Chen Chen' kingdom. She was in her eighteenth year, and her features were just like those of the beauties one sees represented in foreign pictures. She had also yellow hair, hanging down, and arranged in endless plaits. Her whole head was ornamented with one mass of cornelian beads, amber, cats' eyes, and 'grandmother-green-stone.' On her person, she wore a chain armour plaited with gold, and a coat, which was up to the very sleeves, embroidered in foreign style. In a

page 450

belt, she carried a Japanese sword, also inlaid with gold and studded with precious gems. In very truth, even in pictures, there is no one as beautiful as she. Some people said that she was thoroughly conversant with Chinese literature, and could explain the 'Five classics,' that she was able to write odes and devise roundelays, and so my father requested an interpreter to ask her to write something. She thereupon wrote an original stanza, which all, with one voice, praised for its remarkable beauty, and

extolled for its extraordinary merits.”

“My dear cousin,” eagerly smiled Pao-yü, “produce what she wrote, and let's have a look at it.”

“It's put away in Nanking;” Pao-ch'in replied with a smile. “So how could I at present go and fetch it?”

Great was Pao-yü's disappointment at this rejoinder. “I've no luck,” he cried, “to see anything like this in the world.”

Tai-yü laughingly laid hold of Pao-ch'in. “Don't be humbugging us!” she remarked. “I know well enough that you are not likely, on a visit like this, to have left any such things of yours at home. You must have brought them along. Yet here you are now again palming off a fib on us by saying that you haven't got them with you. You people may believe what she says, but I, for my part, don't.”

Pao-ch'in got red in the face. Drooping her head against her chest, she gave a faint smile; but she uttered not a word by way of response.

“Really P'in Erh you've got into the habit of talking like this!” Pao-ch'ai laughed. “You're too shrewd by far.”

“Bring them along,” Tai-yü urged with a smile, “and give us a chance of seeing something and learning something; it won't hurt them.”

“There's a whole heap of trunks and baskets,” Pao-ch'ai put in laughing, “which haven't been yet cleared away. And how could one tell in which particular one, they're packed up? Wait a few days, and when things will have been put straight a bit, we'll try and find them: and every one of us can then have a look at them; that will be all right. But if you happen to remember the lines,” she pursued, speaking to Pao-ch'in, “why not recite them for our benefit?”

“I remember so far that her lines consisted of a stanza with five characters in each line,” Pao-ch'ai returned for answer. “For a foreign girl, they're verily very well done.”

“Don't begin for a while,” Pao-ch'ai exclaimed. “Let me send for Yün Erh, so that she too might hear them.”

After this remark, she called Hsiao Lo to her. “Go to my place,” she observed, “and tell her that a foreign beauty has come over, who's a

page 451

splendid hand at poetry. 'You, who have poetry on the brain,' (say to her), 'are invited to come and see her,' and then lay hold of this verse-maniac of ours and bring her along.”

Hsiao Lo gave a smile, and went away. After a long time, they heard Hsiang-yün laughingly inquire, “What foreign beauty has come?” But while asking this question, she made her appearance in company with Hsiang Ling.

“We heard your voices long before we caught a glimpse of your persons!” the party laughed.

Pao-ch'in and her companions motioned to her to sit down, and, in due course, she reiterated what she had told them a short while back.

“Be quick, out with it! Let's hear what it is!” Hsiang-yün smilingly cried.

Pao-ch'in thereupon recited:

*Last night in the Purple Chamber I dreamt.
This evening on the 'Shui Kuo' Isle I sing.
The clouds by the isle cover the broad sea.
The zephyr from the peaks reaches the woods.
The moon has never known present or past.
From shallow and deep causes springs love's fate.
When I recall my springs south of the Han,
Can I not feel disconsolate at heart?*

After listening to her, “She does deserve credit,” they unanimously shouted, “for she really is far superior to us, Chinese though we be.”

But scarcely was this remark out of their lips, when they perceived She Yüeh walk in. "Madame Wang," she said, "has sent a servant to inform you, Master Secundus, that 'you are to go at an early hour to-morrow morning to your maternal uncle's, and that you are to explain to him that her ladyship isn't feeling quite up to the mark, and that she cannot pay him a visit in person.'"

Pao-yü precipitately jumped to his feet (out of deference to his mother), and signified his assent, by answering 'Yes.' He then went on to inquire of Pao-ch'ai and Pao-ch'in, "Are you two going?"

"We're not going," Pao-ch'ai rejoined. "We simply went there yesterday to take our presents over but we left after a short chat."

Pao-yü thereupon pressed his female cousins to go ahead and he then followed them. But Tai-yü called out to him again and stopped him. "When is Hsi Jen, after all, coming back?" she asked.

"She'll naturally come back after she has accompanied the funeral," Pao-yü retorted.

Tai-yü had something more she would have liked to tell him, but she found it difficult to shape it into words. After some moments spent in abstraction, "Off with you!" she cried.

page 452

Pao-yü too felt that he treasured in his heart many things he would fain confide to her, but he did not know what to bring to his lips, so after cogitating within himself for a time, he likewise observed smilingly: "We'll have another chat to-morrow," and, as he said so, he wended his way down the stairs. Lowering his head, he was just about to take a step forward, when he twisted himself round again with alacrity. "Now that the nights are longer than they were, you're sure to cough often and wake several times in the night; eh?" he asked.

"Last night," Tai-yü answered, "I was all right; I coughed only twice. But I only slept at the fourth watch for a couple of hours and then I couldn't close my eyes again."

"I really have something very important to tell you," Pao-yü proceeded with another smile. "It only now crossed my mind." Saying this, he approached her and added in a confidential tone: "I think that the birds' nests sent to you by cousin Pao-chai...."

Barely, however, had he had time to conclude than he spied dame Chao enter the room to pay Tai-yü a visit. "Miss, have you been all right these last few days?" she inquired.

Tai-yü readily guessed that this was an attention extended to her merely as she had, on her way back from T'an Ch'un's quarters, to pass by her door, so speedily smiling a forced smile, she offered her a seat.

"Many thanks, dame Chao," she said, "for the trouble of thinking of me, and for coming in person in this intense cold."

Hastily also bidding a servant pour the tea, she simultaneously winked at Pao-yü.

Pao-yü grasped her meaning, and forthwith quitted the apartment. As this happened to be about dinner time, and he had been enjoined as well by Madame Wang to be back at an early hour, Pao-yü returned to his quarters, and looked on while Ch'ing Wen took her medicine. Pao-yü did not desire Ch'ing Wen this evening to move into the winter apartment, but stayed with Ch'ing Wen outside; and, giving orders to bring the warming-frame near the winter apartment, She Yüh slept on it.

Nothing of any interest worth putting on record transpired during the night. On the morrow, before the break of day, Ch'ing Wen aroused She Yüeh.

"You should awake," she said. "The only thing is that you haven't had enough sleep. If you go out and tell them to get the water for tea ready for him, while I wake him, it will be all right."

She Yüh immediately jumped up and threw something over her. "Let's call him to get up and dress in his fine clothes," she said. "We can summon

them in, after this fire-box has been removed. The old nurses told us not to allow him to stay in this room for fear the virus of the disease should pass on to him; so now if they see us bundled up together in one place, they're bound to kick up another row."

"That's my idea too," Ch'ing Wen replied.

The two girls were then about to call him, when Pao-yü woke up of his own accord, and speedily leaping out of bed, he threw his clothes over him.

She Yüeh first called a young maid into the room and put things shipshape before she told Ch'in Wen and the other servant-girls to enter; and along with them, she remained in waiting upon Pao-yü while he combed his hair, and washed his face and hands. This part of his toilet over, She Yüeh remarked: "It's cloudy again, so I suppose it's going to snow. You'd better therefore wear a woollen overcoat!"

Pao-yü nodded his head approvingly; and set to work at once to effect the necessary change in his costume. A young waiting-maid then presented him a covered bowl, in a small tea tray, containing a decoction made of Fu-kien lotus and red dates. After Pao-yü had had a couple of mouthfuls, She Yüeh also brought him a small plateful of brown ginger, prepared according to some prescription. Pao-yü put a piece into his mouth, and, impressing some advice on Ch'ing Wen, he crossed over to dowager lady Chia's suite of rooms.

His grandmother had not yet got out of bed. But she was well aware that Pao-yü was going out of doors so having the entrance leading into her bedroom opened she asked Pao-yü to walk in. Pao-yü espied behind the old lady, Pao-ch'in lying with her face turned towards the inside, and not awake yet from her sleep.

Dowager lady Chia observed that Pao-yü was clad in a deep-red felt fringed overcoat, with woollen lichee-coloured archery-sleeves and with an edging of dark green glossy satin, embroidered with gold rings. "What!" old lady Chia inquired, "is it snowing?"

"The weather is dull," Pao-yü replied, "but it isn't snowing yet."

Dowager lady Chia thereupon sent for Yüan Yang and told her to fetch the peacock down pelisse, finished the day before, and give it to him. Yüan Yang signified her obedience and went off, and actually returned with what was wanted.

When Pao-yü came to survey it, he found that the green and golden hues glistened with bright lustre, that the jadelike variegated colours on it shone with splendour, and that it bore no resemblance to the duck-down coat, which Pao-ch'in had been wearing.

page 454

“This,” he heard his grandmother smilingly remark, “is called 'bird gold'. This is woven of the down of peacocks, caught in Russia, twisted into thread. The other day, I presented that one with the wild duck down to your young female cousin, so I now give you this one.”

Pao-yü prostrated himself before her, after which he threw the coat over his shoulders.

“Go and let your mother see it before you start,” his grandmother laughingly added.

Pao-yü assented, and quitted her apartments, when he caught sight of Yüan Yang standing below rubbing her eyes. Ever since the day on which Yüan Yang had sworn to have done with the match, she had not exchanged a single word with Pao-yü. Pao-yü was therefore day and night a prey to dejection. So when he now observed her shirk his presence again, Pao-yü at once advanced up to her, and, putting on a smile, “My dear girl,” he said, “do look at the coat I've got on. Is it nice or not?”

Yüan Yang shoved his hand away, and promptly walked into dowager lady Chia's quarters.

Pao-yü was thus compelled to repair to Madame Wang's room, and let her see his coat. Retracing afterwards his footsteps into the garden, he let Ch'ing Wen and She Yüeh also have a look at it, and then came and

told his grandmother that he had attended to her wishes.

“My mother,” he added, “has seen what I've got on. But all she said was: 'what a pity!' and then she went on to enjoin me to be 'careful with it and not to spoil it.'”

“There only remains this single one,” old lady Chia observed, “so if you spoil it you can't have another. Even did I want to have one made for you like it now, it would be out of the question.”

At the close of these words, she went on to advise him. “Don't,” she said, “have too much wine and come back early.” Pao-yü acquiesced by uttering several yes's.

An old nurse then followed him out into the pavilion. Here they discovered six attendants, (that is), Pao-yü's milk-brother Li Kuei, and Wang Ho-jung, Chang Jo-chin, Chao I-hua, Ch'ien Ch'i, and Chou Jui, as well as four young servant-lads: Pei Ming, Pan Ho, Chu Shao and Sao Hung; some carrying bundles of clothes on their backs, some holding cushions in their hands, others leading a white horse with engraved saddle and variegated bridles. They had already been waiting for a good long while. The old nurse went on to issue some directions, and the six servants, hastily expressing their obedience by numerous yes's, quickly caught hold of the saddle and weighed the stirrup down while Pao-yü mounted leisurely. Li Kuei and Wang Ho-jung then led the

page 455

horse by the bit. Two of them, Ch'ien Ch'i and Chou Jui, walked ahead and showed the way. Chang Jo-chin and Chao I-hua followed Pao-yü closely on each side.

“Brother Chou and brother Ch'ien,” Pao-yü smiled, from his seat on his horse, “let's go by this side-gate. It will save my having again to dismount, when we reach the entrance to my father's study.”

“Mr. Chia Cheng is not in his study,” Chou Jui laughed, with a curtsey. “It has been daily under lock and key, so there will be no need for you, master, to get down from your horse.”

“Though it be locked up,” Pao-yü smiled, “I shall have to dismount all the same.”

“You're quite right in what you say, master;” both Ch'ien Ch'i and Li Kuei chimed in laughingly; “but pretend you're lazy and don't get down. In the event of our coming across Mr. Lai Ta and our number two Mr. Lin, they're sure, rather awkward though it be for them to say anything to their master, to tender you one or two words of advice, but throw the whole of the blame upon us. You can also tell them that we had not explained to you what was the right thing to do.”

Chou Jui and Ch'ien Ch'i accordingly wended their steps straight for the side-gate. But while they were keeping up some sort of conversation, they came face to face with Lai Ta on his way in.

Pao-yü speedily pulled in his horse, with the idea of dismounting. But Lai Ta hastened to draw near and to clasp his leg. Pao-yü stood up on his stirrup, and, putting on a smile, he took his hand in his, and made several remarks to him.

In quick succession, he also perceived a young servant-lad make his appearance inside leading the way for twenty or thirty servants, laden with brooms and dust-baskets. The moment they espied Pao-yü, they, one and all, stood along the wall, and dropped their arms against their sides, with the exception of the head lad, who bending one knee, said: “My obeisance to you, sir.”

Pao-yü could not recall to mind his name or surname, but forcing a faint smile, he nodded his head to and fro. It was only when the horse had well gone past, that the lad eventually led the bevy of servants off, and that they went after their business.

Presently, they egressed from the side-gate. Outside, stood the servant-lads of the six domestics, Li Kuei and his companions, as well as several grooms, who had, from an early hour, got ready about ten horses and been standing, on special duty, waiting for their arrival. As soon as they reached the further end of the side-gate, Li Kuei and each of the other attendants

mounted their horses, and pressed ahead to lead the way. Like a streak of smoke, they got out of sight, without any occurrence worth noticing.

Ch'ing Wen, meanwhile, continued to take her medicines. But still she experienced no relief in her ailment. Such was the state of exasperation into which she worked herself that she abused the doctor right and left. "All he's good for," she cried, "is to squeeze people's money. But he doesn't know how to prescribe a single dose of efficacious medicine for his patients."

"You have far too impatient a disposition!" She Yüeh said, as she advised her, with a smile. "'A disease,' the proverb has it, 'comes like a crumbling mountain, and goes like silk that is reeled.' Besides, they're not the divine pills of 'Lao Chün'. How ever could there be such efficacious medicines? The only thing for you to do is to quietly look after yourself for several days, and you're sure to get all right. But the more you work yourself into such a frenzy, the worse you get!"

Ch'ing Weng went on to heap abuse on the head of the young-maids. "Where have they gone? Have they bored into the sand?" she ejaculated. "They see well enough that I'm ill, so they make bold and runaway. But by and bye when I recover, I shall take one by one of you and flay your skin off for you."

Ting Erh, a young maid, was struck with dismay, and ran up to her with hasty step. "Miss," she inquired, "what's up with you?"

"Is it likely that the rest are all dead and gone, and that there only remains but you?" Ch'ing Wen exclaimed.

But while she spoke, she saw Chui Erh also slowly enter the room.

"Look at this vixen!" Ch'ing Wen shouted. "If I don't ask for her, she won't come. Had there been any monthly allowances issued and fruits distributed here, you would have been the first to run in! But approach a bit! Am I tigress to gobble you up?"

Chui Erh was under the necessity of advancing a few steps nearer to her. But, all of a sudden, Ch'ing Wen stooped forward, and with a dash clutching her hand, she took a long pin from the side of her pillow, and pricked it at random all over.

“What's the use of such paws?” she railed at her. “They don't ply a needle, and they don't touch any thread! All you're good for is to prig things to stuff that mouth of yours with! The skin of your phiz is shallow and those paws of yours are light! But with the shame you bring upon yourself before the world, isn't it right that I should prick you, and make mincemeat of you?”

Chui Erh shouted so wildly from pain that She Yueh stepped forward and immediately drew them apart. She then pressed Ch'ing Wen, until she

page 457

induced her to lie down.

“You're just perspiring,” she remarked, “and here you are once more bent upon killing yourself. Wait until you are yourself again! Won't you then be able to give her as many blows as you may like? What's the use of kicking up all this fuss just now?”

Ch'ing Wen bade a servant tell nurse Sung to come in. “Our master Secundus, Mr. Pao-yü, recently asked me to tell you,” she remarked on her arrival, “that Chui Erh is very lazy. He himself gives her orders to her very face, but she is ever ready to raise objections and not to budge. Even when Hsi Jen bids her do things, she vilifies her behind her back. She must absolutely therefore be packed off to-day. And if Mr. Pao himself lays the matter to-morrow before Madame Wang, things will be square.”

After listening to her grievances, nurse Sung readily concluded in her mind that the affair of the bracelet had come to be known. “What you suggest is well and good, it's true,” she consequently smiled, “but it's as well to wait until Miss Hua (flower) returns and hears about the things. We can then give her the sack.”

“Mr. Pao-yü urgently enjoined this to-day,” Ch'ing Wen pursued, “so what about Miss Hua (flower) and Miss Ts'ao (grass)? We've, of course, gob rules of propriety here, so you just do as I tell you; and be quick and send for some one from her house to come and fetch her away!”

“Well, now let's drop this!” She Yüeh interposed. “Whether she goes soon or whether she goes late is one and the same thing; so let them take her away soon; we'll then be the sooner clear of her.”

At these words, nurse Sung had no alternative but to step out, and to send for her mother. When she came, she got ready all her effects, and then came to see Ch'ing Wen and the other girls. “Young ladies,” she said, “what's up? If your niece doesn't behave as she ought to, why, call her to account. But why banish her from this place? You should, indeed, leave us a little face!”

“As regards what you say,” Ch'ing Wen put in, “wait until Pao-yü comes, and then we can ask him. It's nothing to do with us.”

The woman gave a sardonic smile. “Have I got the courage to ask him?” she answered. “In what matter doesn't he lend an ear to any settlement you, young ladies, may propose? He invariably agrees to all you say! But if you, young ladies, aren't agreeable, it's really of no avail. When you, for example, spoke just now,—it's true it was on the sly,—you called him straightway by his name, miss. This thing does very well with you, young ladies, but were we to do anything of the kind, we'd be looked upon as very savages!”

page 458

Ch'ing Wen, upon hearing her remark, became more than ever exasperated, and got crimson in the face. “Yes, I called him by his name,” she rejoined, “so you'd better go and report me to our old lady and Madame Wang. Tell them I'm a rustic and let them send me too off.”

“Sister-in-law,” urged She Yüeh, “just you take her away; and if you've got aught to say, you can say it by and bye. Is this a place for you to bawl in and to try and explain what is right? Whom have you seen discourse

upon the rules of propriety with us? Not to speak of you, sister-in-law, even Mrs. Lai Ta and Mrs. Lin treat us fairly well. And as for calling him by name, why, from days of yore to the very present, our dowager mistress has invariably bidden us do so. You yourselves are well aware of it. So much did she fear that it would be a difficult job to rear him that she deliberately wrote his infant name on slips of paper and had them stuck everywhere and anywhere with the design that one and all should call him by it. And this in order that it might exercise a good influence upon his bringing up. Even water-coolies and scavenger-coolies indiscriminately address him by his name; and how much more such as we? So late, in fact, as yesterday Mrs. Lin gave him but once the title of 'Sir,' and our old mistress called even her to task. This is one side of the question. In the next place, we all have to go and make frequent reports to our venerable dowager lady and Madame Wang, and don't we with them allude to him by name in what we have to say? Is it likely we'd also style him 'Sir?' What day is there that we don't utter the two words 'Pao-yü' two hundred times? And is it for you, sister-in-law, to come and pick out this fault? But in a day or so, when you've leisure to go to our old mistress' and Madame Wang's, you'll hear us call him by name in their very presence, and then you'll feel convinced. You've never, sister-in-law, had occasion to fulfil any honourable duties by our old lady and our lady. From one year's end to the other, all you do is to simply loaf outside the third door. So it's no matter of surprise, if you don't happen to know anything of the customs which prevail with us inside. But this isn't a place where you, sister-in-law, can linger for long. In another moment, there won't be any need for us to say anything; for some one will be coming to ask you what you want, and what excuse will you be able to plead? So take her away and let Mrs. Lin know about it; and commission her to come and find our Mr. Secundus and tell him all. There are in this establishment over a thousand inmates; one comes and another comes, so that though we know people and inquire their names, we can't nevertheless imprint them clearly on our minds."

At the close of this long rigmarole, she at once told a young maid to take the mop and wash the floors.

The woman listened patiently to her arguments, but she could find no

words to say anything to her by way of reply. Nor did she have the audacity to protract her stay. So flying into a huff, she took Chui Erh along with her, and there and then made her way out.

“Is it likely,” nurse Sung hastily observed, “that a dame like you doesn't know what manners mean? Your daughter has been in these rooms for some time, so she should, when she is about to go, knock her head before the young ladies. She has no other means of showing her gratitude. Not that they care much about such things. Yet were she to simply knock her head, she would acquit herself of a duty, if nothing more. But how is it that she says I'm going, and off she forthwith rushes?”

Chui Erh overheard these words, and felt under the necessity of turning back. Entering therefore the apartment, she prostrated herself before the two girls, and then she went in quest of Ch'iu Wen and her companions, but neither did they pay any notice whatever to her.

“Hai!” ejaculated the woman, and heaving a sigh—for she did not venture to utter a word,—she walked off, fostering a grudge in her heart.

Ch'ing Wen had, while suffering from a cold, got into a fit of anger into the bargain, so instead of being better, she was worse, and she tossed and rolled until the time came for lighting the lamps. But the moment she felt more at ease, she saw Pao-yü come back. As soon as he put his foot inside the door, he gave way to an exclamation, and stamped his foot.

“What's the reason of such behaviour?” She Yüeh promptly asked him.

“My old grandmother,” Pao-yü explained, “was in such capital spirits that she gave me this coat to-day; but, who'd have thought it, I inadvertently burnt part of the back lapel. Fortunately however the evening was advanced so that neither she nor my mother noticed what had happened.”

Speaking the while, he took it off. She Yüeh, on inspection, found indeed a hole burnt in it of the size of a finger. “This,” she said, “must have been done by some spark from the hand-stove. It's of no consequence.”

Immediately she called a servant to her. "Take this out on the sly," she bade her, "and let an experienced weaver patch it. It will be all right then." So saying, she packed it up in a wrapper, and a nurse carried it outside.

"It should be ready by daybreak," she urged. "And by no means let our old lady or Madame Wang know anything about it."

The matron brought it back again, after a protracted absence. "Not only," she explained; "have weavers, first-class tailors, and embroiderers, but even those, who do women's work, been asked about it, and they all have no idea what this is made of. None of them therefore will venture to undertake the

page 460

job."

"What's to be done?" She Yüeh inquired. "But it won't matter if you don't wear it to-morrow."

"To-morrow is the very day of the anniversary," Pao-yü rejoined. "Grandmother and my mother bade me put this on and go and pay my visit; and here I go and burn it, on the first day I wear it. Now isn't this enough to throw a damper over my good cheer?"

Ch'ing Wen lent an ear to their conversation for a long time, until unable to restrain herself, she twisted herself round. "Bring it here," she chimed in, "and let me see it! You haven't been lucky in wearing this; but never mind!"

These words were still on Ch'ing Wen's lips, when the coat was handed to her. The lamp was likewise moved nearer to her. With minute care she surveyed it. "This is made," Ch'ing Wen observed, "of gold thread, spun from peacock's feathers. So were we now to also take gold thread, twisted from the feathers of the peacock, and darn it closely, by imitating the woof, I think it will pass without detection."

"The peacock-feather-thread is ready at hand," She Yüeh remarked smilingly. "But who's there, exclusive of you, able to join the threads?"

"I'll, needless to say, do my level best to the very cost of my life and finish," Ch'ing Wen added.

"How ever could this do?" Pao-yü eagerly interposed. "You're just slightly better, and how could you take up any needlework?"

"You needn't go on in this chicken-hearted way!" Ch'ing Wen cried. "I know my own self well enough."

With this reply, she sat up, and, putting her hair up, she threw something over her shoulders. Her head felt heavy; her body light. Before her eyes, confusedly flitted golden stirs. In real deed, she could not stand the strain. But when inclined to give up the work, she again dreaded that Pao-yü would be driven to despair. She therefore had perforce to make a supreme effort and, setting her teeth to, she bore the exertion. All the help she asked of She Yüeh was to lend her a hand in reeling the thread.

Ch'ing Wen first took hold of a thread, and put it side by side (with those in the pelisse) to compare the two together. "This," she remarked, "isn't quite like them; but when it's patched up with it, it won't show very much."

"It will do very well," Pao-yü said. "Could one also go and hunt up a Russian tailor?"

Ch'ing Wen commenced by unstitching the lining, and, inserting under it, a bamboo bow, of the size of the mouth of a tea cup, she bound it tight at the back. She then turned her mind to the four sides of the aperture, and

page 461

these she loosened by scratching them with a golden knife. Making next two stitches across with her needle, she marked out the warp and woof; and, following the way the threads were joined, she first and foremost connected the foundation, and then keeping to the original lines, she went backwards and forwards mending the hole; passing her work, after every second stitch, under further review. But she did not ply her needle three to five times, before she lay herself down on her pillow, and indulged in a little rest.

Pao-yü was standing by her side. Now he inquired of her: "Whether she would like a little hot water to drink." Later on, he asked her to repose herself. Now he seized a grey-squirrel wrapper and threw it over her shoulders. Shortly after, he took a pillow and propped her up. (The way he fussed) so exasperated Ch'ing Wen that she begged and entreated him to leave off.

"My junior ancestor!" she exclaimed, "do go to bed and sleep! If you sit up for the other half of the night, your eyes will to-morrow look as if they had been scooped out, and what good will possibly come out of that?"

Pao-yü realised her state of exasperation and felt compelled to come and lie down anyhow. But he could not again close his eyes.

In a little while, she heard the clock strike four, and just managing to finish she took a small tooth-brush, and rubbed up the pile.

"That will do!" She Yüeh put in. "One couldn't detect it, unless one examined it carefully."

Pao-yü asked with alacrity to be allowed to have a look at it. "Really," he smiled, "it's quite the same thing."

Ch'ing Wen coughed and coughed time after time, so it was only after extreme difficulty that she succeeded in completing what she had to patch. "It's mended, it's true," she remarked, "but it does not, after all, look anything like it. Yet, I cannot stand the effort any more!"

As she shouted 'Ai-ya,' she lost control over herself, and dropped down upon the bed.

But, reader, if you choose to know anything more of her state, peruse the next chapter.

CHAPTER LIII.

In the Ning Kuo mansion sacrifices are offered to their ancestors on the last night of the year.

In the Jung Kuo mansion, a banquet is given on the evening of the 15th of the first moon.

But to resume our story. When Pao-yü saw that Ch'ing Wen had in her

page 462

attempt to finish mending the peacock-down cloak exhausted her strength and fatigued herself, he hastily bade a young maid help him massage her; and setting to work they tapped her for a while, after which, they retired to rest. But not much time elapsed before broad daylight set in. He did not however go out of doors, but simply called out that they should go at once and ask the doctor round.

Presently, Dr. Wang arrived. After feeling her pulse, his suspicions were aroused. "Yesterday," he said, "she was much better, so how is it that today she is instead weaker, and has fallen off so much? She must surely have had too much in the way of drinking or eating! Or she must have fatigued herself. A complaint arising from outside sources is, indeed, a light thing. But it's no small matter if one doesn't take proper care of one's self, as she has done after perspiring."

As he passed these remarks, he walked out of the apartment, and, writing a prescription, he entered again.

When Pao-yü came to examine it, he perceived that he had eliminated the laxatives, and all the drugs, whose properties were to expel noxious influences, but added pachyma cocos, rhubarb, arolia edulis, and other such medicines, which could stimulate the system and strengthen her physique.

Pao-yü, on one hand, hastened to direct a servant to go and decoct them, and, on the other, he heaved a sigh. "What's to be done?" he exclaimed. "Should anything happen to her, it will all be through the evil

consequences of my shortcomings!”

“Hai!” cried Ch'ing Wen, from where she was reclining on her pillow. “Dear Mr. Secundus, go and mind your own business! Have I got such a dreadful disease?”

Pao-yü had no alternative but to get out of the way. But in the afternoon, he gave out that he was not feeling up to the mark, and hurried back to her side again.

The symptoms of Ch'ing Wen's illness were, it is true, grave; yet fortunately for her she had ever had to strain her physical strength, and not to tax the energies of her mind. Furthermore, she had always been frugal in her diet, so that she had never sustained any harm from under or over-eating. The custom in the Chia mansion was that as soon as any one, irrespective of masters or servants, contracted the slightest chill or cough, quiet and starving should invariably be the main things observed, the treatment by medicines occupying only a secondary place. Hence it was that when the other day she unawares felt unwell, she at once abstained from food during two or three days, while she carefully also nursed herself by taking proper medicines. And although she recently taxed her strength a little too much,

page 463

she gradually succeeded, by attending with extra care to her health for another few days, in bringing about her complete recovery.

Of late, his female cousins, who lived in the garden, had been having their meals in their rooms, so with the extreme convenience of having a fire to prepare drinks and eatables, Pao-yü himself was able, needless for us to go into details, to ask for soups and order broths for (Ch'ing Wen), with which to recoup her health.

Hsi Jen returned soon after she had followed the funeral of her mother. She Yüeh then minutely told Hsi Jen all about Chui Erh's affair, about Ch'ing Wen having sent her off, and about Pao-yü having been already informed of the fact, and so forth, yet to all this Hsi Jen made no further comment than: “what a very hasty disposition (that girl Ch'ing Wen has!).”

But consequent upon Li Wan being likewise laid up with a cold, she got through the inclemency of the weather; Madame Hsing suffering so much from sore eyes that Ying Ch'un and Chou-yen had to go morning and evening and wait on her, while she used such medicines as she had; Li Wan's brother, having also taken her sister-in-law Li, together with Li Wen and Li Ch'i, to spend a few days at his home, and Pao-yü seeing, on one hand, Hsi Jen brood without intermission over the memory of her mother, and give way to secret grief, and Ch'ing Wen, on the other, continue not quite convalescent, there was no one to turn any attention to such things as poetical meetings, with the result that several occasions, on which they were to have assembled, were passed over without anything being done. By this time, the twelfth moon arrived. The end of the year was nigh at hand, so Madame Wang and lady Feng were engaged in making the necessary annual preparations. But, without alluding to Wang Tzu-t'eng, who was promoted to be Lord High Commissioner of the Nine Provinces; Chia Yü-ts'un, who filled up the post of Chief Inspector of Cavalry, Assistant Grand Councillor, and Commissioner of Affairs of State, we will resume our narrative with Chia Chen, in the other part of the establishment. After having the Ancestral Hall thrown open, he gave orders to the domestics to sweep the place, to get ready the various articles, and bring over the ancestral tablets. Then he had the upper rooms cleaned, so as to be ready to receive the various images that were to be hung about. In the two mansions of Ning and Jung, inside as well as outside, above as well as below, everything was, therefore, bustle and confusion. As soon as Mrs. Yu, of the Ning mansion, put her foot out of bed on this day, she set to work, with the assistance of Chia Jung's wife, to prepare such needlework and presents as had to be sent over to dowager lady Chia's portion of the establishment, when it so happened that a servant-girl broke in upon them with a tea-tray in hand, containing ingots of silver of the kind given the

page 464

evening before new year.

“Hsing Erh,” she said, “informs your ladyship that the pieces of gold in that bundle of the other day amount in all to one hundred and fifty-three

taels, one mace and seven candareens; and that the ingots of pure metal and those not, contained in here, number all together two hundred and twenty.”

With these words, she presented the tray. Mrs. Yu passed the ingots under survey. She found some resembling plum-blossom; others peonies. Among them were some with pens and 'as you like,' (importing "your wishes are bound to be fulfilled);” and others representing the eight precious things linked together, for use in spring-time.

Mrs. Yu directed that the silver ingots should be made up into a parcel, and then she bade Hsing Erh take them and deliver them immediately inside.

The servant-girl signified her obedience, and went away. But shortly Chia Chen arrived for his meal, and Chia Jung's wife withdrew.

“Have we received,” thereupon inquired Chia Chen, “the bounty conferred (by His Majesty) for our spring sacrifices or not?”

“I've sent Jung Erh to-day to go and receive it,” Mrs. Yu rejoined.

“Albeit,” continued Chia Chen, “our family can well do without those paltry taels, yet they are, whatever their amount may be, an imperial gift to us so take them over as soon as you can, and send them to our old lady, on the other side, to get ready the sacrifices to our ancestors. Above, we shall then receive the Emperor's bounty; below, we shall enjoy the goodwill of our progenitors. For no matter if we went so far as to spend ten thousand ounces of silver to present offerings to our forefathers with, they could not, in the long run, come up this gift in high repute. Added to this, we shall be the participators of grace and the recipients of blessings. Putting one or two households such as our own aside, what resources would those poverty-stricken families of hereditary officials have at their command wherewith to offer their sacrifices and celebrate the new year, if they could not rely upon this money? In very truth, therefore, the imperial favour is vast, and allproviding!”

“Your arguments are quite correct!” Mrs. Yu ventured.

But while these two were indulging in this colloquy, they caught sight of a

messenger, who came and announced: "Our young master has arrived." Chia Chen accordingly enjoined that he should be told to enter; whereupon they saw Chia Jung step into the room and present with both hands a small bag made of yellow cloth.

"How is it you've been away the whole day?" Chia Chen asked.

Chia Jung strained a smile. "I didn't receive the money to-day from the Board of Rites," he replied. "The issue was again made at the treasury of the Kuang Lu temple; so I had once more to trudge away to the Kuang

page 465

Lu temple before I could get it. The various officials in the Kuang Lu temple bade me present their compliments to you, father. (They asked me to tell you) that they had not seen you for many days, and that they are really longing for your company."

"What an idea! Do they care to see me?" Chia Chen laughed. "Why, here's the end of the year drawing nigh again; so if they don't hanker after my presents, they must long and crave for my entertainments."

While he spoke his eye espied a slip of paper affixed to the yellow cloth bag, bearing the four large characters, 'the imperial favour is everlasting.' On the other side figured also a row of small characters with the seal of the Director of Ancestral Worship in the Board of Rites. These testified that the enclosed consisted of two shares, conferred upon the Ning Kuo duke, Chia Yen, and the Jung Kuo duke, Chia Fa, as a bounty (from the Emperor), for sacrifices to them every spring in perpetuity, (and gave) the number of taels, computed in pure silver, and the year, moon and day, on which they were received in open hall by Chia Jung, Controller in the Imperial Prohibited City and Expectant Officer of the Guards. The signature of the official in charge of the temple for that year was appended below in purple ink.

After Chia Chen had perused the inscription, he finished his meal, rinsed his mouth and washed his hands. This over, he changed his shoes and hat, and bidding Chia Jung follow him along with the money, he went and informed dowager lady Chia and Madame Wang (of the receipt of the

imperial bounty), and repairing back to the near side, he communicated the fact to Chia She and Madame Hsing; after which, he, at length, betook himself to his quarters. He then emptied the money and gave orders that the bag should be taken and burnt in the large censer in the Ancestral Hall.

“Go and ask your aunt Tertia, yonder,” he further enjoined Chia Jung, “whether the day on which the new year wine is to be drunk has been fixed or not? If it has been determined upon, timely notice should be given in the library to draw out a proper list in order that when we again issue our invitations, there should be no chance of two entertainments coming off on the same day. Last year, not sufficient care was exercised, and several persons were invited to both mansions on the very same occasion. And people didn't say that we hadn't been careful enough, but that, as far as appearances went, the two households had made up their minds among themselves to show an empty attention, prompted by the fear of trouble.”

Chia Jung immediately replied that he would attend to his injunctions, and not much time elapsed before he brought a list mentioning the days on which the inmates were to be invited to partake of the new year wine.

Chia Chen examined it. “Go,” he then said, “and give it to Lai Sheng

page 466

so that he may see its contents and invite the guests. But mind he doesn't fix anything else for the dates specified in here.”

But while watching from the pavilion the servant-boys carrying the enclosing screens and rubbing the tables and the gold and silver sacrificial utensils, he perceived a lad appear on the scene holding a petition and a list, and report that 'Wu, the head-farmer in the Hei Shan village, had arrived.' “What does this old executioner come for to-day?” Chia Chen exclaimed.

Chia Jung took the petition and the list, and, unfolding them with all despatch, he held them up (to his father). Chia Chen however glanced at the papers, as they were held by Chia Jung, keeping the while both

hands behind his back. The petition on red paper ran as follows: "Your servant, the head farmer, Wu Chin-hsiao, prostrates himself before his master and mistress and wishes them every kind of happiness and good health, as well as good health to their worthy scion and daughter. May great joy, great blessings, brilliant honours and peace be their share in this spring, which is about to dawn! May official promotion and increase of emoluments be their lot! May they see in everything the accomplishment of their wishes."

Chia Chen smiled. "For a farmer," he remarked, "it has several good points!"

"Pay no heed to the style," urged Chia Jung, also smiling; "but to the good wishes."

Saying this, he speedily opened the list. The articles mentioned were, on examination, found to consist of: "Thirty big deer; five thousand musk deer; fifty roebuck deer; twenty Siamese pigs; twenty boiled pigs; twenty 'dragon' pigs; twenty wild pigs; twenty home-salted pigs; twenty wild sheep; twenty grey sheep; twenty home-boiled sheep; twenty home-dried sheep; two hundred sturgeon; two hundred catties of mixed fish; live chickens, ducks and geese, two hundred of each; two hundred dried chickens, ducks and geese; two hundred pair of pheasants and hares; two hundred pair of bears' paws; twenty catties of deer tendons; fifty catties of beche-de-mer; fifty deer tongues; fifty ox tongues; twenty catties of dried clams; filberts, fir-cones, peaches, apricots and squash, two hundred bags of each; fifty pair of salt prawns; two hundred catties of dried shrimps; a thousand catties of superfine, picked charcoal; two thousand catties of medium charcoal; twenty thousand catties of common charcoal; two piculs of red rice, grown in the imperial grounds; fifty bushels of greenish, glutinous rice; fifty bushels of white glutinous rice; fifty bushels of pounded non-glutinous rice; fifty bushels of various kinds of corn and millet; a thousand piculs of ordinary common rice. Exclusive of a cartload of every sort of vegetables, and irrespective of two thousand five hundred taels, derived from the sale of corn and

millet and every kind of domestic animals, your servant respectfully

presents, for your honour's delectation, two pair of live deer, four pair of white rabbits, four pair of black rabbits, two pair of live variegated fowls, and two pair of duck, from western countries."

When Chia Chen had exhausted the list, "Bring him in!" he cried. In a little time, he perceived Wu Chin-hsiao make his appearance inside. But simply halting in the court, he bumped his head on the ground and paid his respects.

Chia Chen desired a servant to raise him up. "You're still so hale!" he smiled.

"I don't deceive you, Sir," Wu Chin-hsiao observed, "when I say that yours servants are so accustomed to walking, that had we not come, we wouldn't have felt exceedingly dull. Isn't the whole crowd of them keen upon coming to see what the world is like at the feet of the son of heaven? Yet they're, after all, so young in years, that there's the fear of their going astray on the way. But, in a few more years, I shall be able to appease my solicitude on their account."

"How many days have you been on the way?" Chia Chen inquired.

"To reply to your question, Sir," Wu Chin-hsiao ventured, "so much snow has fallen this year that it's everywhere out of town four and five feet in depth. The other day, the weather suddenly turned mild, and with the thaw that set in, it became so very hard to make any progress that we wasted several days. Yet albeit we've been a month and two days in accomplishing the journey; it isn't anything excessive. But as I feared lest you, Sir, would be giving way to anxiety, didn't I hurry along to arrive in good time?"

"How is it, I said, that he's come only to-day!" Chia Chen observed.

"But upon looking over the list just now it seemed to me that you, old fossil, had come again to make as much as fun of me, as if you were putting up a stage for a boxing-match."

Wu Chin-hsiao hastily drew near a couple of steps. "I must tell you, Sir," he remarked, "that the harvest this year hasn't really been good. Rain set

in ever since the third moon, and there it went on incessantly straight up to the eighth moon. Indeed, the weather hasn't kept fine for five or six consecutive days. In the ninth moon, there came a storm of hail, each stone of which was about the size of a saucer. And over an area of the neighbouring two or three hundred li, the men and houses, animals and crops, which sustained injury, numbered over thousands and ten thousands. Hence it is that the things we've brought now are what they are. Your servant would not have the audacity to tell a lie."

Chia Chen knitted his eyebrows. "I had computed," he said, "that

page 468

the very least you would have brought would have been five thousand taels. What's this enough for? There are only now eight or nine of you farmers, and from two localities reports have contrariwise reached us during the course of this very year of the occurrence of droughts; and do you people come again to try your larks with us? Why, verily these aren't sufficient to see the new year in with."

"And yet," Wu Chin-hsiao argued, "your place can be looked upon as having fared well; for my brother, who's only over a hundred li away from where I am, has actually fallen in with a vastly different lot! He has at present eight farms of that mansion under his control, and these considerably larger than those of yours, Sir; and yet this year they too have only produced but a few things. So nothing beyond two or three thousand taels has been realised. What's more, they've had to borrow money."

"Quite so!" Chia Chen exclaimed. "The state of things in my place here is passable. I've got no outside outlay. The main thing I have to mind is to make provision for a year's necessary expenses. If I launch out into luxuries, I have to suffer hardships, so I must try a little self-denial and manage to save something. It's the custom, besides, at the end of the year to send presents to people and invite others; but I'll thicken the skin of my face a bit, (and dispense with both), and have done. I'm not like the inmates in that mansion, who have, during the last few years, added so many items of expenditure, that it's, of course, a matter of impossibility for them to avoid loosening their purse strings. But they haven't, on the

other hand, made any addition to their funds and landed property. During the course of the past year or two, they've had to make up many deficits. And if they don't appeal to you, to whom can they go?"

Wu Chin-hsiao laughed. "It's true," he said, "that in that mansion many items have been added, but money goes out and money comes in. And won't the Empress and His Majesty the Emperor bestow their favour?"

At these words, Chia Chen smilingly faced Chia Jung and the other inmates. "Just you listen to his arguments!" he exclaimed. "Aren't they ridiculous, eh?"

Chia Jung and the rest promptly smiled. "Among your hills and seaboard can anything," they observed, "be known with regard to this principle? Is it likely, pray, that the Empress will ever make over to us the Emperor's treasury? Why, even supposing she may at heart entertain any such wish, she herself cannot possibly adopt independent action. Of course, she does confer her benefits on them, but this is at stated times and fixed periods, and they merely consist of a few coloured satins, antiquities, and bric-a-brac. In fact, when she does bestow hard cash on them, it doesn't exceed a hundred ounces

page 469

of silver. But did she even give them so much as a thousand and more taels, what would these suffice for? During which of the two last years have they not had to fork out several thousands of taels? In the first year, the imperial consort paid a visit to her parents; and just calculate how much they must have run through in laying out that park, and you'll then know how they stand! Why, if in another couple of years, the Empress comes and pays them a second visit, they'll be, I'm inclined to fancy, regular paupers."

"That's why," urged Chia Chen smiling, "country people are such unsophisticated creatures, that though they behold what lies on the surface, they have no idea of what is inside hidden from view. They're just like a piece of yellow cedar made into a mallet for beating the sonorous stones with. The exterior looks well enough; but it's all bitter inside."

"In very truth," Chia Jung added, laughing also the while, as he addressed himself to Chia Chen, "that mansion is impoverished. The other day, I heard a consultation held on the sly between aunt Secunda and Yüan Yang. What they wanted was to filch our worthy senior's things and go and pawn them in order to raise money."

"This is just another devilish trick of that minx Feng!" Chia Chen smiled. "How ever could they have reached such straits? She's certain to have seen that expenses were great, and that heavy deficits had to be squared, so wishing again to curtail some item or other, who knows which, she devised this plan as a preparatory step, in order that when it came to be generally known, people should say that they had been reduced to such poverty. But from the result of the calculations I have arrived at in my mind, things haven't as yet attained this climax:"

Continuing, he issued orders to a servant to take Wu Chin-hsiao outside, and to treat him with every consideration. But no further mention need be made of him.

During this while, Chia Chen gave directions to keep from the various perquisites just received such as would prove serviceable for the sacrifices to their ancestors, and, selecting a few things of each kind, he told Chia Jung to have them taken to the Jung mansion. After this, he himself kept what was required for his own use at home; and then allotting the rest, with due compliance to gradation, he had share after share piled up at the foot of the moon-shaped platform, and sending servants to summon the young men of the clan, he distributed them among them.

In quick succession, numerous contributions for the ancestral sacrifices were likewise sent from the Jung mansion; also presents for Chia Chen. Chia Chen inspected the things, and having them removed, he completed

page 470

preparing the sacrificial utensils. Then putting on a pair of slip-shod shoes and throwing over his shoulders a long pelisse with 'She-li-sun' fur,

he bade the servants spread a large wolf-skin rug in a sunny place on the stone steps below the pillars of the pavilion, and with his back to the warm sun, he leisurely watched the young people come and receive the new year gifts. Perceiving that Chia Ch'in had also come to fetch his share, Chia Chen called him over. "How is it that you've come too?" he asked. "Who told you to come?"

Chia Ch'in respectfully dropped his arms against his sides. "I heard," he replied, "that you, senior Sir, had sent for us to appear before you here and receive our presents; so I didn't wait for the servants to go and tell me, but came straightway."

"These things," Chia Chen added, "are intended for distribution among all those uncles and cousins who have nothing to do and who enjoy no source of income. Those two years you had no work, I gave you plenty of things too. But you're entrusted at present with some charge in the other mansion, and you exercise in the family temples control over the bonzes and taoist priests, so that you as well derive every month your share of an allowance. Irrespective of that, the allowances and money of the Buddhist priests pass through your hands. And do you still come to fetch things of this kind? You're far too greedy. Just you look at the fineries you wear. Why, they look like the habiliments of one who has money to spend, of a regular man of business. You said some time back that you had nothing which could bring you in any money, but how is it that you've got none again now? You really don't look as if you were in the same plight that you were in once upon a time."

"I have in my home a goodly number of inmates," Chia Ch'in explained, "so my expenses are great."

Chia Chen gave a saturnine laugh. "Are you trying again to excuse yourself with me?" he cried. "Do you flatter yourself that I have no idea of your doings in the family temples? When you get there, you, of course, play the grand personage and no one has the courage to run counter to your wishes. Then you've also got the handling of money. Besides you're far away from us, so you're arrogant and audacious. Night after night, you get bad characters together; you gamble for money; and you keep women and young boys. And though you now fling away money with such a high hand, do you still presume to come and receive gifts? But as

you can't manage to filch anything to take along with you, it will do you good to get beans, with the pole used for carrying water. Wait until the new year is over, and then I'll certainly report you to your uncle Secundus."

Chia Ch'in got crimson in the face, and did not venture to utter a single

page 471

word by way of extenuation. A servant, however, then announced that the Prince from the Pei mansion had sent a pair of scrolls and a purse.

At this announcement, Chia Chen immediately told Chia Jung to go out and entertain the messengers. "And just say," he added, "that I'm not at home."

Chia Jung went on his way. Chia Chen, meanwhile, dismissed Chia Ch'in; and, seeing the things taken away, he returned to his quarters and finished his evening meal with Mrs. Yu. But nothing of any note occurred during that night.

The next day, he had, needless to say, still more things to give his mind to. Soon arrived the twenty ninth day of the twelfth moon, and everything was in perfect readiness. In the two mansions alike, the gate guardian gods and scrolls were renovated. The hanging tablets were newly varnished. The peach charms glistened like new. In the Ning Kuo mansion, every principal door, starting from the main entrance, the ceremonial gates, the doors of the large pavilions, of the winter apartments, and inner pavilions, the inner three gates, the inner ceremonial gates and the inner boundary gates, straight up to the doors of the main halls, was flung wide open. At the bottom of the steps, were placed on either side large and lofty vermilion candles, of uniform colour; which when lit presented the appearance of a pair of golden dragons.

On the morrow, dowager lady Chia and those with any official status, donned the court dress consistent with their grade, and taking first and foremost a retinue of inmates with them, they entered the palace in eight bearer state chairs, and presented their congratulations. After acquitting themselves of the ceremonial rites, and partaking of a banquet, they betook themselves back, and alighted from their chairs on their arrival at

the winter hall of the Ning mansion. The young men, who had not followed the party to court, waited, arranged in their proper order, in front of the entrance the King mansion, and subsequently led the way into the ancestral temple.

But to return to Pao-ch'in. This was the first occasion, on which she put her foot inside to look at the inner precincts of the Chia ancestral temple, and as she did so, she scrutinized with minute attention all the details that met her gaze in the halls dedicated to their forefathers. These consisted, in fact, of a distinct courtyard on the west side of the Ning mansion. Within the balustrade, painted black, stood five apartments. Over the main entrance to these was suspended a flat tablet with the inscription in four characters: 'Ancestral hall of the Chia family.' On the side of these was recorded the fact that it had been the handiwork of Wang Hsi-feng, specially promoted to the rank of Grand Tutor of the Heir Apparent, and formerly Chancellor of the Imperial Academy. On either side, was one of a pair of scrolls, bearing the

page 472

motto:

*Besmear the earth with your liver and brains, all ye people, out of gratitude for the bounty of (the Emperor's) protection!
The reputation (of the Chia family) reaches the very skies. Hundred generations rejoice in the splendour of the sacrifices accorded them.*

This too had been executed by Wang, the Grand Tutor.

As soon as the court was entered, a raised road was reached, paved with white marble, on both sides of which were planted deep green fir trees, and kingfisher-green cypress trees. On the moon-shaped platform were laid out antiquities, tripods, libation-vases, and other similar articles. In front of the antechamber was hung a gold-coloured flat tablet, with nine dragons, and the device:

Like a dazzling star is the statesman, who assists the Emperor.

This was the autograph of a former Emperor.

On both sides figured a pair of antithetical scrolls, with the motto:

Their honours equal the sun and moon in lustre.

Their fame is without bounds. It descends to their sons and grandsons.

These lines were likewise from the imperial pencil. Over the five-roomed main hall was suspended a tablet, inlaid with green, representing wriggling dragons. The sentiments consisted of:

Mindful of the remotest and heedful of the most distant ancestors.

A pair of antithetical scrolls was hung on the sides; on which was written:

After their death, their sons and grandsons enjoy their beneficent virtues.

Up to the very present the masses think of the Jung and Ning families.

Both these mottoes owed their origin to the imperial pencil.

Inside, lanterns and candles burnt with resplendent brightness. Embroidered curtains and decorated screens were hung in such profusion that though a large number of ancestral tablets were placed about they could not be clearly discerned. The main thing that struck the eye was the inmates of the Chia mansion standing about, on the left and right, disposed in their proper order. Chia Ching was overseer of the sacrifices. Chia She played the part of assistant. Chia Chen presented the cups for libations. Chia Lien and Chia Tsung offered up the strips of paper. Pao-yü held the incense. Chia Ch'ang and Chia Ling distributed the hassocks and looked after the receptacles for the ashes of joss-sticks. The black clad musicians discoursed music. The libation-cups were offered thrice in sacrifice. These devotions over, paper money was burnt; and libations of wine were poured. After the observance of the prescribed rites, the band stopped, and withdrew. The whole company then pressed round dowager lady Chia, and repaired to the main hall, where the images were placed. The embroidered curtains were hung high up. The variegated screens shut in the place from view. The fragrant candles burnt with splendour. In the place of honour, of the

main apartment, were suspended the portraits of two progenitors of the Ning and Jung, both of whom were attired in costumes, ornamented with dragons, and clasped with belts of jade. On the right and left of them, were also arrayed the likenesses of a number of eminent ancestors.

Chia Heng, Chia Chih and the others of the same status stood according to their proper grades in a row extending from the inner ceremonial gate straight up to the verandah of the main hall. Outside the balustrade came at last Chia Ching and Chia She. Inside the balustrade figured the various female members of the family. The domestics and pages were arrayed beyond the ceremonial gate. As each set of eatables arrived, they transmitted them as far as the ceremonial gate, where Chia Heng, Chia Chih and his companions were ready to receive them. From one to another, they afterwards reached the bottom of the steps and found their way into Chia Ching's hands.

Chia Jung, being the eldest grandson of the senior branch, was the only person, who penetrated within the precincts of the balustrade reserved for the female inmates. So whenever Chia Ching had any offerings to pass on, he delivered them to Chia Jung, and Chia Jung gave them to his wife; who again handed them to lady Feng, Mrs. Yu, and the several ladies. And when these offerings reached the sacrificial altar, they were at length surrendered to Madame Wang. Madame Wang thereupon placed them in dowager lady Chia's hands, and old lady Chia deposited them on the altar.

Madame Hsing stood on the west-east side of the sacrificial altar, and along with old lady Chia, she offered the oblations and laid them in their proper places. After the vegetables, rice, soup, sweets, wine and tea had been handed up, Chia Jung eventually retired outside and resumed his position above Chia Ch'in.

Of the male inmates, whose names were composed with the radical 'wen,' 'literature,' Chia Ching was at the time the head. Below followed those with the radical 'Yü,' 'gem,' led by Chia Chen. Next to these, came the inmates with the radical 'ts'ao,' 'grass,' headed by Chia Jung. These were arranged in proper order, with due regard to left and right. The men

figured on the east; the women on the west.

When dowager lady Chia picked up a joss-stick and prostrated herself to perform her devotions, one and all fell simultaneously on their knees, packing up the five-roomed principal pavilion, the inside as well as outside of the three antechambers, the verandahs, the top and bottom of the stairs, the interior of the two vermilion avenues so closely with all their fineries and embroideries that not the slightest space remained vacant among them. Not so much as the caw of a crow struck the ear. All that was audible was the report of jingling and tinkling, and the sound of the gold bells and jade

page 474

ornaments slightly rocked to and fro. Besides these, the creaking noise made by the shoes of the inmates, while getting up and kneeling down.

In a little time, the ceremonies were brought to a close. Chia Ching, Chia She and the rest hastily retired and adjourned to the Jung mansion, where they waited with the special purpose of paying their obeisance to dowager lady Chia.

Mrs. Yu's drawing rooms were entirely covered with red carpets. In the centre stood a large gold cloisonne brasier, with three legs, in imitation of rhinoceros tusks, washed with gold. On the stove-couch in the upper part was laid a new small red hair rug. On it were placed deep red back-cushions with embroidered representations of dragons, which were embedded among clouds and clasped the character longevity, as well as reclining-pillows and sitting-rugs. Covers made of black fox skin were moreover thrown over the couch, along with skins of pure white fox for sitting-cushions.

Dowager lady Chia was invited to place herself on the couch; and on the skin-rugs spread, on either side, two or three of the sisters-in-law, of the same standing as old lady Chia, were urged to sit down.

After the necessary arrangements had been concluded, skin rugs were also put on the small couch, erected in a horizontal position on the near portion of the apartments, and Madame Hsing and the other ladies of her

age were motioned to seat themselves. On the two sides stood, face to face on the floor, twelve chairs carved and lacquered, over which were thrown antimacassars and small grey-squirrel rugs, of uniform colour. At the foot of each chair was a large copper foot-stove. On these chairs, Pao-ch'in and the other young ladies were asked to sit down.

Mrs. Yu took a tray and with her own hands she presented tea to old lady Chia. Chia Jung's wife served the rest of their seniors. Subsequently, Mrs. Yu helped Madame Hsing too and her contemporaries; and Chia Jung's wife then gave tea to the various young ladies; while lady Feng, Li Wan and a few others simply remained below, ready to minister to their wants. After their tea, Madame Hsing and her compeers were the first to rise and come and wait on dowager lady Chia, while she had hers. Dowager lady Chia chatted for a time with her old sisters-in-law and then desired the servants to look to her chair.

Lady Feng thereupon speedily walked up and supported her to rise to her feet.

“The evening meal has long ago been got ready for you, venerable ancestor,” Mrs. Yu smiled. “You've year by year shown no desire to honour us with your presence, but tarry a bit on this occasion and partake of some refreshment before you cross over. Is it likely, in fact, that we can't come up

page 475

to that girl Feng?”

“Go on, worthy senior!” laughed lady Feng, as she propped old lady Chia. “Let's go home and eat our own. Don't heed what she says!”

“In what bustle and confusion aren't you in over here,” smiled dowager lady Chia, “with all the sacrifices to our ancestors, and how could you stand all the trouble I'm putting you to? I've never, furthermore, had every year anything to eat with you; but you've always been in the way of sending me things. So isn't it as well that you should again let me have a few? And as I'll keep for the next day what I shan't be able to get through, won't I thus have a good deal more?”

This remark evoked general laughter.

“Whatever you do,” she went on to enjoin her, “mind you depute some reliable persons to sit up at night and look after the incense fires; but they mustn't let their wits go wool-gathering.”

Mrs. Yu gave her to understand that she would see to it, and they sallied out, at the same time, into the fore part of the winter-apartments. And when Mrs. Yu and her friends went past the screen, the pages introduced the bearers, who shouldered the sedan and walked out by the main entrance. Then following too in the track of Madame Hsing and the other ladies, Mrs. Yu repaired in their company into the Jung mansion.

(Dowager lady Chia's) chair had, meanwhile, got beyond the principal gateway. Here again were deployed, on the east side of the street, the bearers of insignia, the retinue and musicians of the duke of Ning Kuo. They crammed the whole extent of the street. Comers and goers were alike kept back. No thoroughfare was allowed. Shortly, the Jung mansion was reached. The large gates and main entrances were also thrown open straight up to the very interior of the compound. On the present occasion, however, the bearers did not put the chair down by the winter quarters, but passing the main hall, and turning to the west, they rested it on their arrival at the near side of dowager lady Chia's principal pavilion. The various attendants pressed round old lady Chia and followed her into her main apartment, where decorated mats and embroidered screens had also been placed about, and everything looked as if brand-new.

In the brasier, deposited in the centre of the room, burnt fir and cedar incense, and a hundred mixed herbs. The moment dowager lady Chia ensconced herself into a seat, an old nurse entered and announced that: “the senior ladies had come to pay their respects.”

Old lady Chia rose with alacrity to her feet to go and greet them, when she perceived that two or three of her old sisters-in-law had already stepped inside, so clasping each other's hands, they now laughed, and now they pressed

each other to sit down. After tea, they took their departure; but dowager lady Chia only escorted them as far as the inner ceremonial gate, and retracing her footsteps, she came and resumed the place of honour. Chia Ching, Chia She and the other seniors then ushered the various junior male members of the household into her apartments.

“I put you,” smiled old lady Chia, “to ever so much trouble and inconvenience from one year's end to another; so don't pay any obeisance.”

But while she spoke, the men formed themselves into one company, and the women into another, and performed their homage, group by group. This over, arm-chairs were arranged on the left and on the right; and on these chairs they too subsequently seated themselves, according to their seniority and gradation, to receive salutations. The men and women servants, and the pages and maids employed in the two mansions then paid, in like manner, the obeisance consonant with their positions, whether high, middle or low; and this ceremony observed, the new year money was distributed, together with purses, gold and silver ingots, and other presents of the same description. A 'rejoicing together' banquet was spread. The men sat on the east; the women on the west. 'T'u Su,' new year's day, wine was served; also 'rejoicing together' soup, 'propitious' fruits, and 'as you like' cakes. At the close of the banquet, dowager lady Chia rose and penetrated into the inner chamber with the purpose of effecting a change in her costume, so the several inmates present could at last disperse and go their own way.

That night, incense was burnt and offerings presented at the various altars to Buddha and the kitchen god. In the courtyard of Madame Wang's main quarters paper horses and incense for sacrifices to heaven and earth were all ready. At the principal entrance of the garden of Broad Vista were suspended horn lanterns, which from their lofty places cast their bright rays on either side. Every place was hung with street lanterns. Every inmate, whether high or low, was got up in gala dress. Throughout the whole night, human voices resounded confusedly. The din of talking and laughing filled the air. Strings of crackers and rockets were let off incessantly.

The morrow came. At the fifth watch, dowager lady Chia and the other

senior members of the family donned the grand costumes, which accorded with their status, and with a complete retinue they entered the palace to present their court congratulations; for that day was, in addition, the anniversary of Yüan Ch'un's birth. After they had regaled themselves at a collation, they wended their way back, and betaking themselves also into the Ning mansion, they offered their oblations to their ancestors, and then returned home and received the conventional salutations, after which they put off their fineries and retired to rest.

page 477

None of the relatives and friends, who came to wish their compliments of the season, were admitted into (old lady Chia's) presence, but simply had a friendly chat with Mrs. Hsüeh and 'sister-in-law' Li, and studied their own convenience. Or along with Pao-yü, Pao-ch'ai and the other young ladies, they amused themselves by playing the game of war or dominoes.

Madame Wang and lady Feng had one day after another their hands full with the invitations they had to issue for the new year wine. In the halls and courts of the other side theatricals and banquets succeeded each other and relations and friends dropped in in an incessant string. Bustle reigned for seven or eight consecutive days, before things settled down again.

But presently the festival of the full moon of the first month drew near, and both mansions, the Ning as well as the Jung, were everywhere ornamented with lanterns and decorations. On the eleventh, Chia She invited dowager lady Chia and the other inmates. On the next day, Chia Chen also entertained his old senior and Madame Wang and lady Feng. But for us to record on how many consecutive days invitations were extended to them to go and, drink the new year wine, would be an impossible task.

The fifteenth came. On this evening dowager lady Chia gave orders to have several banqueting tables laid in the main reception hall, to engage a company of young actors, to have every place illuminated with flowered lanterns of various colours, and to assemble at a family entertainment all the sons, nephews, nieces, grandchildren and grandchildren's wives and other members of the two mansions of Ning and Jung. As however Chia

Ching did not habitually have any wine or take any ordinary food, no one went to press him to come.

On the seventeenth, he hastened, at the close of the ancestral sacrifices, out of town to chasten himself. In fact, even during the few days he spent at home, he merely frequented retired rooms and lonely places, and did not take the least interest in any single concern. But he need not detain us any further.

As for Chia She, after he had received dowager lady Chia's presents, he said good-bye and went away. But old lady Chia herself was perfectly aware that she could not conveniently tarry any longer on this side so she too followed his example and took her departure.

When Chia She got home, he along with all the guests feasted his eyes on the illuminations and drank wine with them, Music and singing deafened the ear. Embroidered fineries were everywhere visible. For his way of seeking amusement was unlike that customary in this portion of the establishment.

In dowager lady Chia's reception hall, ten tables were meanwhile arranged. By each table was placed a teapoy. On these teapoys stood censers and bottles; three things in all. (In the censers) was burnt 'Pai ho' palace

page 478

incense, a gift from his Majesty the Emperor. But small pots, about eight inches long, four to five inches broad and two or three inches high, adorned with scenery in the shape of rockeries, were also placed about. All of which contained fresh flowers. Small foreign lacquer trays were likewise to be seen, laden with diminutive painted tea-cups of antique ware. Transparent gauze screens with frames of carved blackwood, ornamented with a fringe representing flowers and giving the text of verses, figured too here and there. In different kinds of small old vases were combined together the three friends of winter (pine, bamboo and plum,) as well as 'jade-hall,' 'happiness and honour,' and other fresh flowers.

At the upper two tables sat 'sister-in-law' Li and Mrs. Hsüeh. On the east was only laid a single table. But there as well were placed carved screens, covered with dragons, and a short low-footed couch, with a full assortment of back-cushions, reclining-cushions and skin-rugs. On the couch stood a small teapoy, light and handy, of foreign lacquer, inlaid with gold. On the teapoy were arrayed cups, bowls, foreign cloth napkins and such things. But on it spectacle case was also conspicuous.

Dowager lady Chia was reposing on the couch. At one time, she chatted and laughed with the whole company; at another, she took up her spectacles and looked at what was going on on the stage.

“Make allowances,” she said, “for my old age. My bones are quite sore; so if I be a little out of order in my conduct bear with me, and let us entertain each other while I remain in a recumbent position.” Continuing, she desired Hu Po to make herself comfortable on the couch, and take a small club and tap her legs. No table stood below the couch, but only a high teapoy. On it were a high stand with tassels, flower-vases, incense-burners and other similar articles. But, a small, high table, laden with cups and chopsticks, had besides been got ready. At the table next to this, the four cousins, Pao-ch'in, Hsiang-yün, Tai-yü and Pao-yü were told to seat themselves. The various viands and fruits that were brought in were first presented to dowager lady Chia for inspection. If they took her fancy, she kept them at the small table. But once tasted by her, they were again removed and placed on their table. We could therefore safely say that none but the four cousins sat along with their old grandmother.

The seats occupied by Madame Hsing and Madame Wang were below. Lower down came Mrs. Yu, Li Wan, lady Feng and Chia Jung's wife. On the west sat Pao-ch'ai, Li Wen, Li Ch'i, Chou Yen, Ying Ch'un, and the other cousins. On the large pillars, on either side, were suspended, in groups of three and five, glass lanterns ornamented with fringes. In front of each table stood a candlestick in the shape of drooping lotus leaves. The

page 479

candlesticks contained coloured candles. These lotus leaves were provided with enamelled springs, of foreign make, so they could be

twisted outward, thus screening the rays of the lights and throwing them (on the stage), enabling one to watch the plays with exceptional distinctness. The window-frames and doors had all been removed. In every place figured coloured fringes, and various kinds of court lanterns. Inside and outside the verandahs, and under the roofs of the covered passages, which stretched on either side, were hung lanterns of sheep-horn, glass, embroidered gauze or silk, decorated or painted, of satin or of paper

Round different tables sat Chia Chen, Chia Lien, Chia Huan, Chia Tsung, Chia Jung, Chia Yün, Chia Ch'in, Chia Ch'ang, Chia Ling and other male inmates of the family.

Dowager lady Chia had at an early hour likewise sent servants to invite the male and female members of the whole clan. But those advanced in years were not disposed to take part in any excitement. Some had no one at the time to look after things; others too were detained by ill-health; and much though these had every wish to be present, they were not, after all, in a fit state to come. Some were so envious of riches, and so ashamed of their poverty, that they entertained no desire to avail themselves of the invitation. Others, what is more, fostered such a dislike for, and stood in such awe of, lady Feng that they felt bitter towards her and would not accept. Others again were timid and shy, and so little accustomed to seeing people, that they could not muster sufficient courage to come. Hence it was that despite the large number of female relatives in the clan, none came but Chia Lan's mother, née Lou, who brought Chia Lan with her. In the way of men, there were only Chia Ch'in, Chia Yün, Chia Ch'ang and Chia Ling; the four of them and no others. The managers, at present under lady Feng's control, were however among those who accepted. But albeit there was not a complete gathering of the inmates on this occasion, yet, for a small family entertainment, sufficient animation characterised the proceedings.

About this time, Lin Chih-hsiao's wife also made her appearance, with half a dozen married women who carried three divan tables between them. Each table was covered with a red woollen cloth, on which lay a lot of cash, picked out clean and of equal size, and recently issued from the mint. These were strung together with a deep-red cord. Each couple carried a table, so there were in all three tables.

Lin Chih-hsiao's wife directed that two tables should be placed below the festive board, round which were seated Mrs. Hsüeh and 'sister-in-law' Li, and that one should be put at the foot of dowager lady Chia's couch.

"Place it in the middle!" old lady Chia exclaimed. "These women have

page 480

never known what good manners mean. Put the table down." Saying this, she picked up the cash, and loosening the knots, she unstrung them and piled them on the table.

'The reunion in the western chamber' was just being sung. The play was drawing to a close. They had reached a part where Yü Shu runs off at night in high dudgeon, and Wen Pao jokingly cried out: "You go off with your monkey up; but, as luck would have it, this is the very day of the fifteenth of the first moon, and a family banquet is being given by the old lady in the Jung Kuo mansion, so wait and I'll jump on this horse and hurry in and ask for something to eat. I must look sharp!" The joke made old lady Chia, and the rest of the company laugh.

"What a dreadful, impish child!" Mrs. Hsüeh and the others exclaimed. "Yet poor thing!"

"This child is only just nine years of age," lady Feng interposed.

"He has really made a clever hit!" dowager lady Chia laughed. "Tip him!" she shouted.

This shout over, three married women, who has previously got ready several small wicker baskets, came up, as soon as they heard the word 'tip', and, taking the heaps of loose cash piled on the table, they each filled a basket full, and, issuing outside, they approached the stage. "Dowager lady Chia, Mrs. Hsüeh, and the family relative, Mrs. Li, present Wen Pao this money to purchase something to eat with," they said.

At the end of these words, they flung the contents of the baskets upon the stage. So all then that fell on the ear was the rattle of the cash flying

in every direction over the boards.

Chia Chen and Chia Lien had, by this time, enjoined the pages to fetch big baskets full of cash and have them in readiness. But as, reader, you do not know as yet in what way these presents were given, listen to the circumstances detailed in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER LIV.

*Dowager lady Chia, née Shih, does away with rotten old customs.
Wang Hsi-feng imitates in jest (the dutiful son), by getting herself up in
gaudy theatrical clothes.*

Chia Chen and Chia Lien had, we will now explain, secretly got ready large baskets of cash, so the moment they heard old lady Chia utter the word 'tip,' they promptly bade the pages be quick and fling the money. The noise of the cash, running on every side of the stage, was all that fell on the ear.

page 481

Dowager lady Chia thoroughly enjoyed it.

The two men then rose to their feet. The pages hastened to lay hold of a silver kettle, newly brought in with fresh wine, and to deposit it in Chia Lien's hands, who followed Chia Chen with quick step into the inner rooms. Chia Chen advanced first up to 'sister-in-law' Li's table, and curtsying, he raised her cup, and turned round, whereupon Chia Lien quickly filled it to the brim. Next they approached Mrs. Hsüeh's table, and they also replenished her cup.

These two ladies lost no time in standing up, and smilingly expostulating. "Gentlemen," they said, "please take your seats. What's the use of standing on such ceremonies?"

But presently every one, with the exception of the two ladies Mesdames Hsing and Wang, quitted the banquet and dropping their arms against their bodies they stood on one side. Chia Chen and his companion then drew near dowager lady Chia's couch. But the couch was so low that they had to stoop on their knees. Chia Chen was in front, and presented the cup. Chia Lien was behind, and held the kettle up to her. But notwithstanding that only these two offered her wine, Chia Tsung and the other young men followed them closely in the order of their age and grade; so the moment they saw them kneel, they immediately threw themselves on their knees. Pao-yü too prostrated himself at once.

Hsiang-yün stealthily gave him a push. "What's the use of your now following their lead again and falling on your knees?" she said. "But since you behave like this, wouldn't it be well if you also went and poured wine all round?"

Pao-yü laughed. "Hold on a bit," he rejoined in a low tone, "and I'll go and do so."

So speaking, he waited until his two relatives had finished pouring the wine and risen to their feet, when he also went and replenished the cups of Mesdames Wang and Hsing.

"What about the young ladies?" Chia Chen smilingly asked.

"You people had better be going," old lady Chia and the other ladies unanimately observed. "They'll, then, be more at their ease."

At this hint Chia Chen and his companions eventually withdrew. The second watch had not, at the time, yet gone. The play that was being sung was: 'The eight worthies look at the lanterns,' consisting of eight acts; and had now reached a sensational part.

Pao-yü at this stage left the feast and was going out. "Where are you off to?" inquired his grandmother Chia. "The crackers outside are dreadful. Mind, the lighted pieces of paper falling from above might burn you."

page 482

Pao-yü smiled. "I'm not going far," he answered. "I'm merely going out of the room, and will be back at once."

Dowager lady Chia directed the matrons to "be careful and escort him."

Pao-yü forthwith sallied out; with no other attendants however than She Yüeh, Ch'iu Wen and several youthful maids.

"How is it," his grandmother Chia felt obliged so ask, "that I don't see anything of Hsi Jen? Is she too now putting on high and mighty airs that

she only sends these juvenile girls here?”

Madame Wang rose to her feet with all haste. “Her mother,” she explained, “died the other day; so being in deep mourning, she couldn't very well present herself.”

Dowager lady Chia nodded her head assentingly. “When one is in service,” she smilingly remarked, “there should be no question of mourning or no mourning. Is it likely that, if she were still in my pay, she wouldn't at present be here? All these practices have quite become precedents!”

Lady Feng crossed over to her. “Had she even not been in mourning to-night,” she chimed in with a laugh, “she would have had to be in the garden and keep an eye over that pile of lanterns, candles, and fireworks, as they're most dangerous things. For as soon as any theatricals are set on foot in here, who doesn't surreptitiously sneak out from the garden to have a look? But as far as she goes, she's diligent, and careful of every place. Moreover, when the company disperses and brother Pao-yü retires to sleep, everything will be in perfect readiness. But, had she also come, that bevy of servants wouldn't again have cared a straw for anything; and on his return, after the party, the bedding would have been cold, the tea-water wouldn't have been ready, and he would have had to put up with every sort of discomfort. That's why I told her that there was no need for her to come. But should you, dear senior, wish her here, I'll send for her straightway and have done.”

Old lady Chia lent an ear to her arguments. “What you say,” she promptly put in, “is perfectly right. You've made better arrangements than I could. Quick, don't send for her! But when did her mother die? How is it I know nothing about it?”

“Some time ago,” lady Feng laughed, “Hsi Jen came in person and told you, worthy ancestor, and how is it you've forgotten it?”

“Yes,” resumed dowager lady Chia smiling, after some reflection, “I remember now. My memory is really not of the best.”

At this, everybody gave way to laughter. “How could your venerable

ladyship," they said, "recollect so many matters?"

Dowager lady Chia thereupon heaved a sigh. "How I remember," she added, "the way she served me ever since her youth up; and how she waited

page 483

upon Yün Erh also; how at last she was given to that prince of devils, and how she has slaved away with that imp for the last few years. She is, besides, not a slave-girl, born or bred in the place. Nor has she ever received any great benefits from our hands. When her mother died, I meant to have given her several taels for her burial; but it quite slipped from my mind."

"The other day," lady Feng remarked, "Madame Wang presented her with forty taels; so that was all right."

At these words, old lady Chia nodded assent. "Yes, never mind about that," she observed. "Yuan Yang's mother also died, as it happens, the other day; but taking into consideration that both her parents lived in the south, I didn't let her return home to observe a period of mourning. But as both these girls are now in mourning, why not allow them to live together? They'll thus be able to keep each other company. Take a few fruits, eatables, and other such things," continuing she bade a matron, "and give them to those two girls to eat."

"Would she likely wait until now?" Hu Po laughingly interposed. "Why, she joined (Hsi Jen) long ago."

In the course of this conversation, the various inmates partook of some more wine, and watched the theatricals.

But we will now turn our attention to Pao-yü. He made his way straight into the garden. The matrons saw well enough that he was returning to his rooms, but instead of following him in, they ensconced themselves near the fire in the tea-room situated by the garden-gate, and made the best of the time by drinking and playing cards with the girls in charge of the tea. Pao-yü entered the court. The lanterns burnt brightly, yet not a

human voice was audible. "Have they all, forsooth, gone to sleep?" She Yüeh ventured. "Let's walk in gently, and give them a fright!"

Presently, they stepped, on tiptoe, past the mirrored partition-wall. At a glance, they discerned Hsi Jen lying on the stove-couch, face to face with some other girl. On the opposite side sat two or three old nurses nodding, half asleep. Pao-yü conjectured that both the girls were plunged in sleep, and was just about to enter, when of a sudden some one was heard to heave a sigh and to say: "How evident it is that worldly matters are very uncertain! Here you lived all alone in here, while your father and mother tarried abroad, and roamed year after year from east to west, without any fixed place of abode. I ever thought that you wouldn't have been able to be with them at their last moments; but, as it happened, (your mother) died in this place this year, and you could, after all, stand by her to the end."

"Quite so!" rejoined Hsi Jen. "Even I little expected to be able to see any of my parents' funeral. When I broke the news to our Madame Wang,

page 484

she also gave me forty taels. This was really a kind attention on her part. I hadn't nevertheless presumed to indulge in any vain hopes."

Pao-yü overheard what was said. Hastily twisting himself round, he remarked in a low voice, addressing himself to She Yüeh and her companions: "Who would have fancied her also in here? But were I to enter, she'll bolt away in another tantrum! Better then that we should retrace our steps, and let them quietly have a chat together, eh? Hsi Jen was alone, and down in the mouth, so it's a fortunate thing that she joined her in such good time."

As he spoke, they once more walked out of the court with gentle tread. Pao-yü went to the back of the rockery, and stopping short, he raised his clothes. She Yüeh and Ch'iu Wen stood still, and turned their faces away. "Stoop," they smiled, "and then loosen your clothes! Be careful that the wind doesn't blow on your stomach!"

The two young maids, who followed behind, surmised that he was bent

upon satisfying a natural want, and they hurried ahead to the tea-room to prepare the water.

Just, however, as Pao-yü was crossing over, two married women came in sight, advancing from the opposite direction. "Who's there?" they inquired.

"Pao-yü is here," Ch'ing Wen answered. "But mind, if you bawl and shout like that, you'll give him a start."

The women promptly laughed. "We had no idea," they said, "that we were coming, at a great festive time like this, to bring trouble upon ourselves! What a lot of hard work must day after day fall to your share, young ladies."

Speaking the while, they drew near. She Yüeh and her friends then asked them what they were holding in their hands.

"We're taking over," they replied, "some things to the two girls: Miss Chin and Miss Hua."

"They're still singing the 'Eight Worthies' outside," She Yüeh went on to observe laughingly, "and how is it you're running again to Miss Chin's and Miss Hua's before the 'Trouble-first moon-box' has been gone through?"

"Take the lid off," Pao-yü cried, "and let me see what there's inside."

Ch'in Wen and She Yüeh at once approached and uncovered the boxes. The two women promptly stooped, which enabled Pao-yü to see that the contents of the two boxes consisted alike of some of the finest fruits and tea-cakes, which had figured at the banquet, and, nodding his head, he walked off, while She Yüeh and her friend speedily threw the lids down anyhow, and followed in his track.

"Those two dames are pleasant enough," Pao-yü smiled, "and they know how to speak decently; but it's they who get quite worn out every day, and they contrariwise say that you've got ample to do daily. Now, doesn't

this amount to bragging and boasting?”

“Those two women,” She Yüeh chimed in, “are not bad. But such of them as don't know what good manners mean are ignorant to a degree of all propriety.”

“You, who know what's what,” Pao-yü added, “should make allowances for that kind of rustic people. You should pity them; that's all.”

Speaking, he made his exit out of the garden gate. The matrons had, though engaged in drinking and gambling, kept incessantly stepping out of doors to furtively keep an eye on his movements, so that the moment they perceived Pao-yü appear, they followed him in a body. On their arrival in the covered passage of the reception-hall, they espied two young waiting-maids; the one with a small basin in her hand; the other with a towel thrown over her arm. They also held a bowl and small kettle, and had been waiting in that passage for ever so long.

Ch'iu Wen was the first to hastily stretch out her hand and test the water. “The older you grow,” she cried, “the denser you get! How could one ever use this icy-cold water?”

“Miss, look at the weather!” the young maid replied. “I was afraid the water would get cold. It was really scalding; is it cold now?”

While she made this rejoinder, an old matron was, by a strange coincidence, seen coming along, carrying a jug of hot water. “Dear dame,” shouted the young maid, “come over and pour some for me in here!”

“My dear girl,” the matron responded, “this is for our old mistress to brew tea with. I'll tell you what; you'd better go and fetch some yourself. Are you perchance afraid lest your feet might grow bigger by walking?”

“I don't care whose it is,” Ch'iu Wen put in. “If you don't give me any, I shall certainly empty our old lady's teapot and wash my hands.”

The old matron turned her head; and, catching sight of Ch'iu Wen, she

there and then raised the jug and poured some of the water.

“That will do!” exclaimed Ch’iu Wen. “With all your years, don’t you yet know what’s what? Who isn’t aware that it’s for our old mistress? But would one presume to ask for what shouldn’t be asked for?”

“My eyes are so dim,” the matron rejoined with a smile, “that I didn’t recognise this young lady.”

When Pao-yü had washed his hands, the young maid took the small jug and filled the bowl; and, as she held it in her hand, Pao-yü rinsed his mouth. But Ch’iu Wen and She Yüeh availed themselves likewise of the warm water to have a wash; after which, they followed Pao-yü in.

Pao-yü at once asked for a kettle of warm wine, and, starting from sister-in-law Li, he began to replenish their cups. (Sister-in-law Li and his aunt

page 486

Hsüeh) pressed him, however, with smiling faces, to take a seat; but his grandmother Chia remonstrated. “He’s only a youngster,” she said, “so let him pour the wine! We must all drain this cup!”

With these words, she quaffed her own cup, leaving no heel-taps. Mesdames Hsing and Wang also lost no time in emptying theirs; so Mrs. Hsüeh and ‘sister-in-law’ Li had no alternative but to drain their share.

“Fill the cups too of your female cousins, senior or junior,” dowager lady Chia went on to tell Pao-yü. “And you mayn’t pour the wine anyhow. Each of you must swallow every drop of your drinks.”

Pao-yü upon hearing her wishes, set to work, while signifying his assent, to replenish the cups of the several young ladies in their proper gradation. But when he got to Tai-yü, she raised the cup, for she would not drink any wine herself, and applied it to Pao-yü’s lips. Pao-yü drained the contents with one breath; upon which Tai-yü gave him a smile, and said to him: “I am much obliged to you.”

Pao-yü next poured a cup for her. But lady Feng immediately laughed

and expostulated. "Pao-yü!" she cried, "you mustn't take any cold wine. Mind, your hand will tremble, and you won't be able to-morrow to write your characters or to draw the bow."

"I'm not having any cold wine," Pao-yü replied.

"I know you're not," lady Feng smiled, "but I simply warn you."

After this, Pao-yü finished helping the rest of the inmates inside, with the exception of Chia Jung's wife, for whom he bade a maid fill a cup. Then emerging again into the covered passage, he replenished the cups of Chia Chen and his companions; after which, he tarried with them for a while, and at last walked in and resumed his former seat.

Presently, the soup was brought, and soon after that the 'feast of lanterns' cakes were handed round.

Dowager lady Chia gave orders that the play should be interrupted for a time. "Those young people," (she said) "are to be pitied! Let them too have some hot soup and warm viands. They then can go on again. Take of every kind of fruit," she continued, "'feast of lanterns' cakes, and other such dainties and give them a few."

The play was shortly stopped. The matrons ushered in a couple of blind singing-girls, who often came to the house, and put two benches, on the opposite side, for them. Old lady Chia desired them to take a seat, and banjos and guitars were then handed to them.

"What stories would you like to hear?" old lady Chia inquired of 'sister-in-law' Li and Mrs. Hsüeh.

"We don't care what they are;" both of them rejoined with one voice.

page 487

"Any will do!"

"Have you of late added any new stories to your stock?" old lady Chia asked.

“We've got a new story,” the two girls explained. “It's about an old affair of the time of the Five Dynasties, which trod down the T'ang dynasty.”

“What's its title?” old lady Chia inquired.

“It's called: 'A Feng seeks a Luan in marriage': (the male phoenix asks the female phoenix in marriage),” one of the girls answered.

“The title is all very well,” dowager lady Chia proceeded, “but why I wonder was it ever given to it. First tell us its general purport, and if it's interesting, you can continue.”

“This story,” the girl explained, “treats of the time when the T'ang dynasty was extinguished. There lived then one of the gentry, who had originally been a denizen of Chin Ling. His name was Wang Chun. He had been minister under two reigns. He had, about this time, pleaded old age and returned to his home. He had about his knees only one son, called Wang Hsi-feng.”

When the company heard so far, they began to laugh.

“Now isn't this a duplicate of our girl Feng's name?” old lady Chia laughingly exclaimed.

A married woman hurried up and pushed (the girl). “That's the name of your lady Secunda,” she said, “so don't use it quite so heedlessly!”

“Go on with your story!” dowager lady Chia shouted.

The girl speedily stood up, smiling the while. “We do deserve death!” she observed. “We weren't aware that it was our lady's worthy name.”

“Why should you be in such fear and trembling?” lady Feng laughed. “Go on! There are many duplicate names and duplicate surnames.”

The girl then proceeded with her story. “In a certain year,” she resumed, “his honour old Mr. Wang saw his son Mr. Wang off for the capital to be in time for the examinations. One day, he was overtaken by a heavy shower of rain and he betook himself into a village for shelter. Who'd

have thought it, there lived in this village, one of the gentry, of the name of Li, who had been an old friend of his honour old Mr. Wang, and he kept Mr. Wang junior to put up in his library. This Mr. Li had no son, but only a daughter. This young daughter's worthy name was Ch'u Luan. She could perform on the lute; she could play chess; and she had a knowledge of books and of painting. There was nothing that she did not understand.”

Old lady Chia eagerly chimed in. “It's no wonder,” she said, “that the story has been called: 'A Feng seeks a Luan in marriage,' '(a male

page 488

phoenix seeks a female phoenix in marriage).' But you needn't proceed. I've already guessed the denouement. There's no doubt that Wang Hsi-feng asks for the hand of this Miss Ch'u Luan.”

“Your venerable ladyship must really have heard the story before,” the singing-girl smiled.

“What hasn't our worthy senior heard?” they all exclaimed. “But she's quick enough in guessing even unheard of things.”

“All these stories run invariably in one line,” old lady Chia laughingly rejoined. “They're all about pretty girls and scholars. There's no fun in them. They abuse people's daughters in every possible way, and then they still term them nice pretty girls. They're so concocted that there's not even a semblance of truth in them. From the very first, they canvass the families of the gentry. If the paterfamilias isn't a president of a board; then he's made a minister. The heroine is bound to be as lovable as a gem. This young lady is sure to understand all about letters, and propriety. She knows every thing and is, in a word, a peerless beauty. At the sight of a handsome young man, she pays no heed as to whether he be relation or friend, but begins to entertain thoughts of the primary affair of her life, and forgets her parents and sets her books on one side. She behaves as neither devil nor thief would: so in what respect does she resemble a nice pretty girl? Were even her brain full of learning, she couldn't be accounted a nice pretty girl, after behaving in this manner! Just like a young fellow, whose mind is well stored with book-lore, and who goes

and plays the robber! Now is it likely that the imperial laws would look upon him as a man of parts, and that they wouldn't bring against him some charge of robbery? From this it's evident that those, who fabricate these stories, contradict themselves. Besides, they may, it's true, say that the heroines belong to great families of official and literary status, that they're conversant with propriety and learning and that their honourable mothers too understand books and good manners, but great households like theirs must, in spite of the parents having pleaded old age and returned to their natives places, contain a great number of inmates; and the nurses, maids and attendants on these young ladies must also be many; and how is it then that, whenever these stories make reference to such matters, one only hears of young ladies with but a single close attendant? What can, think for yourselves, all the other people be up to? Indeed, what is said before doesn't accord with what comes afterwards. Isn't it so, eh?"

The party listened to her with much glee. "These criticisms of yours, venerable ancestor," they said, "have laid bare every single discrepancy." "They have however their reasons," old lady Chia smilingly resumed. "Among the writers of these stories, there are some, who begrudge people's

page 489

wealth and honours, or possibly those, who having solicited a favour (of the wealthy and honorable), and not obtained the object, upon which their wishes were set, have fabricated lies in order to disparage people. There is moreover a certain class of persons, who become so corrupted by the perusal of such tales that they are not satisfied until they themselves pounce upon some nice pretty girl. Hence is it that, for fun's sake, they devise all these yarns. But how could such as they ever know the principle which prevails in official and literary families? Not to speak of the various official and literary families spoken about in these anecdotes, take now our own immediate case as an instance. We're only such a middle class household, and yet we've got none of those occurrences; so don't let her go on spinning these endless yarns. We must on no account have any of these stories told us! Why, even the maids themselves don't understand any of this sort of language. I've been getting so old the last few years, that I felt unawares quite melancholy whenever the girls went

to live far off, so my wont has been to have a few passages recounted to me; but as soon as they got back, I at once put a stop to these things.”

'Sister-in-law' Li and Mrs. Hsüeh both laughed. “This is just the rule,” they said, “which should exist in great families. Not even in our homes is any of this confused talk allowed to reach the ears of the young people.”

Lady Feng came forward and poured some wine. “Enough, that will do!” she laughed. “The wine has got quite cold. My dear ancestor, do take a sip and moisten your throat with, before you begin again to dilate on falsehoods. What we've been having now can well be termed 'Record of a discussion on falsehoods.' It has had its origin in this reign, in this place, in this year, in this moon, on this day and at this very season. But, venerable senior, you've only got one mouth, so you couldn't very well simultaneously speak of two families. 'When two flowers open together,' the proverb says, 'one person can only speak of one.' But whether the stones be true or fictitious, don't let us say anything more about them. Let's have the footlights put in order, and look at the players. Dear senior, do let these two relatives have a glass of wine and see a couple of plays; and you can then start arguing about one dynasty after another. Eh, what do you say?”

Saying this, she poured the wine, laughing the while. But she had scarcely done speaking before the whole company were convulsed with laughter. The two singing girls were themselves unable to keep their countenance.

“Lady Secunda,” they both exclaimed, “what a sharp tongue you have! Were your ladyship to take to story-telling, we really would have nowhere to earn our rice.”

“Don't be in such overflowing spirits,” Mrs. Hsüeh laughed. “There are

page 490

people outside; this isn't like any ordinary occasion.”

“There's only my senior brother-in-law Chen outside,” lady Feng smiled. “And we've been like brother and sister from our youth up. We've romped

and been up to every mischief to this age together. But all on account of my marriage, I've had of late years to stand on ever so many ceremonies. Why besides being like brother and sister from the time we were small kids, he's anyhow my senior brother-in-law, and I his junior sister-in-law. (One among) those twenty four dutiful sons, travestied himself in theatrical costume (to amuse his parents), but those fellows haven't sufficient spirit to come in some stage togs and try and make you have a laugh, dear ancestor. I've however succeeded, after ever so much exertion, in so diverting you as to induce you to eat a little more than you would, and in putting everybody in good humour; and I should be thanked by one and all of you; it's only right that I should. But can it be that you will, on the contrary, poke fun at me?"

"I've truly not had a hearty laugh the last few days," old lady Chia smiled, "but thanks to the funny things she recounted just now, I've managed to get in somewhat better spirits in here. So I'll have another cup of wine." Then having drunk her wine, "Pao-yü," she went on to say, "come and present a cup to your sister-in-law!"

Lady Feng gave a smile. "There's no use for him to give me any wine," she ventured. "(I'll drink out of your cup,) so as to bring upon myself your longevity, venerable ancestor."

While uttering this response, she raised dowager lady Chia's cup to her lips, and drained the remaining half of the contents; after which, she handed the cup to a waiting-maid, who took one from those which had been rinsed with tepid water, and brought it to her. But in due course, the cups from the various tables were cleared, and clean ones, washed in warm water, were substituted; and when fresh wine had been served round, (lady Feng and the maid) resumed their seats.

"Venerable lady," a singing-girl put in, "you don't like the stories we tell; but may we thrum a song for you?"

"You two," remarked old lady Chia, "had better play a duet of the 'Chiang Chün ling' song: 'the general's command.'"

Hearing her wishes, the two girls promptly tuned their cords, to suit the pitch of the song, and struck up on their guitars.

“What watch of the night is it?” old lady Chia at this point inquired.

“It's the third watch,” the matrons replied with alacrity.

“No wonder it has got so chilly and damp!” old lady Chia added.

Extra clothes were accordingly soon fetched by the servants and maids.

page 491

Madame Wang speedily rose to her feet and forced a smile. “Venerable senior,” she said, “wouldn't it be prudent for you to move on to the stove couch in the winter apartments? It would be as well. These two relatives are no strangers. And if we entertain them, it will be all right.”

“Well, in that case,” dowager lady Chia smilingly rejoined, “why shouldn't the whole company adjourn inside? Wouldn't it be warmer for us all?”

“I'm afraid there isn't enough sitting room for every one of us,” Madame Wang explained.

“I've got a plan,” old lady Chia added. “We can now dispense with these tables. All we need are two or three, placed side by side; we can then sit in a group, and by bundling together it will be both sociable as well as warm.”

“Yes, this will be nice!” one and all cried.

Assenting, they forthwith rose from table. The married women hastened to remove the debris of the banquet. Then placing three large tables lengthways side by side in the inner rooms, they went on to properly arrange the fruits and viands, some of which had been replenished, others changed.

“You must none of you stand on any ceremonies!” dowager lady Chia observed. “If you just listen while I allot you your places, and sit down accordingly, it will be all right!”

Continuing, she motioned to Mrs. Hsüeh and 'sister-in-law' Li to take the upper seats on the side of honour, and, making herself comfortable on the west, she bade the three cousins Pao-ch'in, Tai-yü and Hsian-Yün sit close to her on the left and on the right. "Pao-yü," she proceeded "you must go next to your mother." So presently she put Pao-yü, and Pao-ch'ai and the rest of the young ladies between Mesdames Hsing and Wang. On the west, she placed, in proper gradation, dame Lou, along with Chia Lan, and Mrs. Yu and Li Wan, with Chia Lan, (number two,) between them. While she assigned a chair to Chia Jung's wife among the lower seats, put crosswise.

"Brother Chen," old lady Chia cried, "take your cousins and be off! I'm also going to sleep in a little time."

Chia Chen and his associates speedily expressed their obedience, and made, in a body, their appearance inside again to listen to any injunctions she might have to give them.

"Bundle yourself away at once!" shouted dowager lady Chia. "You needn't come in. We've just sat down, and you'll make us get up again. Go and rest; be quick! To-morrow, there are to be some more grand doings!"

Chia Chen assented with alacrity. "But Jung Erh should remain to replenish the cups," he smiled; "it's only fair that he should."

page 492

"Quite so!" answered old lady Chia laughingly. "I forgot all about him."

"Yes!" acquiesced Chia Chen. Then twisting himself round, he led Chia Lien and his companions out of the apartment.

(Chia Chen and Chia Lien) were, of course, both pleased at being able to get away. So bidding the servants see Chia Tsung and Chia Huang to their respective homes, (Chia Chen) arranged with Chia Lien to go in pursuit of pleasure and in quest of fun. But we will now leave them to their own devices without another word.

“I was just thinking,” meanwhile dowager lady Chia laughed, “that it would be well, although you people are numerous enough to enjoy yourselves, to have a couple of great-grandchildren present at this banquet, so Jung Erh now makes the full complement. But Jung Erh sit near your wife, for she and you will then make the pair complete.”

The wife of a domestic thereupon presented a play-bill.

“We, ladies,” old lady Chia demurred, “are now chatting in high glee, and are about to start a romp. Those young folks have, also, been sitting up so far into the night that they must be quite cold, so let the plays alone. Tell them then to have a rest. Yet call our own girls to come and sing a couple of plays on this stage. They too will thus have a chance of watching us a bit.”

After lending an ear to her, the married women assented and quitted the room. And immediately finding some servant to go to the garden of Broad Vista and summon the girls, they betook themselves, at the same time, as far as the second gate and called a few pages to wait on them.

The pages went with hurried step to the rooms reserved for the players, and taking with them the various grown-up members of the company, they only left the more youthful behind. Then fetching, in a little time, Wen Kuan and a few other girls, twelve in all, from among the novices in the Pear Fragrance court, they egressed by the corner gate leading out of the covered passage. The matrons took soft bundles in their arms, as their strength was not equal to carrying boxes. And under the conviction that their old mistress would prefer plays of three or five acts, they had put together the necessary theatrical costumes.

After Wen Kuan and the rest of the girls had been introduced into the room by the matrons, they paid their obeisance, and, dropping their arms against their sides, they stood reverentially.

“In this propitious first moon,” old lady Chia smiled, “won't your teacher let you come out for a stroll? What are you singing now? The eight acts of the 'Eight worthies' recently sung here were so noisy, that they made

my head ache; so you'd better let us have something more quiet. You must however bear in mind that Mrs. Hsüeh and Mrs. Li are both people, who give theatricals, and have heard I don't know how many fine plays. The young ladies here have seen better plays than our own girls; and they have heard more beautiful songs than they. These actresses, you see here now, formed once, despite their youth, part of a company belonging to renowned families, fond of plays; and though mere children, they excel any troupe composed of grown-up persons. So whatever we do, don't let us say anything disparaging about them. But we must now have something new. Tell Fang Kuan to sing us the 'Hsün Meng' ballad; and let only flutes and Pandean pipes be used. The other instruments can be dispensed with."

"Your venerable ladyship is quite right," Wen Kuan smiled. "Our acting couldn't, certainly, suit the taste of such people as Mrs. Hsüeh, Mrs. Li and the young ladies. Nevertheless, let them merely heed our enunciation, and listen to our voices; that's all."

"Well said!" dowager lady Chia laughed.

'Sister-in-law' Li and Mrs. Hsüeh were filled with delight. "What a sharp girl!" they remarked smilingly. "But do you also try to imitate our old lady by pulling our leg?"

"They're intended to afford us some ready-at-hand recreation," old lady Chia smiled. "Besides, they don't go out to earn money. That's how it is they are not so much up to the times." At the close of this remark, she also desired K'uei Kuan to sing the play: 'Hui Ming sends a letter.' "You needn't," she added, "make your face up. Just sing this couple of plays so as to merely let both those ladies hear a kind of parody of them. But if you spare yourselves the least exertion, I shall be unhappy."

When they heard this, Wen Kuan and her companions left the apartment and promptly apparelled themselves and mounted the stage. First in order, was sung the 'Hsün Meng;' next, '(Hui Ming) sends a letter;' during which, everybody observed such perfect silence that not so much as the caw of a crow fell on the ear.

"I've verily seen several hundreds of companies," Mrs. Hsüeh smiled, "but never have I come across any that confined themselves to flutes."

"There are some," dowager lady Chia answered. "In fact, in that play acted just now called: 'Love in the western tower at Ch'u Ch'iang,' there's a good deal sung by young actors in unison with the flutes. But lengthy unison pieces of this description are indeed few. This too, however, is purely a matter of taste; there's nothing out of the way about it. When I was of her age," resuming, she pointed at Hsiang-yün, "her grandfather kept a troupe of young actresses. There was among them one, who played the lute

page 494

so efficiently that she performed the part when the lute is heard in the 'Hsi Hsiang Chi,' the piece on the lute in the 'Yü Ts'an Chi,' and that in the supplementary 'P'i Pa Chi,' on the Mongol flageolet with the eighteen notes, in every way as if she had been placed in the real circumstances herself. Yea, far better than this!"

"This is still rarer a thing!" the inmates exclaimed.

Old lady Chia then shortly called the married women, and bade them tell Wen Kuan and the other girls to use both wind and string instruments and render the piece; 'At the feast of lanterns, the moon is round.'

The women servants received her orders and went to execute them. Chia Jung and his wife meanwhile passed the wine round.

When lady Feng saw dowager lady Chia in most exuberant spirits, she smiled. "Won't it be nice," she said, "to avail ourselves of the presence of the singing girls to pass plum blossom round and have the game of forfeits: 'Spring-happy eyebrow-corners-go-up,' eh?"

"That's a fine game of forfeits!" Old lady Chia cried, with a smile. "It just suits the time of the year."

Orders were therefore given at once to fetch a forfeit drum, varnished black, and ornamented with designs executed with copper tacks. When

brought, it was handed to the singing girls to put on the table and rap on it. A twig of red plum blossom was then obtained. "The one in whose hand it is when the drum stops," dowager lady Chia laughingly proposed, "will have to drink a cup of wine, and to say something or other as well."

"I'll tell you what," lady Feng interposed with a smile. "Who of us can pit herself against you, dear ancestor, who have ever ready at hand whatever you want to say? With the little use we are in this line, won't there be an absolute lack of fun in our contributions? My idea is that it would be nicer were something said that could be appreciated both by the refined as well as the unrefined. So won't it be preferable that the person, in whose hands the twig remains, when the drum stops, should crack some joke or other?"

Every one, who heard her, was fully aware what a good hand she had always been at witty things, and how she, more than any other, had an inexhaustible supply of novel and amusing rules of forfeits, ever stocked in her mind, so her suggestion not only gratified the various inmates of the family seated at the banquet, but even filled the whole posse of servants, both old and young, who stood in attendance below, with intense delight. The young waiting-maids rushed with eagerness in search of the young ladies and told them to come and listen to their lady Secunda, who was on the point again of saying funny things. A whole crowd of servant-girls anxiously pressed inside and crammed the room. In a little time, the theatricals were brought to a

page 495

close, and the music was stopped. Dowager lady Chia had some soup, fine cakes and fruits handed to Wen Kuan and her companions to regale themselves with, and then gave orders to sound the drum. The singing-girls were both experts, so now they beat fast; and now slow. Either slow like the dripping of the remnants of water in a clepsydra. Or quick, as when beans are being sown. Or with the velocity of the pace of a scared horse, or that of the flash of a swift lightning. The sound of the drum came to a standstill abruptly. The twig of plum blossom had just reached old lady Chia, when by a strange coincidence, the rattle ceased. Every one blurted out into a boisterous fit of laughter. Chia Jung hastily approached and filled a cup. "It's only natural," they laughingly cried, "that

you venerable senior, should be the first to get exhilarated; for then, thanks to you, we shall also come in for some measure of good cheer.”

“To gulp down this wine is an easy job,” dowager lady smiled, “but to crack jokes is somewhat difficult.”

“Your jokes, dear ancestor, are even wittier than those of lady Feng,” the party shouted, “so favour us with one, and let's have a laugh!”

“I've nothing out of the way to evoke laughter with,” old lady Chia smilingly answered. “Yet all that remains for me to do is to thicken the skin of my antiquated phiz and come out with some joke. In a certain family,” she consequently went on to narrate, “there were ten sons; these married ten wives. The tenth of these wives was, however, so intelligent, sharp, quick of mind, and glib of tongue, that her father and mother-in-law loved her best of all, and maintained from morning to night that the other nine were not filial. These nine felt much aggrieved and they accordingly took counsel together. 'We nine,' they said, 'are filial enough at heart; the only thing is that that shrew has the gift of the gab. That's why our father and mother-in-law think her so perfect. But to whom can we go and confide our grievance?' One of them was struck with an idea. 'Let's go tomorrow,' she proposed, 'to the temple of the King of Hell and burn incense. We can then tell the King our grudge and ask him how it was that, when he bade us receive life and become human beings, he only conferred a glib tongue on that vixen and that we were only allotted such blunt mouths?' The eight listened to her plan, and were quite enraptured with it. 'This proposal is faultless!' they assented. On the next day, they sped in a body to the temple of the God of Hell, and after burning incense, the nine sisters-in-law slept under the altar, on which their offerings were laid. Their nine spirits waited with the special purpose of seeing the carriage of the King of Hell arrive; but they waited and waited, and yet he did not come. They were just giving way to despair when they espied Sun Hsing-che, (the god of monkeys), advancing

page 496

on a rolling cloud. He espied the nine spirits, and felt inclined to take a golden rod and beat them. The nine spirits were plunged in terror. Hastily they fell on their knees, and pleaded for mercy.”

“What are you up to?’ Sun Hsing-che inquired.”

“The nine women, with alacrity, told him all.”

“After Sun Hsing-che had listened to their confidences, he stamped his foot and heaved a sigh. ‘Is that the case?’ he asked. ‘Well, it’s lucky enough you came across me, for had you waited for the God of Hell, he wouldn’t have known anything about it.’”

“At these assurances, the nine women gave way to entreaties. ‘Great saint,’ they pleaded, ‘if you were to display some commiseration, we would be all right.’”

“Sun Hsing-che smiled. ‘There’s no difficulty in the way,’ he observed. ‘On the day on which you ten sisters-in-law came to life, I was, as luck would have it, on a visit to the King of Hell’s place. So I (saw) him do something on the ground, and the junior sister-of-law of yours lap it up. But if you now wish to become smart and sharp-tongued, the remedy lies in water. If I too were therefore to do something, and you to drink it, the desired effect will be attained.’”

At the close of her story, the company roared with laughter.

“Splendid!” shouted lady Feng. “But luckily we’re all slow of tongue and dull of intellect, otherwise, we too must have had the water of monkeys to drink.”

“Who among us here,” Mrs. Yu and dame Lou smilingly remarked, addressing themselves to Li Wan, “has tasted any monkey’s water. So don’t sham ignorance of things!”

“A joke must hit the point to be amusing,” Mrs. Hsüeh ventured.

But while she spoke, (the girls) began again to beat the drum. The young maids were keen to hear lady Feng’s jokes. They therefore explained to the singing girls, in a confidential tone, that a cough would be the given signal (for them to desist). In no time (the blossom) was handed round on both sides. As soon as it came to lady Feng, the young maids purposely

gave a cough. The singing-girl at once stopped short. "Now we've caught her!" shouted the party laughingly; "drink your wine, be quick! And mind you tell something nice! But don't make us laugh so heartily as to get stomachaches."

Lady Feng was lost in thought. Presently, she began with a smile. "A certain household," she said, "was celebrating the first moon festival. The entire family was enjoying the sight of the lanterns, and drinking their wine. In real truth unusual excitement prevailed. There were great grandmothers,

page 497

grandmothers, daughters-in-law, grandsons' wives, great grandsons, granddaughters, granddaughters-in-law, aunts' granddaughters, cousins' granddaughters; and ai-yo-yo, there was verily such a bustle and confusion!"

While minding her story, they laughed. "Listen to all this mean mouth says!" they cried. "We wonder what other ramifications she won't introduce!"

"If you want to bully me," Mrs. Yu smiled, "I'll tear that mouth of yours to pieces."

Lady Feng rose to her feet and clapped her hands.

"One does all one can to rack one's brain," she smiled, "and here you combine to do your utmost to confuse me! Well, if it is so, I won't go on."

"Proceed with your story," old lady Chia exclaimed with a smile. "What comes afterwards?"

Lady Feng thought for a while. "Well, after that," she continued laughingly, "they all sat together and crammed the whole room. They primed themselves with wine throughout the hours of night and then they broke up."

The various inmates noticed in what a serious and sedate manner she narrated her story, and none ventured to pass any further remarks, but waited anxiously for her to go on, when they became aware that she

coldly and drily came to a stop.

Shih Hsiang-yün stared at her for ever so long.

“I'll tell you another,” lady Feng laughingly remarked. “At the first moon festival, several persons carried a cracker as large as a room and went out of town to let it off. Over and above ten thousand persons were attracted, and they followed to see the sight. One among them was of an impatient disposition. He could not reconcile himself to wait; so stealthily he snatched a joss-stick and set fire to it. A sound of 'pu-ch'ih' was heard. The whole number of spectators laughed boisterously and withdrew. The persons, who carried the cracker, felt a grudge against the cracker-seller for not having made it tight, (and wondered) how it was that every one had left without hearing it go off.”

“Is it likely that the men themselves didn't hear the report?” Hsiang-yün insinuated.

“Why, the men themselves were deaf,” lady Feng rejoined.

After listening to her, they pondered for a while, and then suddenly they laughed aloud in chorus. But remembering that her first story had been left unfinished, they inquired of her: “What was, after all, the issue of the first story? You should conclude that too.”

Lady Feng gave a rap on the table with her hand. “How vexatious you are!” she exclaimed. “Well, the next day was the sixteenth; so the festivities

page 498

of the year were over, and the feast itself was past and gone. I see people busy putting things away, and fussing about still, so how can I make out what will be the end of it all?”

At this, one and all indulged in renewed merriment.

“The fourth watch has long ago been struck outside,” lady Feng smilingly said. “From what I can see, our worthy senior is also tired out; and we

should, like when the cracker was let off in that story of the deaf people, be bundling ourselves off and finish!”

Mrs. Yu and the rest covered their mouths with their handkerchiefs and laughed. Now they stooped forward; and now they bent backward. And pointing at her, “This thing,” they cried, “has really a mean tongue.”

Old lady Chia laughed. “Yes,” she said, “this vixen Feng has, in real truth, developed a meaner tongue than ever! But she alluded to crackers,” she added, “so let’s also let off a few fireworks so as to counteract the fumes of the wine.”

Chia Jung overheard the suggestion. Hurriedly leaving the room, he took the pages with him, and having a scaffolding erected in the court, they hung up the fireworks, and got everything in perfect readiness. These fireworks were articles of tribute, sent from different states, and were, albeit not large in size, contrived with extreme ingenuity. The representations of various kinds of events of antiquity were perfect, and in them were inserted all sorts of crackers.

Lin Tai-yü was naturally of a weak disposition, so she could not stand the report of any loud intonation. Her grandmother Chia therefore clasped her immediately in her embrace. Mrs. Hsüeh, meanwhile, took Hsiang-yün in her arms.

“I’m not afraid,” smiled Hsiang-yün.

“Nothing she likes so much as letting off huge crackers,” Pao-ch’ai smilingly interposed, “and could she fear this sort of thing?”

Madame Wang, thereupon, laid hold of Pao-yü, and pulled him in her lap.

“We’ve got no one to care a rap for us,” lady Feng laughed.

“I’m here for you,” Mrs. Yu rejoined with a laugh. “I’ll embrace you. There you’re again behaving like a spoilt child. You’ve heard about crackers, and you comport yourself as if you’d had honey to eat! You’re quite frivolous again to-day!”

“Wait till we break up,” lady Feng answered laughing, “and we'll go and let some off in our garden. I can fire them far better than any of the young lads!”

While they bandied words, one kind of firework after another was lighted

page 499

outside, and then later on some more again. Among these figured 'fill-heaven-stars;' 'nine dragons-enter-clouds;' 'over-whole-land-a-crack-of-thunder;' 'fly-up-heavens;' 'sound-ten shots,' and other such small crackers.

The fireworks over, the young actresses were again asked to render the 'Lotus-flowers-fall,' and cash were strewn upon the stage. The young girls bustled all over the boards, snatching cash and capering about.

The soup was next brought. “The night is long,” old lady Chia said, “and somehow or other I feel peckish.”

“There's some congee,” lady Feng promptly remarked, “prepared with duck's meat.”

“I'd rather have plain things,” dowager lady Chia answered.

“There's also some congee made with non-glutinous rice and powder of dates. It's been cooked for the ladies who fast.”

“If there's any of this, it will do very well,” old lady Chia replied.

While she spoke, orders were given to remove the remnants of the banquet, and inside as well as outside; were served every kind of recherche small dishes. One and all then partook of some of these refreshments, at their pleasure, and rinsing their mouths with tea, they afterwards parted.

On the seventeenth, they also repaired, at an early hour, to the Ning mansion to present their compliments; and remaining in attendance, while the doors of the ancestral hall were closed and the images put

away, they, at length, returned to their quarters.

Invitations had been issued on this occasion to drink the new year wine at Mrs. Hsüeh's residence. But dowager lady Chia had been out on several consecutive days, and so tired out did she feel that she withdrew to her rooms, after only a short stay.

After the eighteenth, relatives and friends arrived and made their formal invitations; or else they came as guests to the banquets given. But so little was old lady Chia in a fit state to turn her mind to anything that the two ladies, Madame Hsing and lady Feng, had to attend between them to everything that cropped up. But Pao-yü as well did not go anywhere else than to Wang Tzu-t'eng's, and the excuse he gave out was that his grandmother kept him at home to dispel her ennui.

We need not, however, dilate on irrelevant details. In due course, the festival of the fifteenth of the first moon passed. But, reader, if you have any curiosity to learn any subsequent events, listen to those given in the chapter below.

CHAPTER LV.

The stupid secondary wife, dame Chao, needlessly loses her temper and insults her own daughter, T'an Ch'un.

The perverse servant-girls are so full of malice that they look down contemptuously on their youthful mistresses.

We will now resume our narration with the Jung Mansion. Soon after the bustle of the new year festivities, lady Feng who, with the most arduous duties she had had to fulfil both before and after the new year, had found little time to take proper care of herself, got a miscarriage and could not attend to the management of domestic affairs. Day after day two and three doctors came and prescribed for her. But lady Feng had ever accustomed herself to be hardy, so although unable to go out of doors, she nevertheless devised the ways and means for everything, and made the various arrangements she deemed necessary, and whatever concern suggested itself to her mind, she entrusted to P'ing Erh to lay before Madame Wang. But however much people advised her to be careful, she would not lend an ear to them. Madame Wang felt as if she had been deprived of her right arm. And as she alone had not sufficient energy to see to everything, she bestowed her own attention upon such important affairs, as turned up, and entrusted, for the time being, all miscellaneous domestic matters to the co-operation of Li Wan.

Li Wan had at all times held virtue at a high price, and set but little value on talents of any kind, so that she, as a matter of course, displayed leniency to those who were placed under her. Madame Wang accordingly bade T'an Ch'un combine with Li Wan in the management of the household. "In a month," she argued, "lady Feng will be getting all right again, and then you can once more hand over charge to her."

Little, however, though one would think it, lady Feng was endowed with a poor physique. From her youth up, moreover, she had not known how to husband her health; and emulation and contentiousness had, more than anything else, combined to undermine her vital energies. Hence it was that although her complaint was a simple miscarriage, it had really, after

all, been the outcome of loss of vigour. After a month symptoms of emissions of blood began also to show themselves. And notwithstanding her reluctance to utter what she felt every one, at the sight of her sallow and emaciated face, readily concluded that she was not nursing herself as well as she should.

Madame Wang therefore enjoined her merely to take her medicines and look to herself with due care; and she would not allow her to disquiet her mind about the least thing. But (lady Feng) herself also gave way to misgivings lest her illness should assume some grave phase, and much though she laughed with

page 501

one and all, she was ever mindful to steal time to attend to her health, feeling inwardly vexed at not being able to soon get back her old strength again. But she had, as it happened, to dose herself with medicines and to nurse herself for three whole months, before she gradually began to rally and before the discharges stopped by degrees. But we will abstain from any reference to these details which pertain to the future, suffice it now to add that though Madame Wang noticed her improved state, (she thought it) impossible for the time being for T'an Ch'un and Li Wan to resign their charge. But so fidgetty was she lest with the large number of inmates in the garden proper control should not be exercised that she specially sent for Pao-ch'ai and begged of her to keep an eye over every place, explaining to her that the old matrons were of no earthly use, for whenever they could obtain any leisure, they drank and gambled; and slept during broad daylight, while they played at cards during the hours of night. "I know all about their doings," (she said). "When that girl Feng is well enough to go out, they have some little fear. But they're bound at present to consult again their own convenience. Yet you, dear child, are one in whom I can repose complete trust. Your brother and your female cousins are, on the one hand, young; and I can, on the other, afford no spare time; so do exert yourself on my behalf for a couple of days, and exercise proper supervision. And should anything unexpected turn up, just come and tell it to me. Don't wait until our old lady inquires about it, as I shall then find myself in a corner with nothing to say in my defence. If those servants aren't on their good behaviour, mind you blow them up; and if they don't listen to you, come and lay your complaint before me; for

it will be best not to let anything assume a serious aspect.”

Pao-ch'ai listened to her appeal and felt under the necessity of volunteering to undertake the charge.

The season was about the close of spring, so Tai-yü got her cough back again. But Hsiang-yün was likewise laid up in the Heng Wu Yüan, as she too was affected by the weather, and day after day she saw numberless doctors and took endless medicines.

T'an Ch'un and Li Wan lived apart, but as they had of late assumed joint management of affairs, it was, unlike former years, extremely inconvenient even for the servants to go backwards and forwards to make their reports. They consequently resolved that they should meet early every day in the small three-roomed reception-hall, at the south side of the garden gate, to transact what business there was, and that their morning meal over, they should after noon return again to their quarters.

This three-roomed hall had originally been got ready at the time of the visit of the imperial consort to her parents, to accommodate the

page 502

attendants and eunuchs. This visit over, it proved, therefore, no longer of use, and the old matrons simply came to it every night to keep watch. But mild weather had now set in, and any complete fittings were quite superfluous. All that could be seen about amounted to a few small pieces of furniture just sufficient for them to make themselves comfortable with. Over this hall was likewise affixed a placard, with the inscription in four characters:

“Perfected philanthropy, published virtue!”

Yet the place was generally known among the domestics as 'the discuss-matters-hall.' To this hall, (Li Wan and T'an Ch'un) would daily adjourn at six in the morning, and leave it at noon, and the wives of the managers and other servants, who had any matters to lay before them, came and went in incessant strings.

When the domestics heard that Li Wan would assume sole control, each and all felt secretly elated; for as Li Wan had always been considerate, forbearing and loth to inflict penalties, she would be, of course, they thought, easier to put off than lady Feng. Even when T'an Ch'un was added, they again remembered that she was only a youthful unmarried girl and that she too had ever shown herself goodnatured and kindly to a degree, so none of them worried their minds about her, and they became considerably more indolent than when they had to deal with lady Feng. But after the expiry of three or four days several concerns passed through her hands, which gave them an opportunity to gradually find out that T'an Ch'un did not, in smartness and thoroughness, yield to lady Feng, and that the only difference between them was that she was soft in speech and gentle in disposition. By a remarkable coincidence, princes, dukes, marquises, earls, and hereditary officials arrived for consecutive days from various parts; all of whom were, if not the relatives of the Jung and Ning mansions, at least their old friends. There were either those who had obtained transfers on promotion, or others who had been degraded; either those, who had married, or those who had gone into mourning, and Madame Wang had so much congratulating and condoling, receiving and escorting to do that she had no time to attend to any entertaining. There was therefore less than ever any one in the front part to look after things. So while (T'an Ch'un and Li Wan) spent their whole days in the hall, Pao-ch'ai tarried all day in the drawing-rooms, to keep an eye over what was going on; and they only betook themselves back to their quarters after Madame Wang's return. Of a night, they whiled away their leisure hours by doing needlework; but they would, previous to retiring to sleep, get into their chairs, and, taking along with them the servants, whose duty it was to be on night watch in the garden, and other domestics as well, they visited each place on their round. Such was the control exercised

page 503

by these three inmates that signs were not wanting to prove that greater severity was observed than in the days when the management devolved on lady Feng. To this reason must be assigned the fact that all the servants attached inside as well as outside cherished a secret grudge against them. "No sooner," they insinuated, "has one patrolling ogre

come than they add three more cerberean sort of spring josses so that even at night we've got less time than ever to sip a cup of wine and indulge in a romp!"

On the day that Madame Wang was going to a banquet at the mansion of the Marquis of Chin Hsiang, Li Wan and T'an Ch'un arranged their coiffure and performed their ablutions at an early hour; and after waiting upon her until she went out of doors, they repaired into the hall and installed themselves in their seats. But just as they were sipping their tea, they espied Wu Hsin-teng's wife walk in. "Mrs. Chao's brother, Chao Kuo-chi," she observed, "departed this life yesterday; the tidings have already been reported to our old mistress and our lady, who said that it was all right, and bade me tell you, Miss."

At the close of this announcement, she respectfully dropped her arms against her body, and stood aloof without adding another word. The servants, who came at this season to lay their reports before (T'an Ch'un and Li Wan), mustered no small number. But they all endeavoured to find out how their two new mistresses ran the household; for as long they managed things properly, one and all willingly resolved to respect them, but in the event of the least disagreement or improper step, not only did they not submit to them, but they also spread, the moment they put their foot outside the second gate, numberless jokes on their account and made fun of them. Wu Hsin-teng's wife had thus devised an experiment in her own mind. Had she had to deal with lady Feng, she would have long ago made an attempt to show off her zeal by proposing numerous alternatives and discovering various bygone precedents, and then allowed lady Feng to make her own choice and take action; but, in this instance, she looked with such disdain on Li Wan, on account of her simplicity, and on T'an Ch'un, on account of her youthfulness, that she volunteered only a single sentence, in order to put both these ladies to the test, and see what course they would be likely to adopt.

"What shall we do?" T'an Ch'un asked Li Wan.

Li Wan reflected for a while. "The other day," she rejoined, "that Hsi Jen's mother died, I heard that she was given forty taels. So now give her forty taels as well and have done!"

Upon hearing this proposal, Wu Hsin-teng's wife eagerly expressed her acquiescence, by uttering a yes; and taking over the permit she was going on her way at once.

page 504

“Come back,” shouted T'an Ch'un.

“Wu Hsing-teng's wife had perforce to retrace her footsteps.

“Wait, don't get the money yet,” T'an Ch'un remarked. “I want to ask you something. Some of the old secondary wives, attached years back to our venerable senior's rooms, lived inside the establishment; others outside; there were these two distinctions between them. Now if any of them died at home, how much was allowed them? And how much was allotted to such as died outside? Tell us what was given in either case for our guidance.”

As soon as Wu Hsin-teng's wife was asked this question, every detail bearing on the subject slipped from her memory. Hastily forcing a smile, “This is,” she replied, “nothing of any such great consequence. Whether much or little be allowed, who'll ever venture to raise a quarrel about it?”

T'an Ch'un then smiled. “This is all stuff and nonsense!” she exclaimed. “My idea is that it would be better to give a hundred taels. For if we don't comply with what's right, we shall, not to speak of your ridiculing us, find it also a hard job by and bye to face your mistress Secunda.”

“Well, in that case,” laughed Wu Hsin-teng's wife, “I'll go and look up the old accounts. I can't recollect anything about them just at this moment.”

“You're quite an old hand in the management of affairs,” T'an Ch'un observed with a significant smile, “and can't you remember, but come instead to perplex us? Whenever you've had anything of the kind to lay before your lady Secunda, have you also had to go first and look it up? But if this has been the practice, lady Feng can't be looked upon as being such a dreadful creature. One could very well call her lenient and kind. Yet don't you yet hurry to go and hunt them up and bring them to me to see? If we dilly-dally another day, they won't run you people down for

your coarse-mindedness, but we will seem to have been driven to our wits' ends!"

Wu Hsin-teng's wife got quite scarlet in the face. Promptly twisting herself round, she quitted the hall; while the whole bevy of married women stretched out their tongues significantly.

During her absence, other matters were reported. But in a little while, Wu Hsin-teng's wife returned with the old accounts. On inspection, T'an Ch'un found that for a couple of secondary wives, who had lived in the establishment, twenty-four taels had been granted, and that for two, whose quarters had been outside, forty taels had in each case been allowed. Besides these two, others were mentioned, who had lived outside the mansion; to one of whom a hundred taels had been given, and to the other, sixty taels. Under these two records, the reasons were assigned. In the one case, the coffins of father and mother had had to be removed from another province, and sixty taels extra

page 505

had consequently been granted. In the other, an additional twenty taels had been allowed, as a burial-place had to be purchased at the time.

T'an Ch'un handed the accounts to Li Wan for her perusal.

"Give her twenty taels," readily suggested T'an Ch'un. "Leave these accounts here for us to examine minutely."

Wu Hsin-teng's wife then walked away. But unexpectedly Mrs. Chao entered the hall. Li Wan and T'an Ch'un speedily pressed her to take a seat.

Mrs. Chao then broke the silence. "All the inmates of these rooms have trampled me under heel," she said, "but never mind! Yet, my child, just ponder, it is only fair that you should take my part."

While ventilating her grievances, her eyes got moist, her nose watered, and she began to sob.

“To whom are you alluding Mrs. Chao?” T'an Ch'un hastily inquired. “I can't really make out what you're driving at. Who tramples you under foot? Speak out and I'll take up your cudgels.”

“You're now trampling me down yourself, young lady,” Mrs. Chao observed. “And to whom can I go and tell my grievance?”

T'an Ch'un, at these words, jumped up with alacrity. “I never would presume to do any such thing,” she protested.

Li Wan too vehemently sprung to her feet to proffer her some good counsel.

“Pray seat yourselves, both of you,” Mrs. Chao cried, “and listen to what I have to say. I've had, like simmering oil, to consume away in these rooms to this advanced age. There's also your brother besides. Yet I can't compare myself now even to Hsi Jen, and what credit do I enjoy? But you haven't as well any face, so don't let's speak of myself.”

“It was really on account of this,” T'an Ch'un smiled, “that I said that I didn't presume to disregard right and to violate propriety.”

While she spoke, she resumed her seat, and taking up the accounts, she turned them over for Mrs. Chao to glance at, after which she read them out to her for her edification. “These are old customs,” she proceeded, “enforced by the seniors of the family, and every one complies with them, and could I ever, pray, have changed them? These will hold good not only with Hsi Jen; but even when by and bye Huan-erh takes a concubine, the same course will naturally be adopted as in the case of Hsi Jen. This is no question for any large quarrels or small disputes, and no mention should be made about face or no face. She's our Madame Wang's servant-girl, and I've dealt with her according to a long-standing precedent. Those who say that I've taken suitable action will come in for our ancestors' bounty and our lady's bounty as well. But should any one uphold that I've adopted an unfair course, that person is devoid of all common sense and totally ignorant of what a blessing

means. The only thing she can do is to foster as much resentment as she chooses. Our lady, Madame Wang, may even give a present of a house to any one; what credit is that to me? Again, she may not give a single cash, but even that won't imply any loss of face, as far as I am concerned. What I have to say is that as Madame Wang is away from home, you should quietly look after yourself a bit. What's the good of worrying and fretting? Our lady is extremely fond of me; and, if, at different times, a chilliness has sprung up on her part, it's because you, Mrs. Chao, have again and again been officious. Had I been a man and able to have gone abroad, I would long ago have run away and started some business. I would then have had something of my own to attend to. But, as it happens, I am a girl, so that I can't even recklessly utter so much as a single remark. Madame Wang is well aware of it in her heart. And it's now because she entertains a high opinion of me that she recently bade me assume the charge of domestic affairs. But before I've had time enough to do a single good act, here you come, Mrs. Chao, to lay down the law. If this reaches Madame Wang's ear, I fear I shall get into trouble. She won't let me exercise any control, and then I shall, in real earnest, come in for no face. But even you, Mrs. Chao, will then actually lose countenance."

Reasoning with her, she so little could repress her tears that they rolled down her cheeks.

Mrs. Chao had not a word more to say to refute her arguments with. "If Madame Wang loves you," she simply responded, "there's still more reason why you should have drawn us into her favour. (Instead of that), all you think about is to try and win Madame Wang's affections, and you forget all about us."

"How ever did I forget you?" T'an Ch'un exclaimed. "How would you have me drag you into favour? Go and ask every one of them, and you'll see what mistress is indifferent to any one, who exerts her energies and makes herself useful, and what worthy person requires being drawn into favour?"

Li Wan, who stood by, did her best to pacify them with her advice. "Mrs. Chao," she argued, "don't lose your temper! Neither should you feel any ill-will against this young lady of yours. Had she even at heart every good

intention to lend you a hand, how could she put it into words?"

"This worthy senior dame," T'an Ch'un impatiently interposed, "has also grown quite dense! Whom could I drag into favour? Why, in what family, do the young ladies give a lift to slave-girls? Their qualities as well as defects should all alike be well known to you people. And what have they got to do with me?"

Mrs. Chao was much incensed. "Who tells you," she asked, "to give a

page 507

lift to any one? Were it not that you looked after the house, I wouldn't have come to inquire anything of you. But anything you may suggest is right; so had you, now that your maternal uncle is dead, granted twenty or thirty taels in excess, is it likely that Madame Wang would not have given you her consent? It's evident that our Madame Wang is a good woman and that it's you people who are mean and stingy. Unfortunately, however, her ladyship has with all her bounty no opportunity of exercising it. You could, my dear girl, well set your mind at ease. You wouldn't, in this instance, have had to spend any of your own money; and at your marriage by and bye, I would still have borne in mind the exceptional regard you had shown the Chao family. But now that you've got your full plumage, you've forgotten your extraction, and chosen a lofty branch to fly to."

Before T'an Ch'un had heard her to the end, she flew into such a rage that her face blanched; and choking for breath, she gasped and panted. Sobbing, she asked the while: "Who's my maternal uncle? My maternal uncle was at the end of the year promoted to be High Commissioner of the Nine Provinces! How can another maternal uncle have cropped up? It's because I've ever shown that reverence enjoined by the rites that other relatives have now more than ever turned up. If what you say be the case, how is it that every day that Huan-erh goes out, Chao Kuo-chi too stands up, and follows him to school? Why doesn't he put on the airs of an uncle? What's the reason that he doesn't? Who isn't aware of the fact that I'm born of a concubine? Would it require two or three months' time to trace my extraction? But the fact is you've come to kick up all this hullabaloo for fear lest people shouldn't be alive to the truth; and with the

express design of making it public all over the place! But I wonder who of us two will make the other lose face? Luckily, I've got my wits about me; for had I been a stupid creature ignorant of good manners, I would long ago have lost all patience."

Li Wan was much concerned, but she had to continue to exhort them to desist. But Mrs. Chao proceeded with a long rigmarole until a servant was unexpectedly heard to report that lady Secunda had sent Miss Ping to deliver a message. Mrs. Chao caught the announcement, and eventually held her peace, when they espied P'ing erh making her appearance. Mrs. Chao hastily forced a saturnine smile, and motioned to her to take a seat. "Is your lady any better?" she went on to inquire with vehemence. "I was just thinking of going to look her up; but I could find no leisure!"

Upon seeing P'ing Erh enter, Li Wan felt prompted to ask her the object of her visit.

"My lady says," P'ing Erh smilingly responded, "that she apprehends, now that Mrs. Chao's brother is dead, that your ladyship and you, miss, are not

page 508

aware of the existence of an old precedent. According to the ordinary practice no more need be given than twenty taels; but she now requests you, miss, to consider what would be best to do; if even you add a good deal more, it will do well enough."

T'an Ch'un at once wiped away all traces of tears. "What's the use of another addition, when there's no valid reason for it?" she promptly demurred. "Who has again been twenty months in the womb? Or is it forsooth any one who's gone to the wars, and managed to escape with his life, carrying his master on his back? Your mistress is certainly very ingenious! She tells me to disregard the precedent, in order that she should pose as a benefactress! She wishes to take the money, which Madame Wang spurns, so as to reap the pleasure of conferring favours! Just you tell her that I could not presume to add or reduce anything, or even to adopt any reckless decision. Let her add what she wants and

make a display of bounty. When she gets better and is able to come out, she can effect whatever additions she fancies.”

The moment P'ing Erh arrived, she obtained a fair insight (into lady Feng's designs), so when she heard the present remarks, she grasped a still more correct idea of things. But perceiving an angry look about T'an Ch'un's face, she did not have the temerity to behave towards her as she would, had she found her in the high spirits of past days. All she did therefore was to stand aloof with her arms against her sides and to wait in rigid silence. Just at that moment, however, Pao-ch'ai dropped in, on her return from the upper rooms. T'an Ch'un quickly rose to her feet, and offered her a seat. But before they had had time to exchange any words, a married woman likewise came to report some business.

But as T'an Ch'un had been having a good cry, three or four young maids brought her a basin, towel, and hand-glass and other articles of toilette. T'an Ch'un was at the moment seated cross-legged, on a low wooden couch, so the maid with the basin had, when she drew near, to drop on both her knees and lift it high enough to bring it within reach. The other two girls prostrated themselves next to her and handed the towels and the rest of the toilet things, which consisted of a looking-glass, rouge and powder. But P'ing Erh noticed that Shih Shu was not in the room, and approaching T'an Ch'un with hasty step, she tucked up her sleeves for her and unclasped her bracelets. Seizing also a large towel from the hands of one of the maids, she covered the lapel on the front part of T'an Ch'un's dress; whereupon T'an Ch'un put out her hands, and washed herself in the basin.

“My lady and miss,” the married woman observed, “may it please you to pay what has been spent in the family school for Mr. Chia Huan and Mr.. Chia Lan during the year.”

page 509

P'ing Erh was the first to speak. “What are you in such a hurry for?” she cried. “You've got your eyes wide open, and must be able to see our young lady washing her face; instead of coming forward to wait on her, you start talking! Do you also behave in this blind sort of way in the presence of your lady Secunda? This young lady is, it's true, generous

and lenient, but I'll go and report you to your mistress. I'll simply tell her that you people have no eye for Miss T'an Ch'un. But when you find yourselves in a mess, don't bear me any malice."

At this hint the woman took alarm, and hastily forcing a smile, she pleaded guilty. "I've been rude," she exclaimed. With these words, she rushed with all despatch out of the room.

T'an Ch'un smoothed her face. While doing so, she turned herself towards P'ing Erh and gave her a cynical smile. "You've come just one step too late," she remarked. "You weren't in time to see something laughable! Even sister Wu, an old hand at business though she be, failed to look up clearly an old custom and came to play her tricks on us. But when we plied her with questions, she luckily had the face to admit that it had slipped from her memory. 'Do you,' I insinuated, 'also forget, when you've got anything to report to lady Secunda? and have you subsequently to go and hunt up all about it?' Your mistress can't, I fancy, be so patient as to wait while she goes and institutes proper search."

P'ing Erh laughed. "Were she to have behaved but once in this wise," she observed, "I feel positive that a couple of the tendons of her legs would have long ago been snapped. But, Miss, don't credit all they say. It's because they see that our senior mistress is as sweet-tempered as a 'P'u-sa,' and that you, miss, are a modest young lady, that they, naturally, shirk their duties and come and take liberties with you. Your mind is set upon playing the giddy dogs," continuing, she added; speaking towards those beyond the doorway; "but when your mistress gets quite well again, we'll tell her all."

"You're gifted with the greatest perspicacity, miss," the married women, standing outside the door, smiled in chorus. "The proverb says: 'the person who commits a fault must be the one to suffer.' We don't in any way presume to treat any mistress with disdain. Our mistress at present is in delicate health, and if we intentionally provoke her, may we, when we die, have no place to have our corpses interred in."

P'ing Erh laughed a laugh full irony. "So long as you're aware of this, it's well and good," she said. And smiling a saturnine smile, she resumed, addressing herself to T'an Ch'un: "Miss, you know very well how busy our

lady has been and how little she could afford the time to keep this tribe of people in order. Of course, they couldn't therefore, be prevented from becoming

page 510

remiss. The adage has it: 'Lookers-on are clear of sight!' During all these years that you, have looked on dispassionately, there have possibly been instances on which, though additions or reductions should have been made, our lady Secunda has not been able to effect them, so, miss, do add or curtail whatever you may deem necessary, in order that, first, Madame Wang may be benefited, and that, secondly, you mayn't too render nugatory the kindness with which you ever deal towards our mistress."

But scarcely had she finished, than Pao-ch'ai and Li Wan smilingly interposed. "What a dear girl!" they ejaculated. "One really can't feel angry with that hussy Feng for being partial to her and fond of her. We didn't, at first, see how we could very well alter anything by any increase or reduction, but after what you've told us, we must hit upon one or two things and try and devise means to do something, with a view of not showing ourselves ungrateful of the advice you've tendered us."

"My heart was swelling with indignation," T'an Ch'un observed laughing, "and I was about to go and give vent to my temper with her mistress, but now that she (P'ing Erh) has happened to come, she has, with a few words, quite dissuaded me from my purpose."

While she spoke, she called the woman, who had been with them a few minutes back, to return into the room. "For what things for Mr. Chia Huan and Mr. Chia Lau was the money expended during the year in the family school?" she inquired of her.

"For cakes," replied the woman, "they ate during the year at school; or for the purchase of paper and pens. Each one of them is allowed eight taels."

"The various expenses on behalf of the young men," T'an Ch'un added, "are invariably paid in monthly instalments to the respective households."

For cousin Chia Huan's, Mrs. Chao receives two taels. For Pao-yü's, Hsi Jen draws two taels from our venerable senior's suite of apartments. For cousin Chia Lan's, some one, in our senior lady's rooms, gets the proper allowance. So how is it that these extra eight taels have to be disbursed at school for each of these young fellows? Is it really for these eight taels that they go to school? But from this day forth I shall put a stop to this outlay. So P'ing Erh, when you get back, tell your mistress that I say that this item must absolutely be done away with."

"This should have been done away with long ago," P'ing Erh smiled. "Last year our lady expressed her intention to eliminate it, but with the endless things that claimed her attention about the fall of the year, she forgot all about it."

The woman had no other course than to concur with her views and to

page 511

walk away. But the married women thereupon arrived from the garden of Broad Vista with the boxes of eatables. So Shih Shu and Su Yün at once brought a small dining-table, and P'ing Erh began to fuss about laying the viands on it.

"If you've said all you had," T'an Ch'un laughed, "you'd better be off and attend to your business. What's the use of your bustling about here?"

"I've really got nothing to do," P'ing Erh answered smiling. "Our lady Secunda sent me first, to deliver a message; and next, because she feared that the servants in here weren't handy enough. The fact is, she bade me come and help the girls wait on you, my lady, and on you, miss."

"Why don't you bring Mrs. Pao's meal so that she should have it along with us?" T'an Ch'un then inquired.

As soon as the waiting-maids heard her inquiry, they speedily rushed out and went under the eaves. "Go," they cried, directing the married women, "and say that Miss Pao-ch'ai would like to have her repast just now in the hall along with the others, and tell them to send the eatables here."

T'an Ch'un caught their directions. "Don't be deputing people to go on reckless errands!" she vociferated. "Those are dames, who manage important matters and look after the house, and do you send them to ask for eatables and inquire about tea? You haven't even the least notion about gradation. P'ing Erh is standing here, so tell her to go and give the message."

P'ing Erh immediately assented, and issued from the room, bent upon going on the errand. But the married women stealthily pulled her back. "How could you, miss, be made to go and tell them?" they smiled. "We've got some one here, who can do so!"

So saying, they dusted one of the stone steps with their handkerchiefs. "You've been standing so long," they observed, "that you must feel quite tired. Do sit in this sunny place and have a little rest."

P'ing Erh took a seat on the step. Two matrons attached to the tea-room then fetched a rug and spread it out for her. "It's cold on those stones," they ventured; "this is, as clean as it can be. So, miss, do make the best of it, and use it!"

P'ing Erh hastily forced a smile. "Many thanks," she replied.

Another matron next brought her a cup of fine new tea. "This isn't the tea we ordinarily drink," she quietly smiled. "This is really for entertaining the young ladies with. Miss, pray moisten your mouth with some."

P'ing Erh lost no time in bending her body forward and taking the cup. Then pointing at the company of married women, she observed in a low voice: "You're all too fond of trouble! The way you're going on won't do at all! She (T'an Ch'un) is only a young girl, so she is loth to show any severity, or

page 512

display any temper. This is because she's full of respect. Yet you people look down on her and insult her. Should she, however, be actually provoked into any violent fit of anger, people will simply say that her

behaviour was rather rough, and all will be over. But as for you, you'll get at once into endless trouble. Even though she might show herself somewhat wilful, Madame Wang treats her with considerable forbearance, and lady Secunda too hasn't the courage to meddle with her; and do you people have such arrogance as to look down on her? This is certainly just as if an egg were to go and bang itself against a stone!"

"When were we ever so audacious?" the servants exclaimed with one voice. "This fuss is all the work of Mrs. Chao!"

"Never mind about that!" P'ing Erh urged again in an undertone. "My dear ladies, 'when a wall falls, every one gives it a shove.' That Mrs. Chao has always been rather topsy-turvy in her ways, and done things by halves; so whenever there has been any rumpus, you've invariably shoved the blame on to her shoulders. Never have you had any regard for any single person. Your designs are simply awful! Is it likely that all these years that I've been here, I haven't come to know of them? Had our lady Secunda mismanaged things just a little bit, she would have long ago been run down by every one of you, ladies! Even such as she is, you would, could you only get the least opportunity, be ready to place her in a fix! And how many, many times hasn't she been abused by you?"

"She's dreadful," one and all of them rejoined. "You all live in fear and trembling of her. But we know well enough that no one could say that she too does not in the depths of her heart entertain some little dread for the lot of you. The other day, we said, in talking matters over, that things could not go on smoothly from beginning to end, and that some unpleasantness was bound to happen. Miss Tertia is, it's true, a mere girl, and you've always treated her with little consideration, but out of that company of senior and junior young ladies, she is the only soul whom our lady Secunda funks to some certain extent. And yet you people now won't look up to her."

So speaking Ch'iu Wen appeared to view. The married women ran up to her and inquired after her health. "Miss," they said, "do rest a little. They've had their meal served in there, so wait until things have been cleared away, before you go and deliver your message."

"I'm not like you people," Ch'iu Wen smiled. "How can I afford to wait?"

With these words on her lips, she was about to go into the hall, when P'ing Erh quickly called her back. Ch'iu Wen, upon turning her head round, caught sight of P'ing Erh. "Have you too," she remarked with a smile,

page 513

"come here to become something like those guardians posted outside the enclosing walls?"

Retracing, at the same time, her footsteps, she took a seat on the rug, occupied by P'ing Erh.

"What message have you got to deliver?" P'ing Erh gently asked.

"I've got to ask when we can get Pao-yü's monthly allowance and our own too," she responded.

"Is this any such pressing matter?" P'ing Erh answered. "Go back quick, and tell Hsi Jen that my advice is that no concern whatever should be brought to their notice to-day. That every single matter reported is bound to be objected to; and that even a hundred will just as surely be vetoed."

"Why is it?" vehemently inquired Ch'iu Wen, upon hearing this explanation.

P'ing Erh and the other servants then promptly told her the various reasons. "She's just bent," they proceeded, "upon finding a few weighty concerns in order to establish, at the expense of any decent person who might chance to present herself, a precedent of some kind or other so as to fix upon a mode of action, which might help to put down expenses to their proper level, and afford a lesson to the whole household; and why are you people the first to come and bump your heads against the nails? If you went now and told them your errand, it would also reflect discredit upon our venerable old mistress and Madame Wang, were they to pounce upon one or two matters to make an example of you. But if they complied with one or two of your applications, others will again maintain

'that they are inclined to favour this one and show partiality to that one; that as you had your old mistress' and Madame Wang's authority to fall back upon, they were afraid and did not presume to provoke their displeasure; that they only avail themselves of soft-natured persons to make scapegoats of.' Just mark my words! She even means to raise objections in one or two matters connected with our lady Secunda, in order to be the better able to shut up people's mouths."

Ch'iu Wen listened to her with patient ear; and then stretching out her tongue, "It's lucky enough you were here, sister P'ing," she smiled; "otherwise, I would have had my nose well rubbed on the ground. I shall seize the earliest opportunity and give the lot of them a hint."

While replying, she immediately rose to her feet and took leave of them. Soon after her departure, Pao-ch'ai's eatables arrived, and P'ing Erh hastened to enter and wait on her. By that time Mrs. Chao had left, so the three girls seated themselves on the wooden bed, and went through their repast. Pao-ch'ai faced the south. T'an Ch'un the west. Li Wan the east. The company of married women stood quietly under the verandah ready to

page 514

answer any calls. Within the precincts of the chamber, only such maids remained in waiting as had ever been their closest attendants. None of the other servants ventured, of their own accord, to put their foot anywhere inside.

The married women (meanwhile) discussed matters in a confidential whisper. "Let's do our downright best to save trouble," they argued. "Don't let us therefore harbour any evil design, for even dame Wu will, in that case, be placed in an awkward fix. And can we boast of any grand honours to expect to fare any better?"

While they stood on one side, and held counsel together, waiting for the meal to be over to make their several reports, they could not catch so much as the caw of a crow inside the rooms. Neither did the clatter of bowls and chopsticks reach their ears. But presently, they discerned a maid raise the frame of the portiere as high as she could, and two other

girls bring the table out. In the tea-room, three maids waited with three basins in hand. The moment they saw the dining-table brought out, all three walked in. But after a brief interval, they egressed with the basins and rinsing cups. Shih Shu, Su Yün and Ying Erh thereupon entered with three covered cups of tea, placed in trays. Shortly however these three girls also made their exit. Shih Shu then recommended a young maid to be careful and attend to the wants (of their mistresses). "When we've had our rice," she added, "we'll come and relieve you. But don't go stealthily again and sit down!"

The married women at length delivered their reports in a quiet and orderly manner; and as they did not presume to be as contemptuous and offhandish as they had been before, T'an Ch'un eventually cooled down.

"I've got something of moment," she then observed to P'ing Erh, "about which I would like to consult your mistress. Happily, I remembered it just now, so come back as soon as you've had your meal. Miss Pao-ch'ai is also here at present, so, after we four have deliberated together, you can carefully ask your lady whether action is to be taken accordingly or not."

P'ing Erh acquiesced and returned to her quarters. "How is it," inquired lady Feng, "that you've been away such an age?"

P'ing Erh smiled and gave her a full account of what had recently transpired.

"What a fine, splendid girl Miss Tertia is!" she laughingly ejaculated. "What I said was quite right! The only pity is that she should have had such a miserable lot as not to have been born of a primary wife."

"My lady, you're also talking a lot of trash!" P'ing Erh smiled. "She, mayn't be Madame Wang's child, but is it likely that any one would be so bold as to point the finger of scorn at her, and not treat her like the others?"

page 515

Lady Feng sighed. "How could you know everything?" she remarked. "She is, of course, the offspring of a concubine, but as a mere girl, she can't be placed on the same footing as a man! By and bye, when any one

aspires to her hand, the sort of supercilious parties, who now tread the world, will, as a first step, ask whether this young lady is the child of a No. 1 or No. 2 wife. And many of these won't have anything to say to her, as she is the child, of a No. 2. But really people haven't any idea that, not to speak of her as the offspring of a secondary wife, she would be, even as a mere servant-girl of ours, far superior than the very legitimate daughter of any family. Who, I wonder, will in the future be so devoid of good fortune as to break off the match; just because he may be inclined to pick and choose between a wife's child and a concubine's child? And who, I would like to know, will be that lucky fellow, who'll snatch her off without any regard to No. 1 and No. 2?"

Continuing, she resumed, turning smilingly towards P'ing Erh, "You know well enough how many ways and means I've had all these years to devise in order to effect retrenchment, and how there isn't, I may safely aver, a single soul in the whole household, who doesn't detest me behind my back. But now that I'm astride on the tiger's back, (I must go on; for if I put my foot on the ground, I shall be devoured). It's true, my tactics have been more or less seen through, but there's no help for it; I can't very well become more open-handed in a moment! In the second place, much goes out at home, and little comes in; and the hundred and one, large and small, things, which turn up, are still managed with that munificence so characteristic of our old ancestors. But the funds, that come in throughout the year, fall short of the immense sums of past days. And if I try again to effect any savings people will laugh at me, our venerable senior and Madame Wang suffer wrongs, and the servants abhor me for my stinginess. Yet, if we don't seize the first opportunity to think of some plan for enforcing retrenchment, our means will, in the course of a few more years, be completely exhausted."

"Quite so!" assented P'ing Erh. "By and bye, there will be three or four daughters and two or three more sons added; and our old mistress won't be able, singlehanded, to meet all this heavy outlay."

"I myself entertain fears on the same score," lady Feng smiled. "But, after all, there will be ample. For when Pao-yü and cousin Lin get married, there won't be any need to touch a cent of public money, as our old lady has her own private means, and she can well fork out some. Miss Secunda is the child of your senior master yonder, and she too needn't

be taken into account. So there only remain three or four, for each of whom one need only spend, at the utmost, ten thousand taels. Cousin Huan will marry in the

page 516

near future; and if an outlay of three thousand taels prove insufficient, we will be able, by curtailing the bandoline, used in those rooms for smoothing the hair with, make both ends meet. And should our worthy senior's end come about, provision for everything is already made. All that we'll have to do will be to spend some small sum for a few miscellaneous trifles; and three to five thousand taels will more than suffice. So with further economies at present, there will be plenty for all our successive needs. The only fear is lest anything occur at an unforeseen juncture; for then it will be dreadful! But don't let us give way to apprehensions with regard to the future! You'd better have your rice; and when you've done, be quick and go and hear what they mean to treat about in their deliberations. I must now turn this opportunity to the best account. I was only this very minute lamenting that I had no help at my disposal. There's Pao-yü, it's true, but he too is made of the same stuff as the rest of them in here. Were I even to get him under my thumb, it would be of no earthly use whatever. Senior lady is as good-natured as a joss; and she likewise is no good. Miss Secunda is worse than useless. Besides, she doesn't belong to this place. Miss Quarta is only a child. That young fellow Lan and Huan-erh are, more than any of the others, like frozen kittens with frizzled coats. They only wait to find some warm hole in a stove into which they may poke themselves! Really from one and the same womb have been created two human beings (T'an Ch'un and Chia Huan) so totally unlike each other as the heavens are distant from the earth. But when I think of all this, I feel quite angry! Again, that girl Lin and Miss Pao are both deserving enough, but as they also happen to be our connexions, they couldn't very well be put in charge of our family affairs. What's more, the one resembles a lantern, decorated with nice girls, apt to spoil so soon as it is blown by a puff of wind. The other has made up her mind not to open her mouth in anything that doesn't concern her. When she's questioned about anything, she simply shakes her head, and repeats thrice: 'I don't know,' so that it would be an extremely difficult job to go and ask her to lend a helping hand. There's only therefore Miss Tertia, who is as sharp of mind as of tongue. She's

besides a straightforward creature in this household of ours and Madame Wang is attached to her as well. It's true that she outwardly makes no display of her feelings for her, but it's all that old thing Mrs. Chao, who has done the mischief, for, in her heart, she actually holds her as dear as she does Pao-yü. She's such a contrast to Huan-erh! He truly makes it hard for any one to care a rap for him. Could I have had my own way, I would long ere this have packed him out of the place. But since she (T'au Ch'un) has now got this idea into her mind, we must cooperate with her. For if we can afford each other a helping

page 517

hand, I too won't be single-handed and alone. And as far as every right principle, eternal principle, and honesty of purpose go, we shall with such a person as a helpmate, be able to save ourselves considerable anxiety, and Madame Wang's interests will, on the other hand, derive every advantage. But, as far as unfairness and bad faith go, I've run the show with too malicious a hand, and I must turn tail and draw back from my old ways. When I review what I've done, I find that if I still push my tyrannical rule to the bitter end, people will hate me most relentlessly; so much so, that under their smiles they'll harbour daggers, and much though we two may then be able to boast of having four eyes and two heads between us, they'll compass our ruin, when they can at any moment find us off our guard. We should therefore make the best of this crisis, so that as soon as she takes the initiative and sets things in order, all that tribe of people may for a time lose sight of the bitter feelings they cherish against us, for the way we've dealt with them in the past. But there's another thing besides. I naturally know the great talents you possess, but I feel mistrust lest you should, by your own wits, not be able to bring things round. I enjoin these things then on you, now, for although a mere girl she has everything at her fingers' ends. The only thing is that she must try and be wary in speech. She's besides so much better read than I am that she's a harder nut to crack. Now the proverb says: 'in order to be able to catch the rebels, you must first catch their chief.' So if she's at present disposed to mature some plan and set to work to put it into practice, she'll certainly have to first and foremost make a start with me. In the event consequently of her raising objections to anything I've done, mind you don't begin any dispute with her. The more virulent she is in her censure of me, the more deferential you should be towards her. That's your best

plan. And whatever you do, don't imagine that I'm afraid of any loss of face. But the moment you flare up with her, things won't go well.....”

P'ing Erh did not allow her time to conclude her argument. “You're too much disposed to treat us as simpletons!” she smiled. “I've already carried out your wishes, and do you now enjoin all these things on me?”

Lady Feng smiled. “It's because,” she resumed, “I feared lest you, who have your eyes and mouth so full of me, and only me, might be inclined to show no regard whatever for her, that's why. I couldn't, therefore, but tender you the advice I did. But since you've already done what I wanted you to do, you've shown yourself far sharper than I am. There's nothing in this to drive you into another tantrum, and to make that mouth of yours begin to chatter away so much about 'you and I,' 'you and I' !”

“I've actually addressed you as 'you' ;” P'ing Erh rejoined; “but if you be displeased at it, isn't this a case of a slap on the mouth? You can very

page 518

well give me another one, for is it likely that this phiz of mine hasn't as yet tasted any, pray?”

“What a vixen you are!” lady Feng said smilingly. “How many faults will you go on picking out, before you shut up? You see how ill I am, and yet you come to rub me the wrong way. Come and sit down; for you and I can at all events have our meal together when there is no one to break in upon us. It's only right that we should.”

While these remarks dropped from her lips, Feng Erh and some three or four other maids entered the room and laid the small stove-couch table. Lady Feng only ate some birds' nests' soup and emptied two small plates of some recherche light viands; for she had long ago temporarily reduced her customary diet.

Feng Erh placed the four kinds of eatables allotted to P'ing Erh on the table. After which, she filled a bowl of rice for her. Then with one leg bent on the edge of the stove-couch, while the other rested on the ground, P'ing Erh kept lady Feng company during her repast; and waiting on her,

afterwards, until she finished rinsing her mouth, she issued certain directions to Feng Erh, and crossed over at length to T'an Ch'un's quarters. Here she found the courtyard plunged in perfect stillness, for the various inmates, who had been assembled there, had already taken their leave.

But, reader, do you wish to follow up the story? If so, listen to the circumstances detailed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER LVI.

The clever T'an Ch'un increases their income and removes long-standing abuses.

The worthy Pao-ch'ai preserves intact, by the display of a little intelligence, the great reputation enjoyed by the Chia family.

But let us pick up the clue of our story. P'ing Erh bore lady Feng company during her meal; then attending to her, while she rinsed her mouth and washed her hands, she betook herself eventually to T'an Ch'un's quarters, where she discovered the courtyard in perfect stillness. Not a soul was about beyond several maids, matrons and close attendants of the inner rooms, who stood outside the windows on the alert to obey any calls. P'ing Erh stepped into the hall. The two cousins and their sister-in-law were all three engaged in discussing some domestic affairs. They were talking about the feast, to which they had been invited during the new year festivities by Lai Ta's wife, and various details in connection with the garden

page 519

she had in her place. But as soon as she (P'ing Erh) appeared on the scene, T'an Ch'un desired her to seat herself on her footstool.

“What was exercising my mind,” she thereupon observed, “confines itself to this. I was computing that the head-oil, and rouge and powder, we use during the course of a month, are also a matter of a couple of taels; and I was thinking that what with the sum of two taels, already allotted us every month, and the extra monthly amount given as well to the maids, allowances are, with the addition again of that of eight taels for school expenses, we recently spoke about, piled to be sure one upon another. The thing is, it's true, a mere trifle, and the amount only a bagatelle, but it doesn't seem to be quite proper. But how is it that your mistress didn't take this into account?”

P'ing Erh smiled. “There's a why and a wherefore,” she answered. “All the things required by you, young ladies, must absolutely be subject to a fixed rule; for the different compradores have to lay in a stock of each every month; and to send them to us by the maids to take charge of; but

purely and simply to keep in readiness for you to use. No such thing could ever be tolerated as that each of us should have to get money every day and try and hunt up some one to go and buy these articles for us! That's how it is that the compradores outside receive a lump sum, and that they send us, month by month, by the female servants the supplies allotted for the different rooms. As regards the two taels monthly allowed you, young ladies, they were not originally intended that you should purchase any such articles with, but that you should, if at any time the ladies in charge of the household affairs happened to be away from home or to have no leisure, be saved the trouble of having to go in search of the proper persons, in the event of your suddenly finding yourselves in need of money. This was done simply because it was feared that you would be subjected to inconvenience. But an unprejudiced glance about me now shows me that at least half of our young mistresses in the various quarters invariably purchase these things with ready money of their own; so I can't help suspecting that, if it isn't a question of the compradores shirking their duties, it must be that what they buy is all mere rubbish."

T'an Ch'un and Li Wan laughed. "You must have kept a sharp lookout to have managed to detect these things!" they said. "But as for shirking the purchases, they don't actually do so. It's simply that they're behind time by a good number of days. Yet when one puts on the screw with them, they get some articles from somewhere or other, who knows where? These are however only a sham; for, in reality, they aren't fit for use. But as they're now as ever obtained with cash down, a couple of taels could very well be given to the brothers or sons of some of the other people's nurses to

page 520

purchase them with. They'll then be good for something! Were we however to employ any of the public domestics in the establishment, the things will be just as bad as ever. I wonder how they do manage to get such utter rot as they do?"

"The purchases of the compradores may be what they are," P'ing Erh smiled; "but were anyone else to buy any better articles, the compradores themselves won't ever forgive them. Besides other things, they'll aver that

they harbour evil designs, and that they wish to deprive them of their post. That's how it comes about that the servants would much rather give offence to you all inside, (by getting inferior things), and that they have no desire to hurt the feelings of the managers outside, (by purchasing anything of superior quality). But if you, young ladies, requisition the services of the nurses, these men won't have the arrogance to make any nonsensical remarks."

"This accounts for the unhappy state my heart is in," T'an Ch'un observed. "But as we're called upon to squander money right and left, and as the things purchased are half of them uselessly thrown away, wouldn't it, after all, be better for us to eliminate this monthly allowance to the compradores? This is the first thing. The next I'd like to ask you is this. When they went, during the new year festivities, to Lai Ta's house, you also went with them; and what do think of that small garden as compared with this of ours?"

"It isn't half as big as ours," P'ing Erh laughingly explained. "The trees and plants are likewise fewer by a good deal."

"When I was having a chat with their daughter," T'an Ch'un proceeded, "she said that, besides the flowers they wear, and the bamboo shoots, vegetables, fish and shrimps they eat from this garden of theirs, there's still enough every year for people to take over under contract, and that at the close of each year there's a surplus in full of two hundred taels. Ever since that day is it that I've become alive to the fact that even a broken lotus leaf, and a blade of withered grass are alike worth money."

"This is, in very truth, the way wealthy and well-to-do people talk!" Pao-ch'ai laughed. "But notwithstanding your honourable position, young ladies, you really understand nothing about these concerns. Yet, haven't you, with all your book-lore, seen anything of the passage in the writing of Chu Fu-tzu: 'Throw not they self away?'"

"I've read it, it's true," T'an Ch'un smiled, "but its object is simply to urge people to exert themselves; it's as much empty talk as any random arguments, and how could it be bodily treated as gospel?"

"Chu-tzu's work all as much empty talk as any random arguments?" Pao-

ch'ai exclaimed. "Why every sentence in it is founded on fact. You've

page 521

only had the management of affairs in your hands for a couple of days, and already greed and ambition have so beclouded your mind that you've come to look upon Chu-tzu as full of fraud and falsehood. But when you by and bye go out into the world and see all those mighty concerns reeking with greed and corruption, you'll even go so far as to treat Confucius himself as a fraud!"

"Haven't you with all your culture read a book like that of Chi-tzu's?" Pan Ch'un laughed. "Chi-tzu said in bygone days 'that when one descends into the arena where gain and emoluments are to be got, and enters the world of planning and plotting, one makes light of the injunctions of Yao and Shun, and disregards the principles inculcated by Confucius and Mencius.'"

"What about the next line?" Pao-ch'ai insinuated with a significant smile.

"I now cut the text short," T'an Ch'un smilingly rejoined, "in order to adapt the sense to what I want to say. Would I recite the following sentence, and heap abuse upon my own self; is it likely I would; eh?"

"There's nothing under the heavens that can't be turned to some use," Pao-ch'ai added. "And since everything can be utilised, everything must be worth money. But can it be that a person gifted with such intelligence as yours can have had no experience in such great matters and legitimate concerns as these?"

"You send for a person," Li Wan laughingly interposed, "and you don't speak about what's right and proper, but you start an argument on learning."

"Learning is right and proper," Pao-ch'ai answered. "If we made no allusion to learning, we'd all soon enough drift among the rustic herd!"

The trio bandied words for a while, after which they turned their attention again to pertinent affairs.

T'an Ch'un took up once more the thread of the conversation. "This garden of ours," she argued, "is only half as big as theirs, so if you double the income they derive, you will see that we ought to reap a net profit of four hundred taels a year. But were we also now to secure a contract for our surplus products, the money, we'd earn, would, of course, be a mere trifle and not one that a family like ours should hanker after. And were we to depute two special persons (to attend to the garden), the least permission given by them to any one to turn anything to improper uses, would, since there be so many things of intrinsic value, be tantamount to a reckless destruction of the gifts of heaven. So would it not be preferable to select several quiet, steady and experienced old matrons, out of those stationed in the grounds, and appoint them to put them in order and look after things? Neither will there be any need then to make them pay any rent, or give any taxes in kind. All we can ask them is to supply the household with whatever they

page 522

can afford during the year. In the first place, the garden will, with special persons to look after the plants and trees, naturally so improve from year to year that there won't be any bustle or confusion, whenever the time draws nigh to utilise the grounds. Secondly, people won't venture to injure or uselessly waste anything. In the third place, the old matrons themselves will, by availing themselves of these small perquisites, not labour in the gardens year after year and day after day all for no good. Fourthly, it will in like manner be possible to effect a saving in the expenditure for gardeners, rockery-layers, sweepers and other necessary servants. And this excess can be utilised for making up other deficiencies. I don't see any reason why this shouldn't be practicable!"

Pao-ch'ai was standing below contemplating the pictures with characters suspended on the walls. Upon hearing these suggestions, she readily nodded her head assentingly and smiled. "Excellent!" she cried. "Within three years, there will be no more famines and dearths."

"What a first-rate plan!" Li Wan chimed in. "This, if actually adopted, will delight the heart of Madame Wang. Pecuniary economies are of themselves a paltry matter; but there will be then in the garden those to

sweep the grounds, and those whose special charge will be to look after them. Besides, were the persons selected allowed to turn up an honest cash by selling part of the products, they will be so impelled by a sense of their responsibilities, and prompted by a desire of gain that there won't any longer be any who won't acquit themselves of their duties to the fullest measure."

"It remained for you, miss, to put these suggestions in words," P'ing Erh remarked. "Our mistress may have entertained the idea, but it is by no means certain that she thought it nice on her part to give utterance to it. For as you, young ladies, live at present in the garden, she could not possibly, unable as she is to supply such additional ornaments as will make it more showy, contrariwise depute people to exercise authority in it, and to keep it in order, with a view of effecting a reduction in expenses. Such a proposal could never have dropped from her lips."

Pao-ch'ai advanced up to her with alacrity. Rubbing her face: "Open that mouth of yours wide," she laughed, "and let me see of what stuff your teeth and tongue are made! Ever since you put your foot out of bed this morning you've jabbered away up to this very moment! And your song has all been in one strain. For neither have you been very complimentary to Miss Tertia, nor have you admitted that your mistress is, as far as wits go, so much below the mark as to be unable to effect suitable provision. Yet whenever Miss Tertia advanced any arguments, you've at once made use of endless words to join issue with her. This is because the plan devised by

page 523

Miss Tertia was also hit upon by your lady Feng. But there must surely have been a reason why she couldn't carry it into execution. Again, as the young ladies have now their quarters in the garden, she couldn't, with any decency, direct any one to go and rule over it, for the mere sake of saving a few cash. Just consider this. If the garden is actually handed to people to make profit out of it, the parties interested will, of course, not even permit a single spray of flowers to be plucked, and not a single fruit to be taken away. With such as come within the category of senior young ladies, they won't naturally have the audacity to be particular; but they'll daily have endless rows with the junior girls. (Lady Feng) has, with her

fears about the future and her misgivings about the present, shown herself neither too overbearing nor too servile. This mistress of theirs is not friendly disposed towards us, but when she hears of her various proposals, shame might induce her to turn over a new leaf.”

“Early this morning,” T'an Ch'un laughingly observed, “I was very cross, but as soon as I heard of her (P'ing Erh's) arrival, I casually remembered that her mistress employed, during her time, such domestics as were up to all kinds of larks, and at the sight of her, I got more cross than ever. But, little though one would have thought it, she behaved from the moment she came, like a rat that tries to get out of the way of a cat. And as she had had to stand for ever so long, I pitied her very much; but she took up the thread of the conversation, and went on to spin that long yarn of hers. Yet, instead of mentioning that her mistress treats me with every consideration, she, on the contrary, observed: 'The kindness with which you have all along dealt with our lady miss, has not been to no purpose.' This remark therefore not only dispelled my anger, but filled me with so much shame that I began to feel sore at heart. And, when I came to think carefully over the matter, I failed to see how I, a mere girl, who had personally done so much mischief that not a soul cared a straw for me and not a soul took any interest in me, could possess any such good qualities as to treat any one kindly....”

When she reached this point, she could not check her tears from brimming over. Li Wan and her associates perceived how pathetically she spoke; and, recalling to mind how Mrs. Chao had always run her down, and how she had ever been involved in some mess or other with Madame Wang, on account of this Mrs. Chao, they too found it difficult to refrain from melting into sobs. But they then used their joint efforts to console her.

“Let's avail ourselves of this quiet day,” they suggested, “to try and find out how we could increase our revenue and remove abuses, so as not to render futile the charge laid on us by Madame Wang. What use or purpose is it to allude to such trivial matters?”

“I've already grasped your object,” P'ing Erh hastily ventured. “Miss, speak out; who do you consider fit? And as soon as the proper persons have been fixed upon, everything will be square enough.”

“What you say is all very well,” T'an Ch'un rejoined, “but it will be necessary to let your lady know something about it. It has never been the proper thing for us in here to scrape together any small profits. But as your mistress is full of gumption, I adopted the course I did. Had she been at all narrowminded, with many prejudices and many jealousies, I wouldn't have shown the least willingness in the matter. But, as it will look as if I were bent upon pulling her to pieces, how can I take action without consulting her?”

“In that case,” P'ing Erh smiled, “I'll go and tell her something about it.”

With this response, she went on the errand; and only returned after a long lapse of time. “I said,” she laughed, “that it would be perfectly useless for me to go. How ever could our lady not readily accede to an excellent proposal like this?”

Hearing this, T'an Ch'un forthwith joined Li Wan in directing a servant to ask for the roll, containing the names of the matrons in the garden, and bring it to them. When produced, they all held council together, and fixing cursorily upon several persons, they summoned them to appear before them. Li Wan then explained to them the general outline of their duties; and not one was there among the whole company, who listened to her, who would not undertake the charge. One said: “If you confide that bamboo tree for twelve months to my care, it will again next year be a single tree, but besides the shoots, which will have been eaten at home, I shall be able, in the course of the year, to also pay in some money.” “Hand me over,” another one remarked, “that portion of paddy field, and there will, during the year, be no need to touch any public funds on account of the various birds, large and small, which are kept for mere fun. Besides that, I shall be in a position to give in something more.”

T'an Ch'un was about to pass a remark when a servant reported that the doctor had come; and that he had entered the garden to see Miss Shih. So the matrons were obliged to go and usher the doctor in.

“Were there a hundred of you here,” promptly expostulated P'ing Erh, “you wouldn't know what propriety means! Are there perchance no couple of housekeepers about to push themselves forward and see the

doctor in?"

"There's dame Wu and dame T'an," the servant, who brought the message, replied. "The two are on duty at the south-west corner at the 'accumulated splendour' gate."

page 525

At this answer, P'ing Erh allowed the subject to drop.

After the departure of the matrons, T'an Ch'un inquired of Pao-ch'ai what she thought of them.

"Such as are diligent at the outset," Pao-ch'ai answered smiling, "become remiss in the end; and those who have a glib tongue have an eye to gain."

T'an Ch'un listened to her reply; and nodding her head, she extolled its wisdom. Then showing them with her finger several names on the list, she submitted them for the perusal of the trio. P'ing Erh speedily went and fetched a pen and inkslab.

"This old mother Chu," the trio observed, "is a trustworthy woman. What's more, this old dame and her sons have generation after generation done the sweeping of the bamboo groves. So let's now place the various bamboo trees under her control. This old mother T'ien was originally a farmer, and everything in the way of vegetables and rice, in and about the Tao Hsiang village, should, albeit they couldn't, planted as they are as a mere pastime, be treated in such earnest as to call for large works and extensive plantations, be entrusted to her care; for won't they fare better if she can be on the spot and tend them with extra diligence at the proper times and seasons?"

"What a pity it is," T'an Ch'un proceeded smilingly, "that two places so spacious as the Heng Wu garden and the I Hung court bring no grit to the mill."

"Things in the Heng Wu garden are in a worse state," Li Wan hastily interposed. "Aren't the scented wares and scented herbs sold at present

everywhere in perfumery shops, large fairs and great temples the very counterpart of these things here? So if you reckon up, you will find how much greater a return these articles will give than any other kind of product. As for the I Hung court, we needn't mention other things, but only take into account the roses that bud during the two seasons of spring and summer; to how many don't they amount in all? Besides these, we've got along the whole hedge, cinnamon roses and monthly roses, stock roses, honey-suckle and westeria. Were these various flowers dried and sold to the tea and medicine shops, they'd also fetch a good deal of money."

"Quite so!" T'an Ch'un acquiesced with a smile. "The thing is that there's no one with any notion how to deal with scented herbs."

"There's Ying Erh who waits on Miss Pao-ch'ai," P'ing Erh promptly smiled. "Her mother is well-versed in these things. It was only the other day that she plucked a few, and plaited them, after drying them well in the sun, into a flower-basket and a gourd, and gave them to me to play with. But miss can you have forgotten all about it?"

page 526

"I was this very minute speaking in your praise," Pao-ch'ai observed smiling, "and do you come to chaff me?"

"What makes you say so?" exclaimed the trio, in utter astonishment.

"It will on no account do," Pao-ch'ai added. "You employ such a lot of people in here that they all lead a lazy life and have nothing to put a hand to, and were I also now to introduce some more, that tribe will look even upon me with utter contempt. But let me think of some one for you. There's in the I Hung court, an old dame Yeh; she's Pei Ming's mother. That woman is an honest old lady; and is furthermore on the best of terms with our Ying Erh's mother. So wouldn't it be well were this charge given to this dame Yeh? Should there even be anything that she doesn't know, there'll be no necessity for us to tell her. She can go straightway and consult with Ying Erh's mother. And if she can't attend to everything herself, it won't matter to whom she relegates some of her duties. These will be purely private favours. In the event too of any one making any

mean insinuations, the blame won't fall on our shoulders. By adopting this course, you'll be managing things in such a way as to do extreme justice to all; and the trust itself will also be placed on a most satisfactory footing."

"Excellent!" ejaculated Li Wan and P'ing Erh simultaneously.

"This may be well and good," T'an Ch'un laughed, "but the fear is that at the sight of gain, they'll forget all about propriety."

"That's nothing to do with us!" P'ing Erh rejoined a smile playing, about her lips. "It was only the other day that Ying Erh recognised dame Yeh as her adopted mother, and invited her to eat and drink with them, so that the two families are on the most intimate terms."

At this assurance, T'an Ch'un relinquished the topic of conversation, and, holding council together, they selected several persons, all of whom the four had ever viewed with impartial favour and they marked off their names, by dotting them with a pen.

In a little while, the matrons came to report that 'the doctor had gone;' and they handed the prescription. Their three mistresses then perused its contents. On the one hand, they despatched domestics to take it outside, so that the drugs should be got, and to superintend their decoction. On the other, T'an Ch'un and Li Wan explicitly explained to the various servants chosen what particular place each had to look after. "Exclusive," they added, "of what fixed custom requires for home consumption during the four seasons, you are still at liberty to pluck whatever remains and have it taken away. As for the profits, we'll settle accounts at the close of the year."

"I've also bethought myself of something," T'an Ch'un smiled. "If the settlement of accounts takes place at the end of the year, the money will,

page 527

at the time of delivery, be naturally paid into the accountancy. Those high up will then as usual add a whole lot of controllers; and these will, on their part, fleece their own share as soon as the money gets into the palms of

their hand. But as by this system, we've now initiated, you've been singled out for appointment, you've already ridden so far above their heads, that they foster all sorts of animosity against you. They don't, however, give vent to their feelings; but if they don't seize the close of the year, when you have to deliver your accounts, to play their tricks on you, for what other chances will they wait? Moreover, they obtain, in everything that comes under their control during the year, half of every share their masters get. This is an old custom. Every one is aware of its existence. But this is a new regime I now introduce in this garden, so don't let the money find its way into their hands! Whenever the annual settling of accounts arrives, bring them in to us."

"My idea is," Pao-ch'ai smilingly suggested, "that no accounts need be handed even inside. This one will have a surplus, that one a deficit, so that it will involve no end of trouble; wouldn't it be better therefore if we were to find out who of them would take over this or that particular kind and let them purvey the various things? These are for the exclusive use of the inmates of the garden; and I've already made an estimate of them for you. They amount to just a few sorts, and simply consist of head-oil, rouge, powder and scented paper; in all of which, the young ladies and maids are subject to a fixed rule. Then, besides these, there are the brooms, dust-baskets and poles, wanted in different localities, and the food for the large and small animals and birds, and the deer and rabbits. These are the only kinds of things required. And if they contract for them, there'll be little need for any one to go to the accountancy for money. But just calculate what a saving will thus be effected!"

"All these items are, I admit, mere trifles," P'ing Erh smiled, "but if you lump together what's used during a year, you will find that a saving of four hundred taels will be effected."

"Again!" smilingly remarked Pao-ch'ai, "it would be four hundred taels in one year; but eight hundred taels in two years; and with these, we could purchase a few more houses and let them; and in the way of poor, sandy land we could also add several acres to those we've already got. There will, of course, still remain a surplus; but as they will have ample trouble and inconvenience to put up with during the year, they should also be allowed some balance in hand so as to make up what's wanted for themselves. The main object is, of course, to increase profits and curtail

expenses, yet we couldn't be stingy to any excessive degree. In fact, were we even able to make any

page 528

further economy of over two or three hundred taels, it would never be the proper thing; should this involve a breach of the main principles of decorum. With this course duly put into practice, outside, the accountancy will issue in one year four or five hundred taels less, without even the semblance of any parsimony; while, inside, the matrons will obtain, on the other hand, some little thing to supply their wants with; the nurses, who have no means of subsistence, will likewise be placed in easy circumstances; and the plants and trees in the garden will year by year increase in strength and grow more abundantly. In this wise, you too will have such articles as will be fit for use. So that this plan will, to some extent, not constitute a breach of the high principles of propriety. And if ever we want to retrench a little more from where won't we be able to get money? But if the whole balance, if any, be put to the credit of the public fund, every one, inside as well as outside, will fill the streets with the din of murmurings! And won't this be then a slur upon the code of honour of a household such as yours? So were any charge to be entrusted to this one, out of the several tens of old nurses at present employed in the garden, and not to that one, the remainder will naturally resent such injustice. As I said a while back all that these women will have to provide among themselves amounts to a few articles, so they will unavoidably have ample means. Hence each should be told to contribute, beyond the articles that fall to her share during the year, a certain number of tiaos, whether she may or may not realise any balance, and then jointly lump these sums together, and distribute them among those nurses only on service in the garden. For although they may not have anything to do with the control of these things, they themselves will have to stay in the grounds, to keep an eye over the servants on duty, to shut the doors, to close the windows and to get up early and retire late. Whenever it rains in torrents or it snows hard and chairs have to be carried, for you, young ladies, to go out and come in; or boats have to be punted, and sledges drawn, these rough and arduous duties come alike within their sphere of work. They have to labour in the garden from one year's end to the other, and though, they earn something in those grounds, it's only right that they should be able to get some small benefits in the discharge of their legitimate

duties. But there's another most trivial point that I would broach with less reserve. If you only think of your ease, and don't share the profits with them, they will, of course, never presume to show their displeasure, but in their hearts they won't cherish you any good feeling. What they'll do will be to make public business a pretext to serve their own private ends with; they'll pluck more of your fruits than they should; and cut greater quantities of your flowers than they ought. And you people will have a grievance, but you won't have anywhere to go and confide it. But

page 529

should they too reap some gain, they'll readily look after such things on your behalf as you won't have the time to attend to."

The matrons listened to her explanations; (and finding that) they would be removed from the control of the accountancy, that they would not be compelled to go and settle accounts with lady Feng, and that all that they would be called upon to do every year would be to supply a few more tiao, were each and all delighted to an exceptional degree. So much so, that every one of them exclaimed in a chorus that they were quite prepared to agree to the terms. "It is better," they said, "than to be obliged to go out and be squeezed by them; and to have to fork out our own money as well."

Those too not entrusted with the care of any portion of land were also highly elated, when they heard that at the close of each year they would, though they had no valid claim, come in for some share of hard cash.

"They'll have to bear the trouble," they however argued, "to keep things in order, so it's only right that they should be left with a few cash to meet their various wants with; and how could we very well gobble our three meals without doing a stroke of work?"

"Worthy dames," Pao-ch'ai smiled, "you mustn't decline. These duties are within your province and you should fulfil them. All you need do is to exert yourselves a bit by day and night, and not be so remiss and careless as to suffer any of the servants to drink and gamble; that's all. Otherwise, I myself must have nothing to do with the control. But you, yourselves, know well enough that it's my aunt who appealed to me with her own lips

three and five times to do it as a favour to her. 'Your eldest sister-in-law,' she represented, 'has at present no leisure, and the other girls are young,' and then she asked me to look after things. So if I now don't accede, it's as clear as day that I shall be the cause of much worry to my aunt. Our lady Feng herself is seriously ill, and our domestic affairs can't hang fire. I'm really with nothing to do, so were even a mere neighbour to solicit my help, I would also feel bound to lend her a hand in her pressure of work. How much more therefore when it's my own aunt, who invokes my aid? Setting aside the way I'm execrated by one and all, how would I ever be able to stare my aunt in the face, if, while I gave my sole mind to winning fame and fishing for praise, any one got so intoxicated and lost so much in gambling as to stir up trouble? At such a juncture remorse on your part will be too late! Even the old reputation you have ever enjoyed will entirely be lost and gone. Those young ladies and girls and this vast garden are alike placed under your supervision, purely and simply because one takes into account that you have been nurses to three or four generations and that you have most scrupulously observed the rules of etiquette and propriety. It's but fair that you should try, with

page 530

one mind, and show some little regard for what's right and proper. But if you contrariwise behave with such laxity as to let people gratify their wishes by guzzling and gambling, and my aunt comes to hear of these nice doings, a little scolding from her will be of little consequence. But if the various women, who attend to the household, get scent of the state of affairs, they will haul you over the coals, without even so much as breathing one single word beforehand to my aunt. And venerable people, though you are, you will then, instead of tendering advice to young people, be called to account by them. As housekeepers, they exercise, it's true, authority over you; but why shouldn't you yourselves observe a certain amount of decorum? And if you do so, will they have any occasion to bully you? The reason why I've now bethought myself of this special boon for you is that you should unanimously strain every nerve to diligently attend to the garden, in order that the powers that be may, at the sight of your unrelenting care and zeal, have no cause to give way to solicitude. And won't they inwardly look up to you with regard? Neither will you render of no effect the various benefits devised for them. But go now and minutely ponder over all my advice!"

All the women received her words with gratification. "What you say is quite right," they replied. "From this time forth you, miss, and you, our lady, can well compose your minds. With the interest both of you feel on our behalf, may heaven and earth not spare us, if we do not display a full amount of gratitude for all your kindnesses."

These assurances were still being uttered when they saw Lin Chih-hsiao's wife walk in. "The family of the Chen mansion of Chiang Nan," she explained, "arrived in the capital yesterday. To-day, they're going into the palace to offer their congratulations. But they've now sent messengers ahead to come and bring presents and pay their respects."

While she spoke, she produced the list of presents and handed it up. T'an Ch'un took it over from her. "They consist," she said, perusing it, "of twelve rolls of brocades and satins embroidered with dragons, such as are for imperial use; twelve rolls of satins of various colours, of the kind worn by the Emperor; twelve rolls of every sort of imperial gauze; twelve rolls of palace silks of the quality used by his majesty; and twenty rolls of satins, gauzes, silks and thin silks of different colours, generally worn by officials."

After glancing over the list, Li Wan and T'an Ch'un suggested that a first-class tip should be given to the messengers who brought them, after which, they went on to direct a servant to convey the tidings to dowager lady Chia.

Old lady Chia gave orders to call Li Wan, T'an Ch'un, Pao-ch'ai and the other girls. On their arrival, the presents were passed under review; and

page 531

this over, Li Wan put them aside. "You must wait," she said to the servants of the inner store-room, "until Madame Wang comes back and sees them; you can then lock them up."

"This Chen family too," old lady Chia thereupon added, "isn't like any other family; the highest tips should therefore be conferred upon the men. But as in a twinkling, they may also send some of their womankind to come

and make their obeisance, silks should be got ready in anticipation.”

Scarcely was this remark concluded before a domestic actually announced: 'that four ladies of the Chen mansion had come to pay their respects.'

Upon hearing this, dowager lady Chia hastily directed that they should be introduced into her presence. The four women ranged from forty years and over. Their clothing and head-gear were not, in any material degree, different from those of mistresses. As soon as they presented their compliments and inquired about their healths, old lady Chia desired that four footstools should be moved forward. But though the four women thanked her for bidding them sit down, they only occupied the stools, after Pao-ch'ai had seated herself.

“When did you enter the capital?” old lady Chia inquired.

The four women jumped to their feet with alacrity. “We entered the capital yesterday,” they answered. “Our lady has taken our young lady today into the palace to pay their homage. That's why she bade us come and give you their compliments, and see how the young ladies are getting on.”

“You hadn't paid a visit to the capital for ever so many years,” dowager lady Chia smilingly observed, “and here you appear now quite unexpectedly!”

The four women simultaneously smiled again. “Quite so!” they said. “We received this year imperial orders, summoning us to the capital!”

“Has the whole family come?” old lady Chia asked.

“Our old mistress, our young master, the two young ladies and the other ladies haven't come up,” the four women explained. “Only our lady has come, together with Miss Tertia.”

“Is she engaged to any one?” old lady Chia asked.

“Not yet,” rejoined the quartet.

“The two families, that of your senior married lady and that of your lady Secunda are both on most intimate terms with ours,” dowager lady Chia smilingly added.

“Yes, they are,” replied the four women with a smile. “The letters received each year from our young ladies, assure us that they're entirely dependent upon the kindness bestowed upon them, in your worthy mansion, for their well-being.”

“What kindness?” old lady Chia exclaimed laughingly. “These two

page 532

families are really friends of long standing. In addition to this, they're old relatives. So what we do is our simple bounden duty. What's more in the favour of your two young ladies is, that they're not full of their own importance. That's how it is that we've come to be on such close terms.”

The four women smiled. “This is mainly due to your venerable ladyship's excessive humility,” they answered.

“Is that young gentleman of yours too with your old mistress?” old lady Chia went on to inquire.

“Yes, he has also come with our old mistress,” the four women retorted.

“How old is he?” old lady Chia then asked. “Does he go to school?” she afterwards inquired.

“He's thirteen this year,” the four women said by way of response. “But all through those good looks of his, our old mistress cherishes him so fondly that from his youth up, he has been wayward to the extreme, and that he now daily plays the truant. But our master and mistress as well don't keep any great check over him.”

“Yet, he can't resemble that young fellow of ours,” old lady Chia laughed. “What's the name of your young gentleman?”

“As our old mistress treats him just like a real precious gem,” the quartet

explained, "and as his complexion is naturally so white, her ladyship calls him Pao-yü."

"Here's another one with the name of Pao-yü!" old lady Chia laughingly said to Li Wan.

Li Wan and her companions hastily made a curtsey. "There have been, from old times to the present," they smiled, "very many among contemporaries and persons of different generations as well, who have borne duplicate names."

The four women also smiled. "After the selection of this infant name," they proceeded, "we all, both high or low, began to give way to surmises, as we could not make out in what relative's or friend's family there was a lad also called by the same name. But as we hadn't come to the capital for ten years or so, we couldn't remember."

"That young fellow is my grandson," dowager lady Chia remarked. "Hallo! some one come here!"

The married women and maids assented and approached several steps.

"Go into the garden," old lady Chia smilingly said, "and call our Pao-yü here, so that these four housekeeping dames should see how he compares with their own Pao-yü."

The married women, upon hearing her orders, promptly went off. After a while, they entered the room pressing round Pao-yü. The moment the four

page 533

dames caught sight of him, they speedily rose to their feet. "He has given us such a start!" they exclaimed smilingly. "Had we not come into your worthy mansion, and perchance, met him, elsewhere, we would have taken him for our own Pao-yü, and followed him as far as the capital."

While speaking they came forward and took hold of his hands and assailed him with questions.

Pao-yü however also put on a smile and inquired after their healths.

“How do his looks compare with those of your young gentleman?” dowager lady Chia asked as she smiled.

“The way the four dames ejaculated just now,” Li Wan and her companions explained, “was sufficient to show how much they resemble in looks.”

“How could there ever be such a coincidence?” old lady Chia laughed. “Yet, the children of wealthy families are so delicately nurtured that unless their faces are so deformed as to make them downright ugly, they're all equally handsome, as far as general appearances go. So there's nothing strange in this!”

“As we gaze at his features,” the quartet added, with smiling faces, “we find him the very image of him; and from what we gather from your venerable ladyship, he's also like him in waywardness. But, as far as we can judge, this young gentleman's disposition is ever so much better than that of ours.”

“What makes you think so?” old lady Chia precipitately inquired.

“We saw it as soon as we took hold of the young gentleman's hands,” the four women laughingly rejoined, “and when he spoke to us. Had it been that fellow of ours, he would have simply called us fools. Not to speak of taking his hand in ours, why we daren't even slightly move any of his things. That's why, those who wait on him are invariably young girls.”

Before the four dames had time to conclude what they had to say, Li Wan and the rest found it so hard to check themselves that with one voice they burst into loud laughter.

Old lady Chia also laughed. “Let's also send some one now,” she said, “to have a look at your Pao-yü. When his hand is taken, he too is sure to make an effort to put up with it. But don't you know that children of families such as yours and mine are bound, notwithstanding their numerous perverse and strange defects, to return the orthodox civilities,

when they come across any strangers. But should they not return the proper civilities, they should, by no manner of means, be suffered to behave with such perverseness. It's the way that grown-up people doat on them that makes them what they are. And as they can, first and foremost, boast of bewitching good looks and they comport themselves, secondly, towards visitors with all propriety—,

page 534

in fact, with less faulty deportment than their very seniors—, they manage to win the love and admiration of such as only get a glimpse of them. Hence it is that they're secretly indulged to a certain degree. But if they don't show the least regard to any one inside or outside, and so reflect no credit upon their parents, they deserve, with all their handsome looks, to be flogged to death.”

These sentiments evoked a smile from the four dames. “Your words venerable lady,” they exclaimed, “are quite correct. But though our Pao-yü be wilful and strange in his ways, yet, whenever he meets any visitors, he behaves with courteousness and good manners; so much so, that he's more pleasing to watch than even grown-up persons. There is no one, therefore, who sees him without falling in love with him. But you'll say: 'why is he then beaten?' You really aren't aware that at home he has no regard either for precept or for heaven; that he comes out with things that never suggest themselves to the imagination of grown-up people, and that he does everything that takes one by surprise. The result is that his father and mother are driven to their wits' ends. But wilfulness is natural to young children. Reckless expenditure is a common characteristic of young men. Antipathy to school is a common feeling with young people. Yet there are ways and means to bring him round. The worse with him is that his disposition is so crotchety and whimsical. Can this ever do?....”

This reply was barely ended when a servant informed them that their mistress had returned. Madame Wang entered the room, and saluted the women. The four dames paid their obeisance to her. But they had just had sufficient time to pass a few general observations, when dowager lady Chia bade them go and rest. Madame Wang then handed the tea in person and withdrew from the apartment. But when the four dames got

up to say good-bye, old lady Chia adjourned to Madame Wang's quarters. After a chat with her on domestic affairs, she however told the women to go back; so let us put them by without any further allusion to them.

During this while, old lady Chia's spirits waxed so high, that she told every one and any one she came across that there was another Pao-yü, and that he was, in every respect, the very image of her grandson.

But as each and all bore in mind that there were many inmates among the large households of those officials with official ancestors, called by the same names, that it was an ordinary occurrence for a grandmother to be passionately fond of her grandson, and that there was nothing out-of-the-way about it, they treated the matter as of no significance. Pao-yü alone however was such a hair-brained simpleton that he conjectured that the statements made by the four dames had been intended to flatter his grandmother Chia.

page 535

But subsequently he betook himself into the garden to see how Shih Hsiang-yün was getting on.

“Compose your mind now,” Shih Hsiang-yün then said to him, “and go on with your larks! Once, you were as lonely as a single fibre, which can't be woven into thread, and like a single bamboo, which can't form a grove, but now you've found your pair. When you exasperate your parents, and they give you beans, you'll be able to bolt to Nanking in quest of the other Pao-yü.”

“What utter rubbish!” Pao-yü exclaimed. “Do you too believe that there's another Pao-yü?”

“How is it,” Hsiang-yün asked, “that there was some one in the Lieh state called Lin Hsiang-ju, and that during the Han dynasty there lived again another person, whose name was Ssu Ma Hsiang-ju?”

“This matter of names is all well enough,” Pao-yü rejoined with a smile. “But as it happens, his very appearance is the counterpart of mine. Such

a thing could never be!”

“How is it,” Hsiang-yün inquired, “that when the K'uang people saw Confucius, they fancied it was Yang Huo?”

“Confucius and Yang Huo,” Pao-yü smilingly argued, “may have been alike in looks, but they hadn't the same names. Lin and Ssu were again, notwithstanding their identical names, nothing like each other in appearances. But can it ever be possible that he and I should resemble each other in both respects?”

Hsiang-yün was at a loss what reply to make to his arguments. “You may,” she consequently remarked smiling, “propound any rubbish you like, I'm not in the humour to enter into any discussion with you. Whether there be one or not is quite immaterial to me. It doesn't concern me at all.”

Saying this, she lay herself down.

Pao-yü however began again to exercise his mind with further surmises. “If I say,” he cogitated, “that there can't be one, there seems from all appearances to be one. And if I say that there is one, I haven't, on the other hand, seen him with my own eyes.”

Sad and dejected he returned therefore to his quarters, and reclining on his couch, he silently communed with his own thoughts until he unconsciously became drowsy and fell fast asleep.

Finding himself (in his dream) in some garden or other, Pao-yü was seized with astonishment. “Besides our own garden of Broad Vista,” he reflected, “is there another such garden?” But while indulging in these speculations, several girls, all of whom were waiting-maids, suddenly made their appearance from the opposite direction. Pao-yü was again filled with surprise. “Besides Yüan Yang, Hsi Jen and P'ing Erh,” he pondered,

page 536

“are there verily such maidens as these?”

“Pao-yü!” he heard that company of maids observe, with faces beaming with smiles, “how is it you find yourself in here?”

Pao-yü laboured under the impression that they were addressing him. With hasty step, he consequently drew near them, and returned their smiles. “I got here,” he answered, “quite listlessly. What old family friend's garden is this, I wonder? But sisters, pray, take me for a stroll.”

The maids smiled with one consent. “Really!” they exclaimed, “this isn't our Pao-yü. But his looks too are spruce and nice; and he is as precocious too with his tongue.”

Pao-yü caught their remarks. “Sisters!” he eagerly cried, “is there actually a second Pao-yü in here?”

“As for the two characters 'Pao-yü,’” the maids speedily explained, “every one in our house has received our old mistress' and our mistress' injunctions to use them as a spell to protract his life for many years and remove misfortune from his path, and when we call him by that name, he simply goes into ecstasies, at the very mention of it. But you, young brat, from what distant parts of the world do you hail that you've recklessly been also dubbed by the same name? But beware lest we pound that frowzy flesh of yours into mincemeat.”

“Let's be off at once!” urged another maid, as she smiled. “Don't let our Pao-yü see us here and say again that by hobnobbing with this stinking young fellow, we've been contaminated by all his pollution.”

With these words on her lips, they straightway walked off.

Pao-yü fell into a brown study. “There's never been,” he mused, “any one to treat me with such disdain before! But what is it, in fact, that induces them to behave towards me in this manner? May it not be true that there lives another human being the very image of myself?”

While lost in reverie, he advanced with heedless step, until he reached a courtyard. Pao-yü was struck with wonder. “Is there actually,” he cried,

“besides the I Hung court another court like it?” Spontaneously then ascending the steps, he entered an apartment, in which he discerned some one reclining on a couch. On the off side sat several girls, busy at needlework; now laughing joyfully; now practising their jokes; when he overheard the young person on the couch heave a sigh.

“Pao-yü,” smilingly inquired a maid, “what, aren't you asleep? What are you once more sighing for? I presume it's because your sister is ill that you abandon yourself again to idle fears and immoderate anguish!”

These words fell on Pao-yü's ears, and took him quite aback.

“I've heard grandmother say,” he overheard the young person on the

page 537

couch observe, “that there lives at Ch'ang An, the capital, another Pao-yü endowed with the same disposition as myself. I never believed what she told me; but I just had a dream, and in this dream I found myself in a garden of the metropolis where I came across several maidens; all of whom called me a 'stinking young brat,' and would have nothing whatever to do with me. But after much difficulty, I succeeded in penetrating into his room. He happened to be fast asleep. There he lay like a mere bag of bones. His real faculties had flown somewhere or other; whither it was hard for me to say.”

Hearing this, “I've come here,” Pao-yü said with alacrity, “in search of Pao-yü; and are you, indeed, that Pao-yü?”

The young man on the couch jumped down with all haste and enfolded him in his arms. “Are you verily Pao-yü?” he laughingly asked. “This isn't by any means such stuff as dreams are made of!”

“How can you call this a dream?” Pao-yü rejoined. “It's reality, yea, nothing but reality!”

But scarcely was this rejoinder over, than he heard some one come, and say: “our master, your father, wishes to see you, Pao-yü.”

The two lads started with fear. One Pao-yü rushed off with all despatch. The other promptly began to shout, "Pao-yü! come back at once! Pao-yü; be quick and return!"

Hsi Jen, who stood by (Pao-yü), heard him call out his own name, in his dreams, and immediately gave him a push and woke him up. "Where is Pao-yü gone to?" she laughed.

Although Pao-yü was by this time aroused from sleep, his senses were as yet dull, so pointing towards the door, "He's just gone out," he replied, "he's not far off."

Hsi Jen laughed. "You're under the delusion of a dream," she said. "Rub your eyes and look carefully! It's your reflection in the mirror."

Pao-yü cast a glance in front of him, and actually caught sight of the large inlaid mirror, facing him quite opposite, so he himself burst out laughing. But, presently, a maid handed him a rince-bouche and tea and salt, and he washed his mouth.

"Little wonder is it," She Yüeh ventured, "if our old mistress has repeatedly enjoined that it isn't good to have too many mirrors about in young people's rooms, for as the spirit of young persons is not fully developed there is every fear, with mirrors casting their reflections all over the place, of their having wild dreams in their sleep. And is a bed now placed before that huge mirror there? When the covers of the mirrors are let down, no harm can befall; but as the season advances, and the weather gets hot, one feels so languid and tired, that is one likely to think of dropping them? Just as it happened

page 538

a little time back; it slipped entirely from your memory. Of course, when he first got into bed, he must have played with his face towards the glass; but upon shortly closing his eyes, he must naturally have fallen into such confused dreams, that they thoroughly upset his rest. Otherwise, how is it possible that he should have started shouting his own name? Would it not be as well if the bed were moved inside to-morrow? That's the proper place for it."

Hardly had she, however, done, before they perceived a servant, sent by Madame Wang to call Pao-yü. But what she wanted to tell him is not yet known, so, reader, listen to the circumstances recorded in the subsequent chapter.

END OF BOOK II.