CHHOI-CHHUNG.

A COREAN MÄRCHEN.

The following story is rendered freely and with some abridgment from a manuscript in my possession, but care has been taken to avoid any alteration which could injure its value as a document of Corean folk-lore. It has no author's or printer's name, and no date, but it belongs I should say, either to this century, or the last.

The folk-lore of Corea is to be regarded as a branch of that of China. The present story contains hardly anything that is specially characteristic of Corea, and the same may be said of nearly all the Corean literature which has fallen under my notice. The supernatural machinery of the Dragon King etc. is borrowed from the vulgar Chinese mythology known as Taoism, though it has nothing to do with Lao-tze or the remarkable classic with which his name is associated.

The strong animus against China which pervades this tale tends to prove that the Coreans have not quite the reverent affection for that country which some people would have us believe to exist.

A long time ago, in the days when Silla* was an independent Kingdom, there lived in that part of Corea a very learned man named Chhoi-chhung. He was of good family, and had excellent abilities, but he had never been called to office, and led a life of retirement, until at last the King heard that he was descended from a former Minister of State and appointed him Governor of the city of Munchhang.

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* Corea formerly consisted of three Kingdoms—Koryŏ (whence our Corea), Silla, and Pèkché, subsequently united into one, which since the end of the 14th century has borne the name of Chosŏn.

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But this mark of the Royal favour seemed to give him little pleasure, much to the surprise of his wife, who asked him why he was dissatisfied. 'Strange things,' replied he, 'happen in this district of Munchhang. All the Governors who go there lose their wives and grown-up daughters in a mysterious way. The post is no doubt a good one, but yet it would be far better to get appointed somewhere else than to go to such an unlucky place.' 'You are quite right,' said his wife. 'Still you should remember that nothing takes place without a cause, and there is a divinity which presides over human affairs. If it is a man's fate to die young, he dies, and there is no help for it. And for my part, I have no faith in these stories of people being carried off mysteriously. Besides, this appointment will enable us to carry on the tradition of our ancestors, and reflect honour on our family, and we can hardly expect to have a second offer of the kind. What would you do if the Government refused you another post on the score that you have declined this one? But if you like, refuse the Governorship. Your resignation will probably not be accepted, and, in that case, I have a plan which will do away with all anxiety.'

It turned out as she expected. Chhoi chhung declined several times, but the Government would take no refusal. He thought at first of leaving his wife behind, and proceeding to Munchhang alone, but as she was childless, and they were very dear to each other, they could not bear to be separated, and it was finally decided that she should accompany him.

A lucky day having been selected, they set out upon their journey. They arrived safely at their destination, and Chhoi-chhung was at once installed in office, while his wife's first care was to procure an infinity of skeins of red silk which she joined together and fastened one end to her body.

One day while Chhoi-chhung was in the public office attending to his duties as Governor, clouds and vapours closed in from

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all sides, a gust of wind shook Heaven and Earth, and it became so dark that a foot before his face he could see nothing. He had not recovered from his amazement at this sudden convulsion of nature when they sky cleared again and the slaves* came rushing from the inner apartments crying out with many tears that during the storm of wind and rain their lady had suddenly disappeared.

Chhoi-chhung was thunderstruck. He changed countenance, and hastily putting aside his work, hurried into the house. His wife was nowhere to be seen. The only trace of her that he could discover was the red thread which stretched out into the court-yard. He promptly armed some of his bravest and most intelligent clerks and underlings and set out with them to follow up this clew. It led them to the top of a mountain hard by, where it entered a cleft in a great wall of rock. Chhoi-chhung was delighted. He found that there was a door in the cliff, closed by a great stone, which they soon removed and then all went in. After going a long way, they came at last to a new world where the sun and moon shone brightly. There was here a splendid palace with a grim-looking-gate leading to it, but no living creature, man, bird or beast was to be seen.

Chhoi-chhung and his men entered by this gate. Quietly approaching the palace, he peeped in by a window and saw numbers of women of rare beauty sitting in rows to right and left. Among them was his wife who was combing the hair of a Golden Pig which lay on her lap. His first feeling was of joy at finding his wife alive, but when he saw how she was employed, his anger and jealousy flamed up to heaven. He restrained himself, however; and waited to see what would happen.

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* There are a number of slaves, male and female, attached to public offices in Corea. The lot of the latter, who are in many cases the wives or relatives of condemned political offenders, is a very miserable one.

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When Chhoi-chhung's wife saw him at the window, she said to the Golden Pig—"I suppose there is nothing in the world that you are afraid of, and that you may live to the age of a thousand years."

The Golden Pig replied. "There is but one thing that I stand in fear of, and that is a deer-skin."

"A deer-skin is but a dead hide," said the lady, "how can it do you any harm?"

"Though it is but a dead thing," rejoined the Pig, "yet if any one were to spit on a piece of deer-skin and stick it on my forehead, I should die instantly without uttering a word."

The lady was rejoiced in her heart for she remembered that the thong of the bunch of keys which was fastened to the band of her skirt was of deer-skin. So she waited till the Golden Pig was asleep, and there quietly loosing the thong, spat upon it and applied it to the Golden Pig's forehead. When sure enough he died without even waking up from sleep.

The lady, delighted to see that the Pig was really dead, flung down his body from her lap, and opened the window outside of which her husband was standing. Then they left the palace hand-in-hand followed by all the captive women. But their minds were not quite at rest till they reached the rock-door which led to the outer world.

Six months after Chhoi-chhung's wife had the misfortune to be carried of by the Golden Pig, she gave birth to a child, a fine little fellow. But his father was far from pleased, for he most unreasonably suspected him to be the son of the Golden Pig. He ordered one of the official female slaves to take the infant and throw him away. She took the child in her arms and went out, but had not gone far when she came to a place where there was a worm lying outstretched on the road. The child pointed to it and exclaimed "There is the Chinese character for 'one' (一)." The

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slave was greatly surprised, and returned to tell the Governor, but he reproved her sharply, telling her she was a silly woman, and sent her out again. This time the child saw a dead frog lying on the road and called out, "There is the character for Heaven (天)." The slave, hearing this, could not find it in her heart to abandon the child but carried it back and reported the matter to Chhoi-chhung, with the result that he was more enraged than ever, and repeated his order in the sternest tones. She was too much frightened to disobey, and taking up the child reluctantly, she wrapped him in costly garments and laid him down in the middle of the highway. The horses and cattle which passed by avoided treading on him, and at night female genii came down from heaven, and suckled him.

When Chhoi-chhung learnt that the child was still alive on the highway, he ordered his constables to go and throw him into a lotus pond. They did so, but the lotus leaves closed round him, and phœnixes and cranes drew their wings over him to protect him from the cold, while at night the female genii never failed to come down from Heaven and give him suck.

Two or three months passed in this way. The child grew so quickly that he now clambered on the rocks and went down to the sea-shore in his play. As he crept about, the imprints of his hands and feet became Chinese characters and when he cried, the sound of his weeping was like the chanting of Chinese poetry and so pathetic that none who heard him could refrain from tears.

When Chhoi-chhung's wife heard these things she could no longer contain herself. "If you will only consider," said she to her husband, "that our child was born six months after your handmaiden was so unfortunate as to be carried off by the Golden Pig, you will see how unfounded are your suspicions. And you must acknowledge that the Gods of Heaven and Earth have preserved his life until now in a miraculous manner. I beseech you

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therefore let him be brought back." Chhoi chhung was more than half convinced by his wife's pleading, but he feared to make himself a laughing-stock to his subordinates and people if he sent for the child and had him brought home after having exposed him to perish as the son of the Golden Pig.

But his wife had a plan for saving her husband's credit. She advised him to retire to his room and pretend illness, and then went to a sorceress whom she bribed to spread the rumour that the illness of the Governor was a punishment from Heaven for having exposed his own flesh, blood and bones on the seashore to perish. "Tell everybody," said she, "that if the Governor speedily seeks out the child and brings him back, he will recover, but if not, he will not only die himself, but the disease will become infectious, and of all the people of this district not one will be left alive.

When the people of Munchhang heard this, they went in a body to the Governor and with tears and lamentations told him what the sorceress had said. He pretended to be greatly surprised. "My own death," he replied, "would matter little, but it would be a grievous matter if for the sake of this child, all the people were to meet with such a calamity. Let him be brought back."

Some of his officers at once took a boat and went to the place from which the sound of chanting verses came. There they saw the child sitting on the top of a lofty rock which they could not climb. So they called out to him from below. 'Your father is very ill and wishes to see you. Make ready and come quickly.' The boy answered. "It is true that duty requires that a son should go at once to visit a sick father. But my father has refused to acknowledge me as his son, and has exposed me to perish. Go back and tell him this from me. 'In ancient times there was a merchant of Yangchai in China who gave the King of Tsin a beautiful woman. Six months latter she gave birth to a son. But this child was not disowned by the King of Tsin, and he eventually became

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the Emperor of 10,000 chariots.'* But in my case there is no room at all for my father's suspicions that I am not his son. Look too at my ears and eyes. Have they any resemblance to those of a pig? But if my father has abandoned me, Heaven has granted me its protection. I will not go back with you."

"What is the name of this island?" asked the officers. "It is Pig Island," replied the child. "Go away quickly, and come here no more."

When the officers returned, they told all this to the Governor, to his infinite astonishment and sorrow. In remorse for his cruel behaviour, he set out himself for the island, escorted by numbers of his people, and called the boy who came and with tears made obeisance before him. Taking him by the hand, he said 'How can a young child like you support yourself here all alone?' The boy again made obeisance and said 'It was doubtless by Heaven's will that Your Excellency was unable to acknowledge me as your son and banished me to this distant spot and this is no reason for me to hate my parents. But Heaven has given me protection and has preserved my life until this day.' Chhoi-chhung replied, 'This was all my fault and I am now sorry for it. I hope you will now come back with me.'

The boy said, 'It is of course the duty of a child to obey his parents. But I would ask you to allow me for a while to be my own master and to let me see the world. My mother need have no anxiety on my account. And if you will, build me a dwelling in this place and let it be called the 'Moonshine Terrace,' with a tower, to be named the 'Prospect Tower.'

Chhoi-chhung, seeing from the boy's appearance and language that he was no ordinary mortal, felt that it was Heaven's will that he should yield to his wishes. He ceased to urge him to return to

* i. s. of China.

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Munchhang, and built him a dwelling and tower as he had desired.

At this time the child was three years of age. He continued to live in the 'Prospect Tower.' Days and months passed. He was given from Heaven a magic iron wand and numbers of heavenly officials came down from the sky daily and taught him to write the Chinese character as well as many magic arts.* When he was taught one character he knew one hundred: when he was shown one magic art, he could practice a hundred. The iron wand became red hot from constant use.

Every day the Heavenly officials chanted with him Chinese verses which they had composed with an entrancing sound which was diffused far beyond the rainbow-coloured clouds which gathered over the Tower, while a perfume spread abroad from it for one hundred *li*. All who saw or heard were lost in wonder and admiration.

Now the Emperor of China was one day in the garden behind his palace looking at the moon when suddenly there was borne to his ears on the wind from afar a noise as of some one chanting poetry.

He inquired of his courtiers where this sound came from. 'Since last year,' they replied 'whenever the moon is at the full, a sound of chanting verses is heard faintly on the wind. It comes from the land of Silla.' The Emperor wondered greatly, and said, 'How is it possible that in so small a Kingdom there should be so divinely strange a talent?'

The next day he instructed his Ministers to select two or three of the wisest scholars in the Empire and send them to the land of Silla to see what talent might be found there. This mission was

* This reminds us of the association of grammar with magic in the popular fancy in Europe during the middle ages.

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confided to some of the most celebrated pundits who at once took a ship, and set sail for Silla.

On arriving off the coast of Munchhang, they saw there only a small boy who was sitting on a raised terrace chanting poetry. They brought their ship to land below the place where he sat, and said to him. 'You make verses very cleverly.' The boy answered 'Why should not I?' 'Can you also cap verses?' continued the Chinese scholars. To this the boy replied, 'I will, if you will give me the first line.' Upon which the Chinese scholars composed the following, chanting it aloud :—

'See! our oars transfix the moon beneath the waves.'

The boy at once added,

'While the ship bears down the sky amid the sea.'

The Chinese pundits were lost in wonder, but further to try his talent, they composed this line.

'Sea-birds to the surface rising, plunge again.'

Whereupon the boy chanted in reply,

'Hill-clouds in the distance severing, join once more.'

The Chinese scholars finding that in verse he was not to be worsted, next tried him in prose. So they said—"Why do birds and rats say '*chak-chak*'?" To which the child answered 'Why do pigs and dogs say '*meung-meung*'? At this, the Chinese scholars laughed loud and said—'A dog says '*meung-meung*' it is true.' But who ever heard the *meung-meung* from a pig? There you are wrong. The boy in his turn laughed and said—'It is true that a bird chirps *chak-chak*. But who ever heard the sound *chak-chak* from a rat? What you said was absurd, so I framed my question to match it.'

The scholars thought this very wonderful. They inquired from him his age and name and were told that he was the son of Chhoi-chhung of Munchhang and that he was now eleven years

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old. He then dismissed them saying, "Now that the sun has gone down, *I* am going to remain here."

The Chinese scholars looked at one another wonderingly. 'If even the small boys in this country are so accomplished,' thought they, 'what numbers of erudite literati there must be. We had better return to China without delay.' So they turned their ship's head homewards, and returning to China, made their report to the Emperor, who was greatly astonished and said to his Ministers, "This land of Silla is so productive of able men, that it must naturally have a contempt for the Great* Country. Now I have a plan by which I will try them and find a pretext for invading Silla." So he took a hen's egg, and wrapping it in cotton wool, enclosed it in a stone casket. This he placed in a copper case and filled the chinks with bees-wax so that nobody could open it and find out what it contained. He then despatched it to the King of Silla with the following message:—

"Your country, having so many learned scholars, treats the Great Country with contempt and is deserving of the severest punishment. But so far we have treated you with indulgence, and you may be pardoned altogether if you can find any one who can reveal the contents of this stone casket. Otherwise condign punishment awaits you."

Judge of the astonishment of the King of Silla when this message was delivered to him. He at once assembled all his Ministers and summoned to him all the most learned scholars in the land. The highest honours and a gift of a thousand pieces of gold were promised to the man who should compose a stanza on the contents of the stone casket. But none of them had the least idea of what it contained.

Now Chhoi-chhung's son had by this time left his dwelling on

* The Coreans speak commonly of China as the Great Country, and of Corea as the small country.

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'Moonshine Terrace' and had come to the capital in the disguise of a mirror polisher.* One day while going his rounds, shouting the cry of his trade, he chanced to pass by the residence of Minister Na, a loyal and upright man, and a wise gentleman. He was wealthy too, and had one daughter named Unyŏng (cloud-luxuriance) whose beauty was so radiant that when they saw her, the fish sank to the bottom of the water, and wild geese fell from the sky, while the moon hid her face, and the stars blushed for shame.

She happened to hear the cry 'Mirrors to polish,' and having a mirror which needed burnishing, she sent her nurse out with it. The nurse called the boy to her and gave him the mirror, but while he was polishing it, he caught sight of Unyŏng who was peeping out by the half-open lattice, and fell deeply in love with her. Then he purposely rubbed the mirror so hard that it broke into two pieces. "Oh! you boy! what is to be done now?" exclaimed the nurse. The boy pretended to cry, and said 'I have spoilt the mirror, and can only beg that I may be allowed to redeem its value by entering this house as a slave.'

When the Minister was told this, he came into the outer court and calling the boy to him asked him his name, whose son he was and where he lived. "I lost my father and mother when a baby," he replied, "and I do not know their names nor where they lived. I myself have no name"? The Minister then said, "I agree to take you as my slave, but you must have a name. I shall call you the Slave of the Broken Mirror."

It was the business of the Slave of the Broken Mirror to feed and look after the horses. Every morning he got up at daybreak and taking the horses out of the stable, drew them up in a line on the road. Then he mounted the foremost one, and the rest all

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* Mirrors in the East are made of metal, and require frequent polishing to maintain their brightness.

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followed to a broad meadow where they took their pasture. Under his charge the vicious horses were quiet, and the lean ones grew daily fatter. The neighbours, observing this, went to see how the Slave of the Mirror tended his beasts. He simply took them to the meadow and left them to graze while he sat down in a grove and composed verses. Meanwhile green-coated youths came down from Heaven, and in their play looked after the horses until the sun went down, when they all ascended again. Then the horses assembled of themselves, and with their heads bent down came and stood before the Slave of the Mirror. This took place every day, to the wonder of those who witnessed it.

When Minister Na's lady heard these things, she admired greatly, and said to her husband. "This boy is surely no ordinary mortal. Take him from the drudgery of the stable and let him have some light duty in the house." The Minister agreed, and gave him charge of the flowers in the garden, a change with which the Slave of the Mirror was greatly pleased. At night divine youths came down from Heaven and transplanted into the Minister's garden flowers from Paradise which they watered and tended carefully. Before ten days had passed, all the flowers wore brilliant colours and diffused an unwonted perfume, while phœnixs and cranes came and built their nests among them.

Now Unyŏng wished to go into the garden to see the flowers but, while the Slave of the Mirrors was there, she was ashamed to do so. He knew this, and one day asked the Minister for three days' leave to visit his native place which he had not seen for a long time. Having received permission to go, he concealed himself in the garden. Unyŏng hearing that the Slave of the Mirror had gone away, went out into the garden and sauntered among the trees. Then she composed and sang this verse:—

"The flowers are laughing before the balustrade,
But their voice cannot be heard."

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No sooner had she finished than the Slave of the Mirror chanted a couplet to match hers:—

"The birds are lamenting within the grove
But their tears may not be seen."

Unyŏng blushing deeply, turned away and went into the house.

Now many days passed without either the King of Silla, or his Ministers, or the learned men whom they had summoned to their assistance being able to solve the riddle of the stone casket, and the King was in sore distress of mind. At length one of his Ministers said: "No ordinary man can discover this, but only some one of unusual genius, familiar with the operations of the Yin and Yang* throughout the four seasons of the year. But where is such a one to be found?" Then another courtier said: "Minister Na is learned in astronomy and geomancy, and he can surely find the answer."

The King thereupon sent for Minister Na and said to him "You, who are a pillar of the State, are unquestionably able to ascertain the contents of this stone casket. Do so without delay and save the Kingdom from a great peril. But if you fail, ruin is in store for yourself and all your relations of the nine degrees."

Minister Na took up the casket and returned home with it. When he told his news, the whole household was thrown into despair, and all was confusion and alarm. Unyŏng refused food for several days and on her jewel countenance there was an expression of one thousand griefs and ten thousand sorrows. She was standing before a Mirror near the windows of her chamber when the Slave of the Mirror passed outside saying as he passed: "He who has the bright flowers in his charge will release you from anxiety." Unyŏng looked out and seeing that it was the Slave of the Mirror, wondered greatly.

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* The male and female, or positive and negative principles of nature according to Chinese Philosophy.

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One day the Slave of the Mirror said to the nurse. "Why should our master be so distressed in mind? I know what is in the stone casket." She replied: "Everybody in the house is in the greatest despair. You are only a child, it is true, but you are old enough to have more sense than to make a jest of our grief." So she paid no attention to what he said. After this, every time that he met her, he said: "You despise me and will not condescend to ask me what is in the casket, but you will never learn in any other way." The nurse at last told the Minister, but he put no faith in the boy's assertion and treated it as a childish jest. His wife, however, persuaded him to send for the Slave of the Mirror and to hear what he had to say. So he called him in, and making him stand before him, inquired whether it was true that he knew what was in the stone casket. "It was only in jest that I said so," he replied, upon which the Minister told him to be gone. As he went out he muttered to himself in the hearing of the nurse: "If he makes me his son-in-law I will tell him. But since he treats me with contempt and makes me stand outside while he asks his questions, why should I not mock him?" The nurse, hearing this speech, reproved him. "You silly boy," said she, "why do you say things which may cost your head." "It is true" replied he, "that I am a slave and that he is my master. But I am not base-born, and could not make a jest of so grave a matter." The nurse kept this to herself and did not report it to the Minister or his wife. But time passed, and the day at length approached when an answer must be given to the King. Every one was in despair and the nurse could remain silent no longer. She went to her mistress and told her what the Slave of the Mirror had said. The Lady was silent, but when she thought how urgent the matter was, she told her husband and advised him to send for the Slave of the Mirror and question him again, using persuasion, and inviting him to sit down.

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The Minister did so, but he could not bring himself to offer the Slave of the Mirror his daughter in marriage. The only reply he got was that this was an important secret which must not be revealed without sufficient cause When the Slave of the Mirror had withdrawn, Unyŏng came in, and throwing herself at her father's feet and weeping bitterly, said I, the small woman, have discovered that the Slave of the Mirror is not really of low birth, though for some reason he has seen fit to take service with us. Do not grieve, but give me to him, if this will avert a great calamity to all of us. I know that a young girl should not use such language, but at such a time, is modesty the only thing to be considered? Why should I care for the censure of the world when my father's life is in danger? If the Slave of the Mirror really knows what is in the casket, you will gain great honour and I, the small woman, will avoid the reproach of unfilial conduct. I beseech you, father, consider well what you ought to do."

The Minister was struck with the justice of his daughter's words. He patted her on the back, and praised her, saying. "Ah, my child, though you are only a girl, you have the heart of a man." Then he sent again for the Slave of the Mirror, and made him sit down close beside him. "I see" said he, "that you can be no common person. Tell me truly who your parents were." The Slave of the Mirror at length told him the whole truth from first to last, to the Minister's great delight. And now tell me, he continued, what is in the casket, and I will give you my daughter, and hand over to you all my property. Let me know quickly and relieve me from anxiety." "Of course I know what is in the casket, replied the Slave of the Mirror with a smile, but it would be imprudent of me to reveal it just at present."

When he left the Minister, he went to the nurse, and said to her. "When he has given me his daughter to wife, I will tell. But if I were to inform him at once, he might not keep his word to me.

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It will prevent future trouble, if I refuse to speak until he does so."

When this was reported to the Minister he consulted with his wife, and they agreed to celebrate the marriage at once. That same day a feast was prepared and the ceremony performed in presence of the assembled relations. Truly it was a Heaven-made union. The marriage salutations were exchanged, the wild goose was sent, and the newly-married pair promised each other to live together in harmony for one hundred years. They were like two mandarin ducks disporting themselves on the green waters or a pair of kingfishers which had built their nest on a branch of lotus.

That night Unyŏng had a dream, in which she saw two azure dragons coiled up over the stone casket while Mr. Chhoi* stood by looking on. She started from sleep and finding that it was daylight, awoke her husband. Her father was already up, and was standing outside the window. Mr. Chhoi put on his cap† and dress and went out to join him. "The day is getting on" said the Minister, "tell me quickly what is in the casket, and end my doubts and anxiety." Mr. Chhoi took a pen and inkstone, and wrote these verses which he handed to the Minister with a smile.

Rounded the sphere,
This marble case doth hold:
Half crystal clear,
And half is yellow gold,
The bird that knows
The watches of the night:
Life in it glows,
Though now 'tis silent quite.

The style of this composition, sublime as the convolutions of a dragon, delighted the Minister and his wife, and indeed the whole

* He is no longer a slave, but is called by his surname.
† A slave goes bareheaded.

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household, both young and old. But the Minister still doubted. "The verses are very beautiful," said he to his wife, "but how are we to know whether they truly describe the fact." Then Unyŏng said. "Last night I had a dream, when I saw my husband open the casket and look to see what it contained. I looked too, and saw a hen's egg which was just being hatched." The Minister was rejoiced to hear this confirmation of his son-in-law's verses. "In that case," said he, "there can be no more doubt about the matter." So he set off to the Palace at once, taking with him of course the casket and the verses.

The King was much pleased, but could not feel sure that the verses, beautiful as they were, really told the truth. He wanted to open the casket, but his Ministers advised him that it must not be opened until it was sent back to the Emperor of China. An envoy was accordingly appointed to take the casket to China with the answer which Mr. Chhoi had composed.

When the Emperor of China read the verses, he was greatly incensed, and exclaimed, "The first stanza is correct. But the second is false, for it can only mean a chicken. This is an insult to China and must be severely punished." On reflection, however, it occurred to him that many days having passed since the egg was placed in the casket, it might have become hatched, if kept in a warm place. The casket was opend, and a live chicken hopped out, to the great wonder of the Emperor and his Court. "In that small country," he exclaimed, "how can there be such celestial talent?" Then he called his most learned men, and showed them the verses. "No such genius," said they with one voice, "has appeared either in ancient or in modern times. If the Small Country produces such talent, they will surely despise the Great Country. We would advise your Majesty, therefore, to command the King of Silla to send you the poet who has written them. You can then

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submit him to all manner of trials, and retain him as a hostage for his country's good behaviour."

When the King of Silla received this command, he was filled with anxiety. Summoning to him Minister Na, he told him that the Emperor had sent for the author of the verses, and that he must prepare to start for China immediately. The Minister explained that it was not he who was the author of the verses but his son-in-law, a boy of thirteen years of age.* "But it is impossible to allow him to go," added he, "I must go instead."

When Minister Na went home, he told his wife all that had passed, and she agreed with him that so young a boy could not be sent on a voyage across the sea of ten thousand *li*. But Mr. Chhof declared that he must go to China himself. "If the Minister goes," said he, "the Emperor will put him to all manner of trials and examinations, and if he did not answer rightly, calamity would surely befal him. But if I go, I shall come back safe." The Minister was still reluctant to let Mr. Chhoi encounter the dangers of so long a journey. "I am old," said he, "and even if I lost my life there would be no great cause for sorrow. But if Mr. Chhoi went, how could I live with my daughter's grief constantly before my eyes?" Then Unyŏng said, "My husband's ways are not the ways of common men. His learning and courage are extraordinary and I feel sure he will return safe. Put away anxiety and tell the King that he will go."

The Minister reluctantly gave his consent and going to the Palace, told the King that Mr. Chhoi was ready to go to China. "He is young in years," said he; "but he will not disgrace his country." The King was pleased to hear this and ordered Mr. Chhoi to be introduced. "I should have already sent for your son-in-law" said the King, "had it not been for this threatened invasion, which has given me so much anxitey."

* A very common age for marriage in Corea.

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When Mr. Chhoi entered the royal presence, he prostrated himself on the ground and thanked His Majesty for the honour of being admitted to his presence. "What is your name," inquired the King, "and what age are you?" "My name is Chhoi Chhi-wön" was the reply, "and I am thirteen years of age." "Do you know" continued the King, "what questions will be put to you by the Emperor, and how to answer them." "Let not your Majesty be anxious," replied Mr. Chhoi," "I know that I shall be able to answer any questions that are put to me."

Then the King came down from his throne and taking Mr. Chhoi by the hand, promised him that during his absence he would take care of his family. He also ordered an outfit to be provided him, but Mr. Chhoi refused to accept anything, and only asked that he might be furnished with an official cap fifty feet high, having at each side projecting horns of the same length.

A lucky day for sailing having been chosen, Mr. Chhoi went to the Palace and took leave of the King. Then he went back to his house, and bade farewell to Minister Na and his lady, who were overcome with grief, and could only say, "Go in peace, and return to us soon." To his wife Mr. Chhoi gave a stanza he had composed for her, to which she also replied in verse. Pearly drops trickled down her lovely cheeks. "Be careful of yourself," said she, "may you have a favourable voyage to China, and may you return to me in safety. He tore himself away, and went down to the water's edge, where all the court officials had assembled to shake him by the hand and bid him farewell. He took leave of all the principal Ministers one by one and going on board his ship, set sail for China.

As they sailed over the sea, they one day came to a place where their ship turned round and could not be made to go any further. Then Mr. Chhoi said to the sailors, "The ship does not go on. What is to be done?" "Underneath that island," re-

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plied they, "there lives a Dragon King* who by his magic power holds fast the ships which pass this way, and will not let them move until sacrifice is done to him." Mr. Chhoi then ordered the sailors to make the ship touch at the island, and landed all by himself. He had not gone far when a young man in scholar's garb came forward, and made obeisance to him with folded arms. Mr. Chhoi returned his salute and asked him who he was. "My name is Imok," replied he, "and I am the second son of the Dragon King who guards these waters. My father, hearing that a scholar whose name is known all over the world was passing this way, has sent me to invite you to his Palace." Mr. Chhoi answered, "But the Dragon King dwells in a Palace under the sea, whereas I am a man of the filthy upper world; how can I go to him?" Imok then said, "Elder brother, if you will only get on my back and close your eyes, we shall arrive there in the twinkling of an eye." Mr. Chhoi obeyed. There was a sound of rushing wind, but only for a moment. When Mr. Chhoi opened his eyes he saw before him a magnificent palace built of crystal, and the King standing at the gate to receive him. They all went in together and found a banquet ready prepared. The food and drink was such as is never seen among mortal men, and no words can describe the splendour of the table utensils.

Mr. Chhoi thanked the King for his great kindness in inviting to the spirit land an idle scholar of the upper world. "I have a blockhead of a son," replied the King, "who needs instruction in writing; I hope you will remain with us for a few days and give him some lessons in composition." Mr. Chhoi could not refuse. He staid for several days during which he taught Imok how he should study, and then asked leave to take his departure. The

* The Dragon King, the Jade Emperor and other supernatural machinery of this story belong to the Taoist mythology which is only another name for the popular mythology of China.

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Dragon King then ordered his son to accompany his elder brother Chhoi and to convey him safely past the dangers of his journey. They accordingly set out together. When they reached the place where Mr. Chhoi had left his ship, they found the sailors sitting on a rock weeping and lamenting, but when they saw him approach they ran joyfully to meet him. "Where have you been all this time?" they exclaimed. Lord * Chhoi told them he had gone to the Dragon Palace, and that the King had been so hospitable that he had not been able to get away sooner. "No sooner had you gone up the mountain to sacrifice," said they, "than a furious wind sprang up, and the waves surged heaven-high. The light of day was darkened, and it was not till a long time after that the weather became clear and the billows subsided. We felt sure that your sacrifice had miscarried, and that some dreadful calamity had befallen you. Mr. Chhoi explained to them that this convulsion of nature marked the time when he became changed into a spirit in order to enter the Dragon Palace.

When they put to sea again, clouds of bright rainbow tints gathered over the mast, and for several days they had a fair wind which made the ship fly on like an arrow. At length they came to Bull-ear Island where by reason of a very great drought all the trees and herbs had become withered up, and the inhabitants reduced to the last extremity. When they heard that an envoy from Silla had arrived, they all, old and young, came and knelt before Lord Chhoi, beseeching him, and saying, "All the people of this island are in danger of death by starvation owing to the great drought. We beg you, Illustrious Sir, to pray for rain,† and thereby preserve

* At this point of the story the original author has thought fit to promote his hero, calling him by a title more suited to his dignity as ambassador, and which corresponds very roughly to Lord.

† Praying for rain in time of drought is one of the duties of a Corean Governor at the present time.

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our lives." And they all with one voice broke into loud lamentations. Lord Chhoi was touched by the sight of their misery, and turning to Imok, said, "Was there ever anything so cruel? Could you not, for my sake, make a sweet rain to fall for a while?" Imok replied, "Though I have not the Jade Emperor's* sanction, yet I will do so, since you request me." Accordingly he went ashore, and disappeared among the hills. Presently dark clouds began to gather, the earth shook with thunder, and a great deluge of rain came down, which in a short space of time flooded all the low-lying ground. But scarcely had Imok returned to the ship, when the sky became blacker and the thunder louder than ever. Imok, who was prepared for something of this kind, swiftly changed himself into a serpent, and coiled himself up under Lord Chhoi's seat. Then the Thunder-God came down from the sky, and said to Lord Chhoi, "By order of the Jade Emperor, I have come to slay Imok. Be pleased to get up, and stand aside for a little." "But for what offence has he incurred punishment from Heaven," inquired Lord Chhoi. "The people of this island," replied the Thunder-God, "have failed in their duty towards their parents and in love for their brothers and sisters. They have neglected to pick up the grain which had fallen to the ground and flung away the residue from making chang† and rice-beer. For this Heaven visited them with a drought. But Imok has presumed, on his own authority, to give them rain." "Then the fault is mine, and not his," said Lord Chhoi. "For it was I who persuaded him to pray for rain when I saw the people of this island perishing miserably. Slay me, then, and not him." "The Jade Emperor instructed me," said the Thunder-God, "not to slay Imok if the rain had been caused by his companion Chhoi Chhi-wŏn." And he disappeared from sight, upon

* The Jade Emperor is the Supreme Being of the Taoists.

† A kind of condiment made by fermentation of a bean, in universal use throughout the Far East.

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which the weather became fine as before.

Imok then resumed his original form, and thanked Lord 'Chhoi for saving his life. "You can be no mere mortal" he added, 'what crime did you commit when in Heaven that you were punished by banishment to earth?" "I was a chamberlain," answered Lord Chhoi, "in attendance on the Jade Emperor, and I falsely reported that some flowers in the Moon-Palace had bloesomed, when they had not. For this I was exiled to earth. But you are of Dragon race and can transform yourself at will. May I see an example of you art?" "I would do so willingly," replied Imok, "but I fear to terrify you." "Why should I fear to see your change of shape," said Lord Chhoi, "when I was not frightened by the dreadful Majesty of the Thunder-God?" Imok according went away in among the hills and straight-way returning in the form of a yellow Dragon, hovered in the air over Lord Chhoi and called to him with a loud voice. Lord Chhoi had need of all his courage when he saw so fearful and dangerous a creature.

Here Imok took his leave. In his form of a yellow dragon, he spread out his folds and spoke to the winds and clouds in a thunderous voice which made Heaven and Earth to tremble. On his path, all the leaves of the trees were shaken to the ground.

Lord Chhoi, having parted with Imok, proceeded alone on his way to China. He ordered his sailors to make haste with their oars, and so ere long they arrived at West River. Here an old woman appeared all of a sudden at the ship's bow, and said to Lord Chhoi, "I have been expecting you for a long time. Drink this rice-beer." She also gave him some cotton wool steeped in chang.* "This may seem a trifle," said she, "but you will find it useful. Be careful not to waste or lose it." So saying, she disappeared from sight.

Day after day they pursued their voyage, and at length came

* See above, page 22.

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to the Island of Neung-wŏn where they found an old man sitting on the river-bank. He called to Lord Chhoi, and said, "Where are you bound for, learned Sir?" "To China," replied Lord Chhoi, "If you go to China," continued the old man, "you will be exposed to great danger, and will hardly return in safety." Lord Chhoi bowed low, and asked him how that might be. "When you have gone on for five days more," said the old man, "you will see a beautiful woman sitting by the river-side holding a mirror in her left hand, and in her right a jewel. Address her with the greatest respect and she will reveal to you all that is to befall you." Hardly had he said these words, when he vanished from sight, to Lord Chhoi's no small wonder.

For five days more they went on without stop or stay, and then, as they had been told, saw a beautiful damsel sitting on the river's bank. Lord Chhoi went up to her, and saluted her courteously. "Where are you going," said she, "and what is your business." Lord Chhoi told her, and she then said to him, "When you go to China, the Emperor will want to do you a mischief. At each of the eight palace gates you will be put to strange trials, and you must not be off your guard for a single moment." Then, taking some talismans from a brocade pouch, she added, "When you come to the first gate, throw down the green talisman, at the second throw down the red talisman, at the third, the white talisman, at the fourth, the black talisman, and at the fifth, the yellow talisman. At the other gates, questions will be put to you hard to answer, but if you answer them aright the dangers which threaten you will be averted." Before she had finishing speaking, she became invisible.

When Lord Chhoi arrived at the capital, he was met by a man in scholar's garb, who said to him. "The Sun and Moon are suspended from Heaven, but from what is Heaven suspended?" Lord Chhoi replied, "The mountains and waters rest upon the

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Earth, but on what does the Earth rest?" To this the scholar was unable to give any answer. Seeing that he had to do with a man of great talent he inquired who he was, and went and reported his arrival to the Emperor.

Then at each of the gates of the Imperial Palace, extraordinary preparations were made for Lord Chhoi's destruction. At the first gate, a deep pit-fall was dug: at the second there was to be a terrific crash of discordant music: at the third, an elephant was concealed behind a screen of rich embroidery. Lord Chhoi was then invited to come in. He put on his fifty feet official cap, and presented himself at the gate, where the projecting horns caught so that he could not enter. Looking up to Heaven with a smile, he said. "In our Small Country, the Palace Gates are high enough to admit me, how is it that the Palace Gate of the Great Country is so low?" When the Emperor heard this, he was ashamed, and ordered the gate to be pulled down so that Lord Chhoi might be admitted. Lord Chhoi then entered, and flung down the talismans one after another, as the maiden had told him. When he flung down the third talisman, it suddenly became transformed into a serpent, which fastened itself to the elephants trunk, so that he could not open his mouth.

All the dangers of these gates having been surmounted, Lord Chhoi came to a place where there were several tens of learned pundits standing in line to right and left who vied with one another who should put him the most difficult questions. But he answered them all in verse, freely as flowing water, without the smallest hesitation or delay. Then they looked at him in amazement and vied with one another who should pay him the most elaborate compliments.

Now when the Emperor heard that he had entered safely, he wondered greatly, and ordered Lord Chhoi to be admitted to his presence. Lord Chhoi prostrated himself a long way from the

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Emperor, but he was invited to come forward and to take a seat on the raised dāis beside him. "Are you really the person who discovered the contents of the stone casket?" asked the Emperor. Lord Chhoi answered that he was. "What noises and what strange sights did you observe," further inquired the Emperor, "as you passed through the palace gates?" Lord Chhoi replied that he had noticed nothing unusual. The Emperor then sent for the musicians and asked them why they had played no music when Lord Chhoi entered the Palace. The guardians of the gates then said that they had prepared discordant music and fearful sights, as directed, but that a number of men in red garments with iron staves in their hands had told them to desist, as an honourable guest was expected, and they must not make a disrespectful noise.

The Emperor then proposed to Chhi-wŏn* all manner of difficult subjects for composition in verse and he replied on the spot by making hundreds of suitable stanzas. Each letter was gold and embroidery, each line was jade and precious stones. The style of composition, vast as the ocean, extorted the admiration of the Emperor and his Court.

To try him further, the Emperor next placed in a bowl some poisoned rice on the top of which he laid four grains of unhulled paddy. For condiment, oil was set before him.

When Lord Chhoi saw the 'four grains of unhulled rice,' he knew at once that they stood for 'who are you,' the Corean words for these two phrases being the same. So he raised his voice to its highest pitch, and shouted, "I am a scholar of the Land of Silla, and my name is Chhoi Chhi-wŏn," to the Emperor's great amusement and admiration. 'But what a pity,' continued Lord Chhoi,

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* Chhi-wŏn is the personal (our Christian) name by which the Emperor would address Chhoi as an inferior.

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"that in the Great Country you have no chang to eat with your rice." In the Small Country, we use chang as a condiment, and not oil."

The Emperor, seeing that Lord Chhoi left untasted the rice which had been set before him inquired the reason. Lord Chhoi replied, "Your servant's country is only a Small Country, but it is ruled by law. If I were guilty of an offence, I should deserve punishment, more or less severe, according to its heinousness. In our country we do not put to death innocent subjects of another State by secret treachery." "What do you mean?" said the Emperor. Upon which Lord Chhoi answered "A bird, sitting on the roof, has told your servant that this rice is poisoned and would be death to any one who partook of it." The Emperor smiled. "You are really a Heavenly Spirit," said he, and ordered a rich banquet to be set before him.

After this the pundits of the Emperor's Court all assembled, and challenged him to a competition in writing verses. But there was none of them who could at all compare with him. This made the Emperor very angry and he banished Lord Chhoi to an uninhabited island, where no food of any kind was to be had. But Lord Chhoi sucked the cotton wool dipped in chang which the old woman had given him and felt no need of more substantial nourishment.

Many days passed, and at length a scholar who had been sent by the Emperor to see what had become of him came and called 'Lord Chhoi.' Lord Chhoi knew what he had come for, so he made answer in a feeble voice, bringing out his words with difficulty. The messenger then departed, and on his return to Court informed the Emperor that Chhi-wŏn was nearly dead, for he had hardly replied to him in a feeble voice. "In that case he cannot long survive," said the Emperor, and he and his Court were delighted at the news.

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Now at this time Envoys from the barbarians of the South, on their way with tribute to China, touched at the island where Lord Chhoi had been abandoned. Here they saw a crowd of scholars with Lord Chhoi in their midst, chanting verses. A cloud of all the colours of the rainbow had gathered over them. Lord Chhoi gave the Envoys a verse which he had composed and asked them to present it to the Emperor when they arrived in China. When the Emperor saw it, he exclaimed, "This is beyond a doubt the writing of Chhoi Chhi-wŏn. It is now three years since he was left on that island. How can he have been kept alive all this time?" Wondering greatly how this could be, he sent another messenger to see Lord Chhoi and make report how he was. When the messenger arrived at the island, he saw him under a firtree taking his ease in company with a number of youths in green garments. A white deer was standing beside him. The messenger called out in a loud voice 'Chhi-wŏn.' "What man are you," replied Lord Chhoi, "who dares to call me by my name? Of what crime, have I, the Envoy of a foreign state, been guilty that I should be abandoned on a desert island, and treated with such contumely? Go back and say so to your Emperor."

The Emperor was greatly astonished, and said, "Truly he must be a Spirit from Heaven. Go again and invite him courteously to come to me."

This time the messenger delivered to Lord Chhoi a written invitation from the Emperor. He bowed repeatedly on receiving it, and said, "The great officials of China enjoy high rank but they do not practice learning; they are small men who use flattery to their sovereign. How can they last long." So saying, he flung a talisman to the ground, which became straightway changed into an azure dragon which took Lord Chhoi on its back, and springing into the air, soared across the sky. The

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messenger took to his ship in terror, and hastened away with all the speed of his oars.

Lord Chhoi were courteously received by the Emperor, who inquired after his welfare and said to him, "All the land under the sun belongs to me, and you are therefore one of my subjects. Will you not stay in China, and serve me?" Lord Chhoi drew a talisman from his sleeve and flung it into the air. It immediately became changed into a rainbow, on which Lord Chhoi took his seat and said, "Does this place too belong to your Majesty? Your Majesty's Ministers and servants," continued he, "are all small men, whose service is flattery and there is not a single loyal true hearted man among them. How should I become one of them?" The Emperor blushed for shame, and the faces of his Courtiers turned to an earthy pallor as they looked at one another. After this time, he was treated with invariable respect and courtesy.

One day Lord Chhoi said to the Emperor, "It is a long time since I left my own country, and I would now ask leave to take my departure." The Emperor was loath to let him go, but could think of no excuse for detaining him longer. So Lord Chhoi bade him farewell, and taking a talisman from his sleeve, threw it on the ground. It was at once turned into a green lion, which took Lord Chhoi on its back and soared away through the air while the Emperor and his Court looked on in the greatest amazement.

Unyŏng's joy was great at the return of her husband, but it was clouded by the news she had to give him of the death of her father and mother whom they both lamented deeply. She herself had changed greatly during his absence. Her hair was white, and she had become an old woman. But Lord Chhoi gave her an elixir from the Spirit Land which in the space of one night made her a blooming girl again with a complexion like the peach-blossom.

Now Lord Chhoi said one day to his wife, "The things of

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this world are always changing, and it is a filthy place, unfit for us to dwell in. Let us give up all our worldly possessions and go away from here." So they sent for the Minister's relations, and gave over to them all their property, and the charge of the sacrifices to their ancestors. Then going out from the house, they suddenly vanished from sight to the wonder of all beholders. They went to Mount Kaya and returned no more.

In the years Chŏng-tŏk (1506-1621), however, a woodcutter went up this mountain driving an ox before him and carrying his hatchet in his hand. There he fell in with a scholar who was sitting under a firtree playing gobang with a number of priests who were assembled round him. He stood for a while leaning on his axe and watching their game, until the handle of the axe, eaten by worms, gave way. He looked up startled and saw that it was already morning. Then the scholar offered him some cotton wool steeped in chang which he put to his lips and tasted but did not swallow. "If you will not eat it," said the scholar, "depart from here at once."

The woodman went to the place were he had tied up his ox, but there was nothing left of it, but some white bones. All the flesh had rotted away, and become earth. Surprised and bewildered, he made his way home where he was told that the master of the house was dead and that the three years' mourning for him was just ended.

The woodman then knew that the scholar whom he had met on Mt. Kaya could be none other than Chhoi Chi-wŏn. He afterwards went up the mountain and sacrificed to him, when his face appeared for a moment like a shadow and he was no more seen.

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