

吳沃堯：二十年目睹之怪現狀

Bizarre Happenings

Eyewitnessed in Two Decades

By Wu Wo-yao (1866-1910)

Translated by Shih Shun Liu

The excerpts presented in the following pages are taken from one of the most popular among the fictions published in China around the turn of the century which sought to expose the degeneration of Chinese society under the waning Manchu rule. Another sample of this literature, traditional in form but topical in content and informed with a new spirit of satire, is Li Po-yuan's *Modern Times, or A Brief History of Enlightenment* (文明小史), introduced in *Renditions* No. 2.

Wu Wo-yao, also known as Wu Yen-jen (吳趸人), was a native of Nanhai (Canton), Kwangtung. During his comparatively short but prolific career, he worked alternately as journalist and novelist, gaining firsthand experience from all over the country of the decadent city life which was grist to his writing mill. Some of his other titles are: *Sea of Regret* (恨海), *Remains of a Disastrous Life* (劫餘灰), *Recent History of Social Contamination* (最近社會醜聞史), *Robber Detectives* (盜偵探), *Shanghai Travels* (上海遊驂錄), *How to Get Rich* (發財秘訣), *Strange Accounts of the Electrical Craft* (電術奇談), and the unfinished patriotic novel *A Painful History* (痛史).

Bizarre Happenings, part of which first appeared in Liang Ch'i-ch'ao's magazine *New Fiction*, was completed in 1909. The book of 108 chapters consists of a series of anecdotes, caricatures and thinly-disguised real-life characters and incidents, revolving around a young man who started out as an aide to an official friend and later became his business associate. The first-person narrator styles himself "Someone Dead Nine Times Out of Ten" (九死一生), meaning that he has escaped from the maws of all manner of predatory insects, animals and ghosts, and lived to tell his tales. These reflect the seamier side of contemporary society roughly falling into the following categories: (1) political corruption and official incompetence; (2) lack of patriotism; (3) ignorance and hypocrisy; (4) disregard of traditional ethics; (5) defects of the examination system; and (6) superstition. In episode after sordid episode, the reader is taken through a jungle of skullduggery and chicanery, hurried along in a pedestrian and often exaggerated style that ill-conceals the author's bitterness and cynicism over the human depravity that he found all around him.

In the words of Shih Shun Liu, who translated it into English: "This book is among the best works written in the later years of the Ch'ing regime. This form of sociological fiction had been initiated by Wu Ching-tzu, the famous author of the novel *The Scholars* (儒林外史), who lived in an earlier period of the dynasty. While a number of similar works have been

produced since Wu's time, few can compare with *Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed in Two Decades* in depth of observation and sharpness of criticism. For this reason, this book, though often criticized for being unduly harsh in the treatment of its subject matter, occupies a unique position among perhaps hundreds of works of the same kind published at this crucial time."

Dr. Liu's translation is scheduled to be published in abridged form by the Chinese University of Hong Kong under the title *Vignettes from the Late Ch'ing*. Chapter divisions and headings in the English version do not necessarily follow those in the original text. Here we give our readers an advance look at some initial sections of the forthcoming book.

From Peasant to Magistrate

WHEN I WAS fifteen, my father died unexpectedly. The proceeds of his estate were entrusted to an uncle, who promised to deposit the money in a reliable bank in Shanghai, where it would earn enough interest to support my mother.

After some time, my mother wrote to my uncle to enquire about the interest, but she received no reply. Further letters also remained unanswered, so I was sent to Nanking to find my uncle and enquire about the money.

When I arrived at Nanking, I had the first of a series of unpleasant shocks. The doorman at his residence informed me that my uncle had left on official business. I asked that my baggage should be taken into my uncle's house, so that I could stay there until he returned. The doorman said that he would have to report to his mistress before he could admit me. He went into the house for instructions and did not return for a long time. When he eventually came, he said, "My mistress says that you are entitled to a warm reception, but my master is away on a business trip which will last for two or three days. My mistress has never had the pleasure of meeting you before, so she suggests that you stay at a hotel for the time being. You will be welcome here as soon as my master returns."

I was shocked by this reply but there was nothing I could do except go to a hotel and stay there until my uncle returned.

Some days after I moved into the hotel, I went back to get news of my uncle, only to be told that he had not yet returned. I tried my best to be patient, but after several inquiries, there was still

no word of his return. When I asked to see my aunt, she refused to receive me. By that time I had already stayed in the hotel for over ten days, and the travelling expenses I had brought with me, which were scanty in the first instance, were nearly exhausted. Being greatly worried, I made some calculations and came to the conclusion that if my uncle did not come back within a few days, not only would I have no money with which to pay my way back home, but I would not be able to pay for my board and lodging at the hotel.

While I was in this predicament, I suddenly heard someone call my name. I looked round and saw someone whose face I knew well but whose name I could not possibly recall. While I stood there confused, the stranger asked me, "What wind blew you up here? Don't you even know me? How are your studies?"

Then I suddenly remembered that this man was my former schoolmate, Wu Ching-tseng, with the courtesy name Chi-chih. He was ten years older than I, and he had helped me a great deal with my studies. After winning the *chin-shih*¹ degree in the imperial examination a few years earlier, he had qualified as an expectant magistrate and had been assigned to Kiangsu Province for appointment.

Never having dreamt of meeting a friend in Nanking, I was pleasantly surprised to see him. I bowed to him, and invited him to the hotel. Chi-chih waved his arm and said, "My house is just opposite. Let's go over there." It was only a stone's throw, and we soon entered his residence. Sitting down in the study, I related to him everything that

¹"Advanced Scholar", a successful candidate in the third degree, in the imperial examinations.

had happened in the past year. I told him how my uncle was out of town on official business, how my aunt refused to see me, and how I had to stay in a hotel and wait. Taken aback, Chi-chih asked, "Who is your uncle? What rank does he have?" I mentioned his name and said, "He belongs to the *Tung-chih* grade."

"Oh," said Chi-chih, "isn't his courtesy name Tzu-jen?"

When I confirmed this, Chi-chih continued, "I've known him casually and sat at the same dinner party with him twice. To me he has always been just a fellow-provincial. I didn't know he was your uncle. Yes, he went out of town on business a few days ago, but I seem to have heard of his return. Another puzzling point is this: why does your aunt refuse to see you?"

I said, "That's beyond me! Perhaps it's because she's never seen me before."

"That's strange," said Chi-chih. "You're members of the same family. Why haven't you met before?"

I explained, "My uncle grew up in Peking and got married there. Though he's been home several times, he's never taken his family with him. Moreover, this is my first time in Nanking. That's why we've never met before."

"Oh," replied Chi-chih, "then that's why, although we're fellow-provincials, your uncle isn't well versed in our native dialect. That's not strange at all. But you're young. It's not right for you to stay in a hotel. You'd better move over to my house here. Having been together since our childhood, you needn't stand on ceremony, and I wouldn't allow you to do so. Let me have your key, so that I can send for your luggage."

Being worried about my room and board, I was happy to hear my friend's offer of hospitality. After a few polite words, I complied with his suggestion and handed over the key. Chi-chih asked, "Do you owe anything for your lodging and food?"

"The hotel makes a settlement every five days," I replied, "and only three days ago I made a payment. Whatever I owe cannot exceed the payment for the last three days."

Chi-chih sent his servant to the hotel for my luggage and gave him one *yuan* to settle the account.

When he had gone, I thought that, since I was going to stay at my friend's residence, I ought to

get acquainted with his family. Thus I said, "I'm most lucky to be enjoying your hospitality. May I take the opportunity to meet your wife?" Without standing on ceremony, Chi-chih took me to one of the interior chambers and asked his wife to appear, duly making the introduction. Mrs. Wu, née Li, was very gracious to me and said, "You and Chi-chih are like brothers. While here, you're like a member of our family. When you need anything, such as tea or water, just give your orders to the servants, and please don't be shy."

After remaining for a while, I went back to the study. The servant had already brought my luggage, and a bed was fitted up for me in the study. I was then asked some questions about conditions at home. From that day on, staying in my friend's residence, I always had company and we spent many hours chatting and laughing together.

ON THE FOLLOWING day, Chi-chih went to his office early in the morning. He did not come home until noon to have his lunch. After lunch I wanted to go to my uncle's house to make another inquiry. "Wait," said Chi-chih. "An inquiry at the provincial Department of Civil and Financial Affairs will reveal everything. I intended to find out for you today, but I forgot all about it after being absorbed in the office by a story about a 'wild-chicken' *taotai*."²

Being immediately interested in this story, I asked about it. Chi-chih said, "It is a long story, but to appreciate it, you must first understand what the epithet 'wild-chicken' means. In Shanghai," he added, "prostitutes are known as 'wild-chickens.'"

"What does it mean? How could a prostitute become a *taotai*?" I asked.

"No," he said, "let me finish. A man from Shaohsing—we needn't bother about his name—a perfect rustic, was tired of staying at home and went to Shanghai to look for a job. It happened that he had a relative in the southern city of Shanghai, who owned a money exchange there. Seeing that he was an honest man, the relative employed him as a courier. His duties were to collect payments and at times to gather financial information

²Form of address for Intendant of Circuit, an administrative official below the rank of the Provincial Commissioner.

and deliver bills. For more than a year the rustic performed fairly good service. But one day he heard from someone about the good fun of 'hunting for wild-chickens.'

"What does that mean?" I broke in again.

"It means associating with the lower class of prostitutes," said Chi-chih. "The rustic was greatly excited, and that day he took a few *yuan* with him and went to Foochow Road, where there are a large number of wild-chickens. At the door of a house on Hui-hsiang Lane, he saw a yellow fish."

I was again taken aback and asked, "What's a yellow fish?"

"That's a Nanking term for a prostitute with natural feet. When the rustic teased the yellow fish, she took him into the house. The name of the girl was Kuei-hua, and she spoke pure Peking dialect. By spending a few *yuan*, the rustic passed the night in the brothel. When he left next morning, Kuei-hua escorted him to the door and asked him to come again that evening. This is usual business talk with prostitutes, who may or may not mean it. But the rustic took it seriously, and sure enough, he presented himself there again that night. He had to leave after staying there for a while. Before he left, Kuei-hua again said, 'Come again tomorrow.' And come he did. Once more he was asked to come again the following evening. As usual, he kept the appointment. This time he was asked to spend the night, and by paying a couple of *yuan*, he was able to do so. Next morning, after getting up, Kuei-hua asked for a gold ring from him. 'Gladly,' he said, 'but it will take two or three days for me to get it.'

"After three days he kept his word by presenting her with a gold ring. Thereupon, Kuei-hua asked him what his business was in Shanghai. He told her everything honestly and without concealment. Questioned about his salary, he said that he earned six *yuan* per month. 'Then,' said Kuei-hua, 'my ring has cost you half a year's pay.'

"That's nothing,' said he. 'I've got the treasurer's consent to borrow the year-end bonus.' Asked how much this amounted to, he replied, 'It's not definite. When business is good, I can get a bonus of 60 or 70 *yuan* at the end of the year. Even when business is not good, I can get 20 or 30 *yuan*.' After keeping silent for a while, Kuei-hua said, 'Then your annual income is only something over 100 *yuan*.'

"That's all,' he replied, 'that a businessman can

earn.'

"Why don't you become an official?' Kuei-hua inquired.

"The rustic laughed and said, 'To be an official takes luck. How can we country bumpkins have such luck?'

"Kuei-hua asked, 'Are you married?'

"I was,' he replied, 'but owing to my hard luck, I lost my wife two years ago. Now I'm a poor solitary man without any children.'

"Really?'

"Of course it's the truth. Why should I tell you a lie?'

"Kuei-hua said, 'I still advise you to become an official.'

"The rustic replied, 'All I hope for is that my boss can raise my pay a little. That would be lucky enough. How dare I hope to become an official? Besides, it takes money to buy an official title. Even a minor title would cost several hundred taels.'³

"Kuei-hua said, 'You should at least secure the title of a *taotai*. What's the use of a minor title?'

"Sticking out his tongue, the rustic said, '*Taotai*! I don't know how much that would cost.'

"Kuei-hua said, 'If you follow my advice on one point, I guarantee that you'll get the title of *taotai*.'

"Don't talk nonsense,' the rustic replied. 'I'm sure that's beyond me. As to compliance with your advice, please tell me what you have in mind. I'll do anything you say.'

"If you take me,' said Kuei-hua, 'as your second wife and marry no one else...'

"Smiling, the rustic said, 'I'm afraid I haven't got the means to take you. Can you tell me what your price is?'

"Well,' Kuei-hua replied, 'as I am on my own, I belong to myself and no one can exercise any control over me. I can marry whomever I like, and there's no question of any price to pay. Do you think it's like buying a maid-servant?'

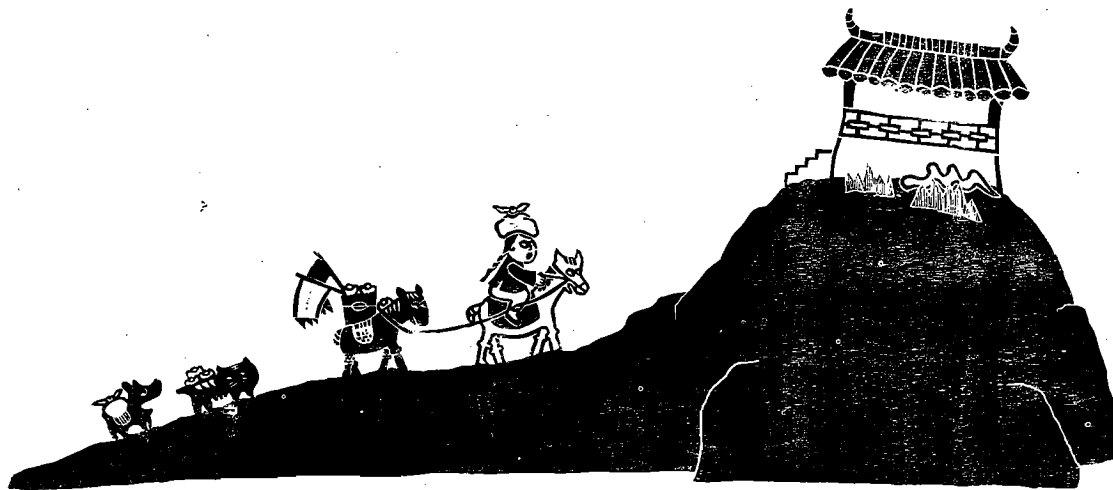
"If that's the case, I'll swear not to marry anyone else if you consent to take me,' said the rustic.

"Seriously?' asked Kuei-hua.

"Of course,' replied the rustic. 'We country-folks never lie.'

"At that juncture Kuei-hua immediately ordered

³One tael roughly equals an ounce of silver.



the sign at the door to be removed and the door to be closed. She intended to live like an ordinary resident and told the servants to call the rustic their master and herself the mistress. That night she told the rustic to resign from his position at the money exchange, and he honestly intended to do so. But after thinking it over, he felt that in case anything happened, it would not be easy to get a job like that. He went to see his employer at the store and lied to him, 'Because of an urgent matter I have to ask for leave to go home. I'll be away for two or three months at the most, and I'll come back after that.' His request was granted.

"Then the rustic took his bedding and moved over to Hui-hsiang Lane, where he stayed with Kuei-hua for a few days. After that she took him to the capital and, believe it or not, bought him the title of *taotai* of the second rank with the right to wear peacock plumes. An imperial audience was arranged for him, and he was assigned to Kiangsu Province for appointment.

"While in Peking, the rustic had nothing to do and had to stay home all alone. On the other hand, Kuei-hua was very busy riding around, but the rustic did not dare to ask her with what she was occupied. It was a long wait before the two left the capital for Soochow, the secondary provincial capital of Kiangsu, where the rustic registered. She gave him a letter of introduction from a certain prince to the Governor. When he delivered the letter, the Governor was not at all impressed with his rustic appearance, but since he had the blessing

of the prince, the Governor, being a very smooth man, did not see fit to ask too many questions, though he had his doubts with regard to the rustic's qualifications. Finally the Governor said, 'There are very few openings in Soochow, far fewer than in Nanking (the principal provincial capital). You had better go to Nanking, since there's not much difference between the two capitals. In the meantime I'll keep my eyes open here, and if anything turns up, I won't fail to take care of you.'

"After emerging from this interview, the rustic related the story to Kuei-hua, who said, 'Then let's go to Nanking. Fortunately I've made preparations for that eventuality also.' Thereupon, the two of them went to Nanking to see the Viceroy, to whom a letter of introduction had been obtained from the prince. As the Viceroy was advanced in age, he was not so thorough in his interview with the rustic. The only thought he had was that, since he had a strong recommendation, the thing to do was to place him after a few days.

"At the same time, the rustic went to call on the Commissioner of Civil and Financial Affairs, to whom he handed another letter of recommendation from the same prince. The Commissioner, a relative of the prince, was a Manchu, and that was the reason for the letter. Having read the letter, the Commissioner was hardly impressed by the appearance of the rustic, who could not even produce a decent biographical sketch or make a presentable bow before his superiors. The Commissioner reported the encounter to the Viceroy

and suggested that the latter delay the appointment. He sent a wire to the national capital to make an inquiry, but no reply was forthcoming, until a few days later, when a letter was received.

"This letter gave every detail of the story. It revealed that Kuei-hua was the daughter of a wet nurse in the house of the prince and had from childhood served as a maidservant there. As the mother and daughter had between them a large amount of savings, they had decided that Kuei-hua should marry a rich official. They were accustomed to serving in the company of bigwigs, so their sights were set high. Ordinarily a maidservant could not be matched with more than a man-servant, but this was contrary to the wishes of the mother and daughter. But how could one of the bigwigs in the capital be expected to marry a maidservant? So, the plan was conceived whereby the daughter should go down south to choose a husband and the latter be armed with a couple of letters after buying an official title, so as to secure a good position. Contrary to expectations, the daughter selected a rustic, and though he had the letter provided by his mother-in-law, he let her down completely and could not land a job anywhere.

"After receiving this letter, the Commissioner suggested to the Viceroy that the rustic ask for leave and that no formal order of dismissal be issued so as to preserve the rustic's reputation. Though extremely disappointed, Kuei-hua had nevertheless won the title of the wife of an official of the second rank. This then is the story of the wild-chicken *taotai*. Don't you think it's a strange one?"

HAVING LISTENED to all this, I was naturally surprised that an incident of this nature could have occurred. Chi-chih continued, "It was only because Kuei-hua chose the wrong man that she reaped this result. It is amusing enough that a person like Kuei-hua, who had been both a maidservant and a prostitute, should have thought of becoming an official's wife. But is it not even more amusing to see an official's wife willing to become a prostitute?"

This aroused my curiosity, and I hastened to ask him about it. Chi-chih said, "This happened two years ago, when the Viceroy was mentally upset and worried. When he was young, he was addicted to sex. Now that he is advanced in age,

he still has six or seven concubines of seventeen or eighteen, let alone a number of maidservants with whom he has illicit relations. He is so noted for his sexual desire that certain people tend to flatter him through this channel. When he was sick one day, a young expectant *taotai*, who claimed to know medicine, was asked to feel his pulse. After a long while the *taotai* said, "Unfortunately I can't very well handle your case, and I dare not write a prescription at random. But perhaps my wife can deal with it."

"'Oh,' said the Viceroy, 'I didn't know that your wife was a physician. I shall be pleased to see her tomorrow.'

"Next day the official's wife, all dolled up, went to the Viceroy's residence. After feeling his pulse, the woman declared, 'No medication is required for this case. A mere massage will suffice.' The Viceroy inquired where he could get a masseur. The woman replied in a low voice, 'I myself know something about it.' So the Viceroy asked her to do it for him. She said that she was a little different from others in her method and that for her to do it properly it was necessary to dismiss all others in the room and be alone with the patient. In addition, while she was performing the act, good incense had to be burned and she had to utter charms.

Believing her explicitly, the Viceroy sent out all the maidservants and concubines and remained alone with the woman. However, a couple of the concubines were suspicious. When they peeked through the partition, they saw an indecent act going on. Shouting hysterically, they entered the room and beat up the woman with a bar. This excited many other concubines, who ran in with bars or clubs to do their part of the beating. Terribly scared and with no place to go, the woman got on her knees and begged the Viceroy to save her life. At last, the Viceroy stopped the furious crowd and had the woman escorted to the gate. But she was followed and beaten by the same crowd all the way to the second gate, where she was left with some labourers, who drove her out of the front gate. The poor woman, all dolled up when she came in, had to leave with dishevelled hair and tattered clothes. Word of this incident soon spread throughout Nanking. Don't you think it's amusing?"

I said, "Thus insulted, this *taotai* couldn't

possibly have stayed on in Nanking."

"On the contrary," said Chi-chih, "he was very proud of himself."

I inquired with surprise, "What was there to be proud of?"

I pursued the question further, "After his wife was so thoroughly disgraced, how could he be proud of anything?"

"He had his reasons," replied Chi-chih. "Within ten days he received two appointments. Last year he was even recommended for promotion, and the honour of the second rank was conferred on him. Should he not be proud?"



A Clever Swindle

I TOLD CHI-CHIH about an official who had been caught stealing on the boat to Nanking. When I described the man, he said, "Ah, yes, I know him. He really is an expectant magistrate, and one with some seniority. It is because recent contributions to the Chengchow engineering fund resulted in the creation of many new expectant magistrates, who have had to wait their turn for appointment, causing long delays and many disappointments. In addition, examinations by special imperial grace are scheduled for next year, and those who are successful are likely to become expectant magistrates, thus again increasing the number awaiting appointment. So, this man has had to wait a few years. Of course he could be appointed to a temporary position. In fact he was given charge of the Chinkiang timber *likin*,⁴ but he was accused by timber merchants of collecting taxes by force and causing disturbances and was immediately dismissed by the provincial Commissioner of Civil and Financial Affairs, given three demerits and suspended for two years. As a result, he forsook his official career and embarked on stealing."

This was indeed a great surprise to me. I said, "I heard that he had been taken ashore to be dealt with, but I wonder how he was punished."

Shaking his head, Chi-chih replied, "What could be done? Those responsible on board sent him to the Police Bureau, after which the boat sailed away. The stolen goods were all claimed by their rightful owners. When the man reached the Police

Bureau, its head, who was a friend, found it difficult to deal with the case. The culprit pretended to have been wronged and showed his temper, claiming that his servants had tricked him. The head of the Police Bureau gave the servants a flogging and let the matter rest. This shows how careful you should be when coming into the world and making your friends. As a matter of fact, this man has not only stolen, but has engaged in gambling, swindling and kidnapping, and he would stop at nothing to benefit himself. He counts among his friends many worthless fellows roaming the rivers and lakes. Taking advantage of his official title, he has committed innumerable lawless acts."

The words of Chi-chih set me thinking. The acts of the expectant *taotai* and magistrate conclusively proved the moral turpitude of officialdom. But I did not dare ask why Chi-chih himself was willing to remain in official circles in spite of this.

During the next few days, it became obvious that my uncle was deliberately avoiding me. Chi-chih found out that he had returned from his mission and gone away on another one.

"The Provincial Commissioner of Civil and Financial Affairs has sent him to Tungchow on a famine-investigation mission. There's no telling how long he will be this time."

Chi-chih asked me whether I had written home to my mother.

"No, not yet," I replied. "I was waiting until there was something definite I could tell her."

"That's a mistake," Chi-chih said. "Go ahead and write. I can lend you fifty taels to send home. In the letter you needn't mention that it's borrow-

⁴An internal tax assessed on the transit of goods.

ed, nor do you need to state your failure to contact your uncle. Just say in general terms that you are remitting fifty taels first and that the remainder is to follow. Otherwise your mother will have further cause for anxiety." When he finished, I thanked him. "You needn't thank me," said Chi-chih. "Just write the letter. The commission for the customs position is in my hands. I'll assume office in about a fortnight. I'll ask you to be one of the clerks. Since you've never filled any other job, I hope you won't mind serving in this capacity. I've also put your name down as a sinecure assistant to the accountant, who has been recommended by the Provincial Commissioner. Since you're one of my confidants, with your name in his office, he will have to share some of his emoluments with you. At the same time your salary as a clerk will not be too low. You may repay my fifty taels later, there's no hurry about that."

I was naturally greatly pleased and deeply grateful when I heard this. At once I wrote a letter, cast, according to Chi-chih's advice, in indefinite terms without mentioning everything. It was taken by a messenger whom Chi-chih sent home next day.

At this time I was greatly comforted, but I was still in the dark as to my uncle's intentions. I got ready a letter, sealed it and took it with me to my uncle's residence, where I asked the doorman to enclose it in the next communication to his master. I went back to Chi-chih's house after entrusting this letter to the doorman.

Seven or eight days later, Chi-chih said to me, "I'm about to take up my appointment. As the office is far away, communications from here are not so convenient. If you stay in the office, there'll be no one to take care of the house here. As a clerk doesn't have much to do, you can still remain at my house and present yourself at the office once every three or five days. In case of urgency I'll send for you from time to time. At any rate your work need not be done at the office. Moreover, when I have occasion to stay home for a few days, you can go and take care of things there. What do you think of this arrangement?"

I said, "You have so much confidence in me and are so considerate to me that I can only feel grateful. What better arrangement could be made?"

After our consultation, Chi-chih left for his office. I accompanied him there to take a pre-

liminary look and came home after lunch. Thereafter I went to the office once every three or five days. I felt very much at leisure, though I had to handle Chi-chih's personal correspondence. Some of this was of a social nature, and I answered it for him without even having to report to him. Nor did Chi-chih have anything to say about this arrangement. As time went on, we got along even better than before.

Early one day, it was my turn to go to the office, and I went out to hire a horse for the trip. As I passed the gate of a certain house, I heard some shouts ordering the escorting of a guest out of the dwelling. Thereupon, the gate opened, and I stood still to see what was happening. I looked into the house, where four or five servants stood in attendance with great solemnity. The guest coming out was a man with broad brows and big eyes, wearing a gray cloth gown and a black silk jacket, an old-style hat which had been in vogue twenty years before, and a pair of black cloth boots.

Following him was the host, who wore the formal attire of an official of the second rank, including a red button and peacock plumage on his hat and a pair of the most fashionable Peking boots. The official escorted his guest to the outside of the gate. He let down his rolled sleeves and held up his hands to his very eyebrows as a mark of great obeisance. He waited until the guest could not be seen before he went back into the house. I saw hanging on the door a sign which was red and bore a black inscription in these words: "Residence of Kou, Native of Chang-pai, Second Rank, with Peacock plumage, *Taotai* of Kiangsu, Immediate Expectancy." The inscription was in the Sung style.

Impressed with this rare sight, I hired a horse, which took me to the customs office, where I saw Chi-chih. It was not a busy day, and we all sat around chatting. When lunch was served, several colleagues got together at the table. Suddenly I thought of what I had just seen and said to Chi-chih, "Today I saw a grand old man who was extremely courteous to a scholar, a rare sight in this age." Even before Chi-chih made his reply, one of the colleagues asked, "How courteous? Tell me quickly, so that I can also go and see him." When I related what I had just seen, Chi-chih looked at me and smiled, saying, "You are easily fooled."

I then asked, "Is it because there are other

factors involved?" Said Chi-chih, "Yesterday I received a letter from Prefect Chia of Yangchow, who recommended a friend. But honestly I can find no opening for him in this office. Please write a reply and send it to the accountant's office, so that it can accompany the travelling expenses to be presented to the party concerned."

When I took this order, I asked again, "Since *Taotai* Kou, of whom I spoke a moment ago, is not really courteous, what. . . ." Before I could finish my question, Chi-chih interrupted, "Did you ride on horseback or on a donkey to come here today?" Knowing that he purposely interrupted me, I had to stop the questioning. The subject I had had in mind was thus brushed aside.

AFTER LUNCH, I returned to Chi-chih's house. His wife showed me a pair of jade bracelets and said, "A friend wishes to dispose of this jewelry for the sum of 300 taels. Not knowing whether the price is right, I want to ask you to have an appraisal made by Hsiang-chen." The latter was one of the largest jewelry stores in Nanking. Chi-chih was a regular customer there, and I had also visited the store two or three times in his company, so the men in the store were all acquainted with me. When I entered the store, I asked the manager to make an appraisal, and he found the price of 300 taels to be a fair one.

As we chatted, I could see that something was going on in the store and that each one seemed to have a complaint to make against the other. Though the manager was keeping me company, he appeared to be listless. But when I rose to take leave, the manager said, "Since you've nothing particular on hand, remain for a while. I want to tell you something and see what you can do about it." I sat down again and asked what he had in mind. The manager said, "Our store has been swindled." I asked, "In what way did that happen?"

The manager said, "It's a long story. Behind this store we had six or seven rooms vacant. Several months ago we posted a 'To let' sign. After a few days the rooms were rented to a man named Liu as a residence, and he moved his family into the house. The master of the house made daily visits by sedan-chair, and every day he passed through the store. As a result, all of us got well acquainted with him. At night, whenever he had nothing to do, he used to come to chat with us.

One day he told us that he had a few things which he loved very much but which he had to dispose of because of financial stringency. He inquired if our store could take them. If we could, well and good. Otherwise he would leave them with us and entrust us with their sale. We asked him what the things were, and so he took them to the store and showed them to us. They were a jade Buddha, which was one *chih* and five or six *tsun* in height, a pair of white-jade vases, a jade *ju-i*⁵ and a ring for the thumb. In our view these things were worth at most 3,000 taels. He said that he wanted 20,000 taels for them, and that if we could sell them, we would be given five per cent commission.

"Knowing very well that we could not sell them, we nevertheless agreed to keep them, since it would not cost us anything to do that, more especially because the few things did not take up much space. Moreover, they were good window dressing for us.

"However, after more than three months, although some customers made inquiries about them, all of them were frightened away by the high price, and none made any offer. One day a man came and bought some snuff boxes, bracelets and a string of beads for official attire. The way he bargained and pointed out flaws in certain articles showed him to be an expert. Two days later, he came back again. This went on for some time. Then, suddenly he came with two other men one day and asked to see the jade Buddha, vases and *ju-i*. After looking at them, he said that they could not be found anywhere else in Nanking. Having praised them for a long while, he inquired about the price. One of our sales clerks, seeing that he was so interested, poked fun at him by asking 30,000 taels. He said, 'Attractive as they are, how can they be worth that much? At least the price should be cut by half.'

"'Dear Sir, half of 30,000 is 15,000,' we replied. His remark raised false hopes in us, and we proceeded to show him the thumb ring as well. He was likewise greatly interested in this article but said, 'Even with this ring the merchandise would not be worth that much.' We asked him to make an offer, and he said, 'I have already offered half the price. Let's settle at 15,000.' A sales clerk interrupted, 'When you said 15,000, you referred

⁵Literally, "as you wish", an ornamental piece made of bones, bamboo, wood, metals or jade.

to the things you saw first. How can it be the same price when a thumb ring is added?"

"The customer said, smiling, 'Then let it be 16,000.'

"After long haggling, we came down to 26,000. He increased his offer to 17,000 and left after that without making a deal.

"After he left, we studied the articles again and simply could not see how they could be worth the price offered. Not trusting our own judgment, we invited other experienced members of our profession to make a new estimate. Even they did not regard the articles as worth more than 3,000 or 4,000 taels. The expert knowledge displayed by the customer in question seemed to indicate that the high price he had offered could not have been other than a fair one. But the matter puzzled us very much.

"A few days later he came back again with another gentleman and added another 1,000 to his offer, making it 18,000. But the deal was not yet closed. Thereafter he came every day. He told us that he wanted the articles as a birthday present for a certain prime minister. Each time he visited us, he added to his offer until the sum reached 24,000. We made some calculations and found that with the five per cent commission promised by Mr. Liu, we could make 5,000 taels on this deal, and so we accepted the offer.

"Thereupon, the man produced a draft in the amount of 500 taels. He said that, being short of cash, he wanted to make a deposit of 500 and pick up the articles in ten days. He added that in case he failed to turn up within that time, he would forfeit the deposit, but that we should see that the articles were not sold within the ten days under any circumstances. If we did, he went on, he could not even accept 24,000 taels as compensation. We agreed to all these terms. But this being a big deal, he insisted that everything be put in writing. This was done, and he left.

"We waited for five or six days without any news. Late at night on the eighth day we heard a knock on the door, at which stood a man with puzzled looks, who asked, 'Is this the Liu residence?' He came in and was conducted to the Liu residence inside. Shortly afterwards loud wailing was heard from those quarters. Upon inquiry it was learned that Mr. Liu had received word from home that his mother had passed away. At the

time we did not pay much attention to what had happened, but on the following morning Mr. Liu came to us in the store to pay his rent. He informed us that he had to leave for home with his family to arrange his mother's funeral. As they had to go on board that very night, he asked that the articles which he had left with us be returned.

"I explained that the merchandise had been sold and that since the time of settlement was just one day off, he was advised to delay his trip somewhat. This he refused to do under any circumstances, and he reproached us for not heeding the proper rules of conduct. Strictly speaking, he explained, a son receiving the news of the death of one of his parents should leave for home immediately. Since a day had already been lost because of the packing, no further delay could be justified.

"We thought that since the articles had been sold and since there was only one day before the date of settlement, it was safe to let Mr. Liu have the cash less the commission he had undertaken to pay us. So deducting 1,000 from the 20,000 agreed upon, we paid him 19,000 taels and he departed with his family. However, after he left there was no sign of the buyer, not only on the tenth day but even after more than a month. The day before yesterday the owner of the store came to make a check of the books and he held all of us responsible for making good the sum thus lost. Evidently Mr. Liu plotted the whole thing to swindle us. Do you think that there is anything we can do?"

After listening to this story and thinking it over, I felt that there was little to be done. Then the manager said, "I think that Mr. Liu's story about his mother's death must have been a falsehood and that he must be still here. But what can we do to locate him?"

I said, "Even if we find him, it is useless. After all he sold you the articles in question, though you got yourself into this predicament by paying too much for them. What proof do you have to show that he is a swindler?"

After thinking a little, the manager said, "If we could find the buyer, that would also be helpful."

"No," I replied. "That is even more futile. He came to a written agreement with you to come in ten days or forfeit his deposit. Since he is not claiming back the deposit from you, what can you do to him?"

When he heard these remarks from me, the manager could only sigh. I left shortly to hand back the bracelets to Mrs. Wu. After reading a little, I pondered again over the incident related to me by the manager of the Hsiang-chen jewelry store. To me it was a most fantastic occurrence. It seemed that any clever man could fall prey to a swindle like that, let alone a businessman who was after nothing but profit.

SOON CHI-CHIH returned. When he had dealt with a visitor, he came to chat with me.

"After you left," he said, "a letter was handed to me. I opened it and found that it was from a staff member in the Viceroy's office. He expressed a wish to see me and inquired when I could receive him at home. Since he is from the Viceroy's office, I couldn't afford to offend him. I said to the bearer, 'I'm planning to go home today, so your master is welcome to see me at my house in the afternoon.' I hurried home for this reason, and he was here even before I had a chance to sit down. When I went out to greet him, he asked me abruptly to pick an opera."

When Chi-chih reached this point, I interrupted by saying, "It's really strange. Imagine making an appointment from such a distance just for this trifle!"

"No," said Chi-chih, "that's not it. I thought the same way and asked, 'Is it someone's birthday or some other special occasion, on which friends plan to make a gift of an operatic show? If so, I'll chip in of course, and there's no need to pick any opera.' " He laughed and said that he did not mean real operas. Upon further inquiry from me, he pulled out of his pocket a folder, which he handed to me. When I opened it, I saw a list of all the districts of Kiangsu written on it with a figure under each, ranging from 7,000 or 8,000 to 20,000 or 30,000 taels. I asked him to explain. Thereupon, Chi-chih left his seat of honour and took one of the side chairs, whispering to me, "This is a short cut to quick appointment. Once the prescribed amount is submitted, appointment is guaranteed within ten days. Of course the prices set are for permanent commissions, and those for provisional ones are lower."

I said, "How did you answer him?"

Chi-chih said, "Since I can't afford to offend this type of man, I minced my words. I used the

pretext that having only recently taken over at the Customs, I had no funds at my disposal and would have to wait a little. He continued to entice me, and I had to think of other excuses to dodge his advances."

"This is really strange," I continued. "Though the sale of offices has become a traditional practice, it's usually the Provincial Commissioner's office that takes it up. Why is the Viceroy's office now involved in such a malpractice?"

"What other reason is there? Whoever has the greater power is at it. But it's too much to set prices and put them down in black and white."

"This is one way of soliciting business," said I. "I only wonder if all the rules of business ethics apply."

Both of us laughed over the matter for a while.

I mentioned the strange incident related to me by the manager of the Hsiang-chen jewelry store. Sighing, Chi-chih said, "With the rise of human depravity, swindles are common. I heard of this particular incident long ago. You've been told the superficial details, but you don't know the inside story. Even the manager himself is still in the dark as to who swindled him."

I was surprised and asked him, "Since you know who the swindler was, why don't you go and tell the manager, so that he can sue the party concerned or deal with the matter in an appropriate manner? Wouldn't that be a good thing?"

Chi-chih said, "In the first place I only know the manager through my frequent dealings with him, and there's no intimate friendship between us. Why should I interfere? Secondly, even if I supplied him with the information, he wouldn't be able to do a thing against the person involved. Who do you think the swindler is?" Chi-chih banged on the desk and continued, "It's none other than the proprietor of the jewelry store himself!"

I was so astonished that I could not think of anything to say.

"Well," continued Chi-chih, "he started as a swindler and he's since made good in this trade. His name is Pao Tao-shou, with the same pronunciation as the words meaning 'sure to succeed in grabbing', which people have in mind whenever his name is mentioned, because of the skill with which he pursues his 'art'. Step by step he became a rich man through his swindles and opened this jewelry store. At New Year's time last year he

went to Shanghai and bought a lottery ticket. Not letting go this chance to get rich quick, his colleagues wanted to share the ticket with him. He sold them five of the ten sections into which the ticket was divided. Keeping only three of the five remaining sections, the manager let the minor clerks share the other two. All cash adjustments were made at the time. A few days later a telegram came from Shanghai bearing the good news that the ticket had won the first prize of 60,000 *yuan*.

"The good tidings gladdened every heart at the store, and the proprietor went to Shanghai to claim the prize. Deducting 30,000 for himself, he handed 18,000 for three sections to the manager, and let the minor clerks divide the remaining 12,000. The proprietor took the opportunity to ask his colleagues to make an investment in the store, but contrary to his expectations, there was no response at all from any of them. So, he sought revenge for their total lack of cooperation by plotting this swindle against them. According to his calculations, the jade Buddha, vase and other articles now remaining in his hands are still worth 3,000 taels. Deducting this from the 19,000 taels paid to Mr. Liu, he forced his colleagues to make good the 16,000 taels thus lost to him."

"The plot," said I, "was so perfectly conceived that no one could have suspected it."

However, Chi-chih dissented by saying, "In fact there was a loophole, only no one detected it before the unfortunate incident took place. The rooms at the rear of the store were originally occupied by the proprietor's family, but after winning the lottery prize they moved out. It's natural for a person with more money to want to live more comfortably. The inside rooms should then have been fixed up for the entertainment of customers coming from out of town or set aside for the showing of valuable merchandise. This would have been more meaningful. Why did he rent the rooms to someone else instead?"

I said, "Wasn't it a good idea to rent the rooms for some extra income? Who could have expected him to put up a swindler there? To my mind, the articles in question could have been returned to Mr. Liu at the time he was leaving."

"No, indeed," Chi-chih replied, "if this had been done, the man who had left the deposit would have come with the required cash to complete the deal. Not finding the articles there, how

much would he have demanded? Moreover, there was a written agreement. Indeed the terms could not have been evaded even by tricky devils."

Policemen

ONE EVENING I wrote three stanzas of poetry. When Chi-chih saw them the next day, he praised them. I told him that I was going to send them to a newspaper for publication.

"Why are you going to do that?" Chi-chih asked. "Have you ever read good poetry in a newspaper? Many who pose as poets take advantage of their acquaintance with a few newspapermen and send their writings for publication in the papers. They feel that they are Li Po and Tu Fu reincarnate. There are also those who pay them compliments, simply because their names have appeared in print. This has of course made them all the more proud of themselves. What is most ridiculous, some businessmen, who are not even properly educated, because of their admiration of those who enjoy fame, have gone so far as to pay for poetry written by others and publish it in newspapers under their own names. As a result, some poor writers have even fixed prices for their writings.

I said, "I'm surprised that a man who is normally kind to others like you can be so harsh and cynical."

"I myself," Chi-chih replied, "know little about what has been going on. But two years ago, when I was on my way to the capital, I met a newspaper editor in Shanghai. His name was Hu Hui-sheng, and it was he who told me all this story. I suppose everything he said was the truth."

"I can scarcely believe that everyone who contributes poetry to newspapers is like that."

"Of course," Chi-chih said, "not all of them are alike, but the exceptions to the rule are few and far between. I can tell you something which is even more ridiculous. Have you noticed that in newspapers you see many poems written as comments on paintings? As a rule, those who write such poetry run advertisements in the same newspapers in which their poems appear, announcing price schedules for their calligraphy and paintings. In fact they cannot paint at all; when they are asked to do so, they pay someone else to do the job for

them. They generally scribble a poem on the painting and call it their own."

"What good does this do them?"

"Their price schedules," said Chi-chih, "are generally very high. To paint a fan, for instance, they charge a *yuan* or two, but they pay twenty or thirty cents to someone else for doing the painting, thus leaving them a handsome profit. This is what poets do for their painting. As for painters who cannot write poetry, they could survive very well if they inscribed their paintings honestly, without posing as poets. But they usually ask someone else to write the poem for them. Not only do they copy the poems on their paintings, but they keep the drafts for subsequent use. As they are not well-educated, they sometimes attach the wrong poem to a painting. For example, they may put a poem about plum blossoms as an inscription on a painting of peaches."

I could not help laughing at this, as we went off to lunch.

LATER ON I received a letter from my uncle. It read, "I am very pleased to know that you are here. Right now I am leaving for Shanghai, but I shall stay there only for a short while and expect to return in a few days."

I was so happy to receive this letter that I took it with me to the office to let Chi-chih know about it. As I entered the study, I found a colleague talking with Chi-chih. The man was an inspector by the name of Wen Shu-nung, a Shanghai man. I told Chi-chih about the letter and showed it to him.

After reading the letter Chi-chih pointed at Shu-nung and said to me, "He is also a poet. You can get together with him and talk about many things in common."

Shu-nung and I started to talk about life in Shanghai, which he knew well. I mentioned that I was surprised to see mixed parties of men and women in the teahouses.

"These women," Shu-nung said, "are 'wild chickens'. But there are also good women going to the teahouses. This is a custom widely prevalent in foreignized Shanghai, but the practice was later prohibited by the Chief of Police."

"That was a good deed for the improvement of social customs. I wonder who this Chief of Police was."

Shu-nung said, "Superficially it was a good thing, but as a matter of fact he was just closing the door after the burglar had left."

"What do you mean?" I queried.

"This Chief of Police," said Shu-nung, "taking advantage of his authority, was in the habit of carrying out policies suited to his own convenience. For instance, when he was head of the Shanghai West Gate Precinct, his concubine, as a result of his maltreatment, committed suicide by swallowing raw opium. Thus upset, he ordered all opium dens in his precinct to be shut down. Apparently it was a good thing that he did, but actually he had a personal axe to grind.

"As to his prohibition of women's visits to teahouses, the story is an even uglier one. Having been an apprentice in a grocery when he was a boy, this man somehow crept into officialdom. Though he rose to the position of Chief of Police, one of his daughters remained unmarried even after she came of age. Every day she would have tea at one of the teahouses in the Temple of the City God. Her father never stopped her. But one day she was missing. All the servants said that she had not left the house at all. After a long search it was discovered that she had fastened a plank on the roof-terrace to serve as a bridge to the city wall, which was closely adjacent to their house. Apparently the young lady had used this means to run away from home. Her father was so enraged that he ordered the roof-terraces of all the houses alongside the city wall to be pulled down. His pretext was the prevention of burglary. At the same time, he also prohibited women from visiting teahouses. Is this not shutting the door after the burglar has left?"

"Where, did the girl go?" I inquired.

"It was very strange," Shu-nung replied, "that the girl disappeared when a sedan-chair bearer also disappeared."

"That was really a coincidence," I said. "How could she have gone away with a sedan-chair bearer?"

"In this world things happen which are beyond our expectations," Shu-nung said. "After the disappearance of his daughter, the Chief of Police, afraid of washing his dirty linen in public, sent his brother-in law secretly to Chiating, the home town of the chair-bearer, to make an inquiry. Believe it or not, there she was, with the chair-bearer. The

brother-in-law rushed back to Shanghai to make a report. After consultation, he wrote a letter to the Magistrate of Chiating, charging the chair-bearer with kidnapping his master's daughter. Upon receipt of this letter the Magistrate arrested the chair-bearer. The brother-in-law of the Chief of Police then forced the girl to go home. No sooner had she returned than she caused a commotion by sobbing night and day and going on a hunger strike, which lasted fully three days. The Chief of Police showed no pity and was willing to let her die; but his wife, out of love for her daughter, intervened. She asked her brother to make another trip to Chiating to plead with the Magistrate for a light penalty and, if possible, the immediate release of the culprit. Two days later, he came back from the second trip and reported thus:

"The chair-bearer has received no bodily punishment at all. Because he had joined the staff of a powerful member of the local gentry, he was set free upon the latter's request, with which the Magistrate had to comply. Pleased with the result, the girl's mother secretly consoled her. Shortly afterwards she was given some silver by her mother and permitted to return to Chiating. Unexpectedly another scandal took place after her return to that town."

At this juncture a racket was heard outside the building, and the conversation was interrupted.

The noise arose from a case of smuggling which had just been discovered by the inspectors on one of the incoming boats. Shu-nung went out at once to see what had happened. He was away for such a long time that I could not wait for his return and left for the city before it got too dark.

ONE DAY, the doorman suddenly came up with a message from my uncle, telling me of his arrival back home and sending for me. I hastened to his residence. My uncle greeted me by asking, "How long have you been here? Unfortunately I've been absent all this time, and no one at the house knows you. However, I was pleased to learn that you're staying with Wu Chi-chih. Is everything convenient for you at his house?"

"Yes," I replied, "it's very convenient there."

My uncle asked, "Can you really handle the work?"

"Yes, sir," I said, "since it involves the writing of only a few letters, there's nothing that I can't

handle."

"There are also various kinds of letters to his superiors," my uncle said, pursuing the matter further. "I'm afraid it's not an easy task."

Just as my uncle was on the point of continuing the conversation, a maidservant told him that my aunt would like to see me. My uncle took me into the interior chambers, where I greeted my aunt. She said, "When you arrived, your uncle was on a business trip. Since we're such close relatives, I should have welcomed you into the house, but because I had never had the pleasure of meeting you before, I did not dare do so. It's a good thing that you've been looked after by your friend, Mr. Wu. How are you? Ever since your grandfather died and your parents escorted the coffin home, our two families have never met again. At that time you weren't even born. It's now almost twenty years. When do you plan to go back home?"

Before I could reply, my uncle said, "Now that Wu Chi-chih has engaged him to do secretarial work, I'm afraid that he won't be able to go home for the time being."

"That's fine," said my aunt. "We can see each other frequently."

"Do you have anything to attend to now?" asked my uncle.

"Yes," I replied, "I must go to the office soon."

"Then you go ahead," said my uncle. "Tomorrow morning come back again, and I'll have something to tell you."

At this point I said goodbye and hired a horse to go to the office. When I arrived, I found Chi-chih's room locked, so I went to Shu-nung's room and chatted with him. He told me that Chi-chih had left for home. I said, "Usually Chi-chih does not lock his door when he leaves the office. Why did he lock it today?"

Shu-nung answered, "I hear that something was lost yesterday. I asked him what it was, but he refused to disclose it."

I asked Shu-nung to finish the story of the Chief of Police and his runaway daughter, promising him a treat when I get paid.

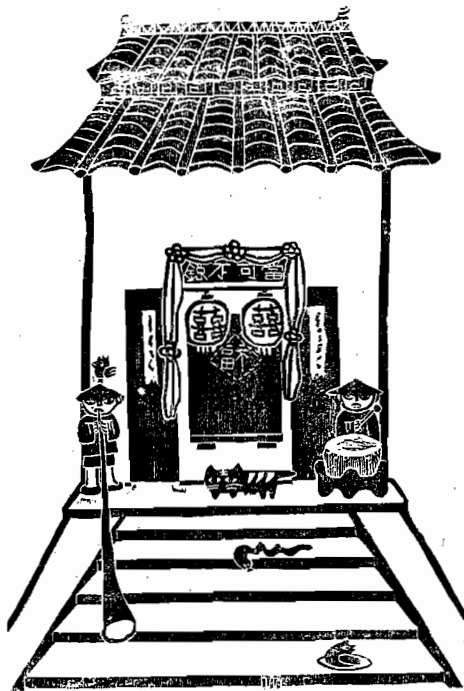
"You broke off," I said, "when you told of the dispatch by the wife of the Chief of Police of someone to Chiating to look for the chair-bearer and of the new incident that arose."

"When the messenger arrived at Chiating," said Shu-nung. "he found that the chair-bearer had

unexpectedly become a monk. With great difficulty he was persuaded to return to lay life and go back to Shanghai. Several months elapsed before he could regrow his hair. Without securing the consent of her husband, the wife of the Chief of Police arbitrarily married her daughter to the chair-bearer. With her personal savings, she asked her brother to purchase the title of sheriff's deputy for her son-in-law, and she even forced her husband to get him a job. Being henpecked, the Chief of Police obeyed his wife's orders scrupulously and secured for him the position of city guard, which he is still holding, I'm afraid. Though this is a minor job, the profit from the 'Japanese pass' is by no means negligible. This practically concludes this matter."

"Very well," I said, "the story may be finished, but what does the 'Japanese pass' mean?"

"I shouldn't have mentioned it," said Shu-nung, smiling, "and provoked your interest in it. The 'Japanese pass' is a local Shanghai term. After the city gate is closed at night, no one, except those having official business, can enter or go out without a permit. In Shanghai, if you have a dime, someone will open the gate for you, but to save face, you pretend to show a pass though it is a dime that you are paying. As the dimes in circulation in Shanghai are Japanese made, it is referred to as a 'Japanese pass.'"



HAVING HEARD this explanation, I continued, "You said you've got a great many stories to tell. Why not go on with them?"

"There you go again!" said Shu-nung. "Where shall I begin? I'm afraid that it's only when we talk about them at random that we can think of these things."

I said, "After that chair-bearer became a deputy, he must have been involved in some scandals."

"Yes," said Shu-nung, clapping his hands, "you're right, but my story doesn't concern this man, but some other deputies. Let me tell you this story to satisfy your curiosity. Once a deputy filled an unimportant post in a certain battalion in Woosung. His monthly pay was no more than a few taels. One day he offended a patrol officer for some reason. Being his superior, the patrol officer spoke ill of him before the commander of the battalion. Listening to the one-sided charge, the latter dismissed the deputy, who became a tramp and wandered aimlessly. When he arrived in Shanghai, the municipal police were recruiting new policemen. After trying his luck, he was successfully enlisted. He earned eight or ten *yuan* each month, which was about the same pay he had received in the battalion.

"One day the patrol officer I just mentioned went to Shanghai on some business. When he was on the street calling loudly for a rickshaw, the deputy, now a policeman on his beat, recognized him as his old enemy and struck him very hard with his baton. The policeman shouted, 'Do you know the regulations of the foreign settlement? If you continue to make so much noise here, you'll get into trouble with the authorities here.'

"Seeing that it was his former enemy, the patrol officer became angry and said, 'Regulations or no regulations, how can you beat people without even giving a warning?'

"If you say anything more, I'll take you to headquarters.'

"Since I've violated no law, what am I afraid of even if you take me to headquarters?'

"Thereupon, the policeman went forward and got hold of the patrol officer by his queue, pulling him away with him. The patrol officer made some resistance, and, to incriminate him, the policeman tore off a piece of his uniform with his own hands and stripped the patrol officer of his long gown, which was thrown by the roadside. When they

reached headquarters, the policeman accused the patrol officer of urinating in the street and claimed that when he tried to stop him, the patrol officer had attacked him and torn his uniform.

"Before the patrol officer could speak to defend himself, a foreigner went over to him and gave him a box on the ear. Just think, the foreigner was no impartial judge; without understanding the language, let alone the details of the incident, he naturally listened to the policeman's story.

"Next day it was Sunday and the day after that the birthday of the Emperor, so no trial was conducted at the Mixed Court.⁶ The poor man had to spend two or three nights in confinement, and when the day of trial came, instead of the case being straightened out before the Chinese member of the court, as he had expected, the patrol officer was given a hundred lashes without a word of explanation, after the Chinese judge had listened to the accusations presented by the policeman, including the tearing of his uniform. Afterwards he was sentenced to a fortnight's imprisonment. When he tried to defend himself, he was dragged away by the guards and put back in jail. Can you imagine the power of a mere policeman in the foreign settlement?"

I said, "I can understand that the foreigner listened only to his own subordinates, because he had language difficulty. But should a Chinese judge pass judgement without even asking a single question?"

"There are two reasons," said Shu-nung. "Except in serious cases, trials in the Shanghai International Settlement are not conducted by judges from both sides. In such minor cases as those of personal quarrels, not only the defendants, but also the plaintiffs, are not asked questions. The judgements are based only on the reports of detectives and police, who are regarded as impartial.

"Secondly, although there are Chinese judges on the Mixed Court, they are like puppets and are so afraid of foreigners that they're always in danger of losing their jobs once they offend their foreign colleagues. As a result, in trying ordinary cases, whatever the foreigner says goes. The police, as employees of foreigners, are even more apprehen-

⁶A mix municipal tribunal of foreign and Chinese judges in the International Settlement of Shanghai, imposed under the terms of the unequal treaties.

sive. Especially in a case involving a policeman as the plaintiff, the defendant is bound to be punished without even being asked a single question."

I was on the point of pursuing the matter further when a servant handed me a slip of paper, bearing a message from Chi-chih, and asking me to go into the city for consultation. I took leave of Shu-nung and rode into the city.

Theft and Smuggling

ON MY WAY to meet Chi-chih, I passed the gate of *Taotai Kou's* residence and saw that the middle door was wide open. There were many horses at the entrance, and fire-crackers were being set off incessantly. I wondered what the occasion for all this was. As I trotted along, I was thinking about this all the time. Chi-chih was out making courtesy calls and did not come back until it was after dark. No sooner did he see me than he asked, "Have you been to visit your uncle?"

"How in the world," I inquired, "did you find that out so soon?"

"Shortly after I arrived home, your uncle came to call on me. He left after chatting a long while with me. I feared that I might have to go out to the office early tomorrow morning without a chance to return the courtesy. So I wrote you a brief message after he left and asked you to come home. In the meantime I went to make the return call and chatted with him again."

"You had quite a long talk," I said.

"Like me," Chi-chih continued, "he's fond of talking on and on about this and that. He's rather a romantic type, and though he's getting on in years, his interest in women is very keen. I had a long talk with him about conditions in Shanghai. And what do you know? Instead of paying attention to cosmetics, women in Shanghai are trying to lure their men with sun-glasses. Just think, what do a pair of these glasses add to a pretty woman's face?"

I was anxious to change the subject. "What occasion is being celebrated at the residence of *Taotai Kou*?" I asked. "Have we received any invitation? Is it necessary to do anything?"

"What occasion?" Chi-chih repeated. "I have not only had to do something, but to lend him

some money. He received an appointment today and sent someone to borrow fifty *yuan* from me to serve as a tip for the messenger delivering the commission. I've already sent a card extending my congratulations."

"What does he need so much money for?" I asked. "It doesn't take that much to tip a messenger."

"Well," Chi-chih continued, "though not all the money may have been used for the tip, it's nothing unusual for a Manchu to show off his generosity."

I said, "To celebrate a minor appointment with such fanfare and so many firecrackers is rather silly."

"Firecrackers," said Chi-chih, "are an obsession with those from Hunan. I wanted to see you because there's something with which I must secretly entrust you. Something has been stolen from me. I want you to find out the thief, who must be in our very midst."

"Yes," I replied. "I heard at the Customs that you had lost something."

"It's nothing valuable—just a watch imported into China for the first time. It's like a crystal ball and as big as a walnut. It cost me only a little more than ten *yuan*. The watch itself is not such an irreparable loss, but I have fixed to it a pendant, which is made of black copper from Yunnan. Though I don't know how valuable black copper is, it's quite rare, and the workmanship is very fine. It's in the shape of a Buddha's face, as big as an almond. I'm not sure whether it's carved or cast, but it's a distinctive and lovely piece of work. All those whom I employ have been with me for a long time, and I'm sure they're all reliable. Only three servants—Wang Fu, Li Sheng and Chou Fu—are new recruits. They're all at the Customs now. Please keep an eye on them, and if you feel that one of them is the culprit, I'll dismiss him."

Chi-chih gave me a key and said, "This is the key to my room. Take it with you, and see if there's any business to deal with." He also gave me a package containing some silver, adding, "Here are fifty taels, twenty of which is the pay I offered you. Whatever surplus there may be in the treasury is not distributed until festival time. I was afraid that you would be in need of more than twenty taels for remittance to your family and for additional purchases, and so I've arranged for you to have an advance payment of thirty additional taels,

to be cleared off at the time of the next festival. Next time when you're at the office, you should put in an appearance or two in the treasurer's room, to show that your job is not a mere sinecure."

NEXT DAY, soon after I got up, I went to my uncle's house. As he had not yet got up, I had to wait a long time before I was summoned by my aunt, with whom I chatted a little about family affairs. It was already ten, and I was on the point of leaving when my uncle came in. He went to a desk and took out a package containing some silver. He said, "Only two thousand taels of your mother's money was deposited in Shanghai. At five per cent the interest is exactly a hundred taels a year. To collect it, I had to spend twenty taels on travelling expenses. Deducting this amount, I am handing to you eighty taels, which you can remit home first. The remaining three thousand taels have been lent to a friend of mine, Wang Tsu-hsiang, also at an interest rate of five per cent. But he is now in Hunan. Wait till I write to him and get the interest for you."

Taking over the silver, I told him that I had to leave early to attend to my business at the Customs. My uncle asked, "Is Chi-chih coming for dinner today?" "Yes," I replied, "he is staying away from the office today just to be able to attend your dinner party."

"I'm doing this for you," said my uncle. "He's been looking after you, so I'm obliged to entertain him. If you're busy, you can run along."

I hurriedly hired a horse and rode off to the Customs. I opened Chi-chih's room and thought about the matter Chi-chih had entrusted to me, but without any clue it was very difficult to start an investigation. After some thought, I decided to set a trap. I placed the package of eighty taels on the desk, leaving the door ajar, and stepped outside to a point where I could watch without being seen. I thought that in this way someone might be tempted to steal the silver. I waited a long time, but apparently no one was to be trapped. I was afraid that even if I stood there until my legs got stiff, I would not accomplish anything.

As I was on the point of quitting, I heard the door being opened and someone entered the room. It was none other than Chou Fu, who looked around him and said, "Again there's no one here." As he turned his head, he saw the package of silver.

He weighed it with his hand and stuck out his tongue in astonishment. He tried to open the drawers, but they were all locked, so he opened one of the bookcases and put the silver there. After shutting it and looking around again, he stepped out and closed the door.

I thought to myself, "At first he seemed to act like a thief, but actually he is nothing of the kind." Then I left my hiding-place and looked into one of the rooms. There I saw my colleague, Pi Ching-chiang playing chess with a coarse fellow wearing short clothes. In the latter's hand was a long pipe which he was smoking. Surprised by what I saw, I did not stop to greet the couple and went straight back to Chi-chih's room.

On my way I saw Chou Fu sitting on a bench outside the room. He stood up as soon as he caught sight of me. He said, "Next time when you leave the room, please lock the door. Otherwise, in case of any loss, it will be our responsibility." So saying, he followed me into the room, continuing, "When something is lost, our master does not even investigate. This makes it all the more embarrassing."

"What is there that's embarrassing, with or without an investigation?" I asked.

Chou Fu said, "If there is something missing and an investigation is carried out immediately, it's much easier, because the thief can be found and duly punished. But now our master makes no inquiry at all. He is very generous, but the thief gets away so easily that he can feel very happy. On the other hand, those whose consciences are clear do not feel at ease, because they don't know whom the master suspects."

"It's necessary," I said, "to have an investigation, but quietly. If the master does not make any investigation, you are free to make one. If you succeed in finding the thief, you will naturally be rewarded."

"No one dare expect any reward," said Chou Fu, "but only in this way can the innocent be cleared."

"Then," I said, "those of you who feel that their consciences are clear can engage quietly in an investigation. Do not raise any hue and cry, or the real thief may be frightened away."

Chou Fu agreed and got ready to withdraw. But before he did so, he stopped and said, "A moment ago when I entered the room, I saw a package of silver on the desk, which I've placed in

the bookcase there."

"That's fine," I said, "In Mr. Pi's room there is a very strange fellow. Will you go and find out who he is?"

As Chou Fu went out on this errand, Shu-nung came in after he had finished his work. As soon as he entered the room, he said to me, "You are as good as your word. You have come back so soon to give me a treat."

At this point Chou Fu returned, saying, "There's nobody very strange there, only a water-carrier by the name of Ah-san."

"What are they doing?" I asked.

"It looks as if they've been playing chess. They've put away the pieces now."

Shu-nung asked me what it was all about, and I told him of the man I had seen with Pi Ching-chiang. Shu-nung said, "He's in the habit of associating with men of this kind."

"Why?" I inquired.

"It's nothing unusual," said Shu-nung, "but he comes from a poor family and some even say that he was once the manager of a brothel. Even the servants avoid him, and so he can only associate with fire-tenders and water-carriers."

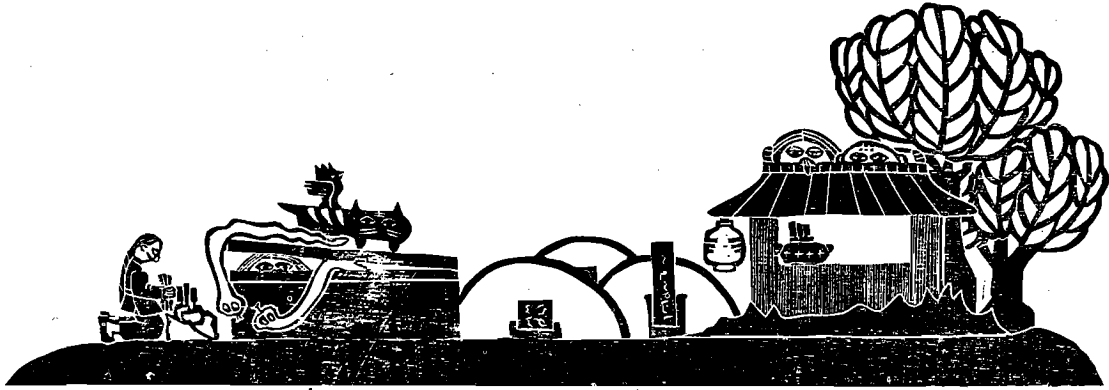
"Why does Chi-chih employ such people?" I asked.

Shu-nung said, "The man had some sort of pull, and all he gets from Chi-chih is a sinecure job with a salary of only four thousand cash a month. Since he can't even read, what can he do?"

"By whom was he recommended?" I asked.

"That I don't know," said Shu-nung, "and you must ask Chi-chih. But now let's change the subject. Whenever you see me, you want me to tell stories. Last night I thought very hard and two of them came to my mind. One was something I saw with my own eyes, and the other was passed around as a joke. Whether the latter is true I have no way of knowing, but let me tell you this first, to show you how unenviable our positions here in the Customs are, especially my own as Chief Inspector. I'm the target of all complaints."

SHU-NUNG began his story. "There was an opium smuggler with a small capital, who never carried more than one or two cans of the drug, sealed as foodstuff with label of a grocery company. For this reason the customs paid little attention to him. But as time went on, his trick was bound to be



discovered. On one occasion he was detected and his smuggled opium confiscated. Naturally he could not do anything about it. But on another occasion he again tried his trick with one can of the drug. This time it was really a trick. When the customs guard discovered the can, he seized it and the smuggler ran off at once. The guard presented the can to the official concerned, who opened it and, lo, what did he find? The can was filled with night soil, and as soon as it was opened, live grasshoppers leapt out and spread the night soil everywhere. Fortunately we were not there to witness the scene."

"I've heard that before," I said, "It's probably just a joke."

"There's another story," said Shu-nung, "about an incident I saw with my own eyes but with which fortunately I had nothing to do. That year I was serving in Fukien, also at a customs office. I was the treasurer, but it happened that I was very sick for about ten days. During that interval an informer reported that a large smuggled consignment was expected the following day. It consisted of a huge assortment of pearls and jade, all stored in a coffin, which could form part of a false funeral. The surname of the family, the placards, lanterns, etc. that would go into the parade and the number of mourners were all given in detail. As this was a serious matter, a consultation was held with the head of the customs office, and it was decided that the coffin would have to be opened to facilitate the inspection. The informer insisted that the ob-

ject of the funeral was solely the smuggling of the valuable shipment. He added that he would gladly hold himself responsible for the veracity of the report. He was asked by the head of the office to remain as a witness.

"Next day the funeral procession arrived as predicted by the informer, and everything that formed part of the procession was as he had described on the previous day. The chief mourner was stopped and told that there were valuables in the coffin. The mourner was naturally greatly enraged and denied the story completely. At this time the head of the office also appeared on the scene and ruled that the coffin had to be opened for inspection.

"The head of the office asked the mourner, 'What's in the coffin?'

"My father's corpse!" was the reply.

"Where is it being taken to?" asked the official.

"To our home town," said the mourner.

"When did your father die?'

"Yesterday.'

"Since he died in a town not his own, there might well have been some things to be attended to. How could the funeral journey start so soon? There must be something wrong. Unless the coffin is opened for inspection, the mystery cannot be cleared up.'

"Greatly astonished, the mourner said, 'It's a crime to open a coffin and tamper with the dead. Officials of authority as you are, how can you behave like this?'

"As a result of further consultation the whole staff was in full agreement with the head of the office and insisted that there was no alternative to the opening of the coffin. The mourner objected strenuously but he was all alone and could not stop the official group from opening his father's coffin. To the amazement of all present, nothing more than a corpse was found in the coffin. The mourner was so angry that he seized the official by the head and tried to drag him away. Fortunately his subordinates came to his rescue, and the matter was finally settled after long hours of squabbling lasting from that afternoon till dawn next day. In the midst of the row the informer fled.

"The settlement included the replacement of a high-grade coffin, sacrificial rites performed by the head of the office in mourning clothes and compensation amounting to five thousand taels. From

then on, several funeral processions passed by; but even when we were absolutely sure that there was smuggling involved, no one dared interfere with any of them again. In fact, as I see it, all the later funeral processions were organized under false pretences, and each one of them was a smuggling trick. The whole thing was indeed well-planned. The idea was to fool the authorities first with a real funeral procession and frighten them out of their wits, so that they would not dare to interfere with the following operations."

"What an unworthy son," I said, "to have gone so far as to let the body of his own father be desecrated!"

"Are you really so stupid?" Shu-nung asked. "This could have been any dead beggar, not his father!"

A Bannerman at the Teahouse

Wu Wo-yao is known to have used contemporary jokes, anecdotes, and gossip to string together his "bizarre happenings". Probably the most often repeated is the one about the impecunious Manchu Bannerman at his morning tea. "Bannermen", the descendants of Manchus (and some Mongols and Chinese) who were in the military service of the early Ch'ing emperors, are frequently made fun of in the book, and this story may properly be regarded in present-day parlance as an "ethnic joke". Here it is retold in English by Gloria Bien.

Kao Sheng was a native of Peking. Before he found a job, he would get up early every morning to go to the teahouse and sit for hours over a bowl of tea. In the small teahouses in the capital, a bowl of tea cost only two pennies, the equivalent of four pennies in provincial money. If one brought his own tea leaves, the charge was just one penny.

One day when Kao Sheng was at the teahouse he saw a Bannerman come in for tea, bringing his own tea leaves. He opened a paper packet and emptied the tea leaves into the bowl.

"I'm afraid you don't have enough tea leaves," said the waiter.

"What do you know?" humphed the Bannerman. "This here is the best Dragon Well tea from France, across the Atlantic Ocean where the Redhairs live. Just three or four leaves are enough. If you use more, you'll end up not wanting to drink tea for a whole year!" All the waiter could do then was to brew his tea for him.

Having overheard this bit of conversation, Kao Sheng was curious, so he went over to have a look. There in the middle of the man's bowl floated three or four leaves of ordinary jasmine tea. The water in the bowl, far from turning a red color, was not even tinged with yellow; it was nothing but a bowl of plain boiled water. Kao Sheng secretly