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The Golden-Horned Dragon King;

OR

THE EMPEROR'S VISIT TO THE SPIRIT WORLD.

TRANSLATED FROM THE CHINESE,

BY

SAMUEL I. WOODBRIDGE.

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—*Confucius*.

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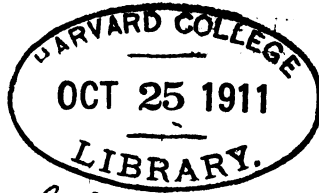
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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

The task of rendering into English the Classics of the Chinese has been accomplished by Western Sinologues, so that the world is now tolerably well acquainted with the thoughts of the Ancient Kings. It is a mistake, however, to suppose that these books which compel the admiration of every truth-seeker, form the mainspring of Chinese popular thought and action; for, excepting the outward observance of a few forms, the teaching of China's Sages is now a dead letter. Practically, the genius of the Classics is gone and all that remains is a serio-comic imitation of ancient ceremony.

The further a people advance in the intellectual apprehension of truth, without a knowledge of the Bible, the more silly and puerile their objects of worship become. This is illustrated by the Ancient Egyptians who revered the scarabæus beetle, and by the Hindus who worshipped the cow. In this country the pitiful sight is often witnessed of high Chinese officials, whose literary degrees would cover a page, marching out in their dignified robes of state to devoutly greet a little wriggling snake whom they believe to be the Dragon King.

So strong has been the influence of Christianity in the West, that the story

which we translate would be regarded there as fit only for the amusement of children, or for whiling away a leisure hour. An English boy would no more credit the adventures of King Dragon than he would those of Jack the Giant Killer.

In China it is different. The people believe a story like this as thoroughly as we do the history of George Washington, for superstition which is credulous as well as cruel and cowardly has crowded out most of the truth from the Chinese mind. The Classics are never read for pleasure by the old; they offer no attraction to the young, and few women read. It is a sad commentary on human wisdom to find that these boasted Classics are merely studied to be used for examinations, the successful passing of which will secure for the winner a wide field for the practice of lying, treachery, and deceit. While comparatively few people study Confucius, all classes, men and women, old and young, rich and poor, eagerly devour and digest stories like the "Golden-Horned Dragon King." For centuries this assimilation has been going on until the popular thought has crystallised in the most grotesque and inconceivable shape.

The Golden-Horned Dragon King.

A STORY OF THE T'ANG DYNASTY.

CHAPTER I.

THE FISHERMAN AND THE WOODCUTTER.

Fill up the Golden Censer with fragrant incense and draw near while I relate an ancient tale.

A drought was upon the land of Channa and the people were suffering intensely for food. On the banks of Golden River dwelt a poor fisherman who for months had been endeavouring by dint of hard labour to secure enough food to keep his family alive: but the river bed was dry, the people poor, and his nets were lying useless on the shore. One day after giving up in despair and resigning himself and his family to fate he spied a woodcutter carrying a load of faggots to the town. Calling loudly to him to stop, he rushed up to him and desperately clutched his arm, exclaiming piteously, "Oh, Sir, your business is flourishing and you have abundance of food to eat while we are starving. For three years there has not been a drop of rain in the land. We are indeed very wretched, can you not help me, or let me go with you to the hills and learn the trade of the woodman? Pity, oh, pity me."

The woodcutter quickly replied, "Listen, fisherman, I am poorer than you, I am compelled to work every day without rest; for were I to stop an hour the supply of my food would be cut off—you are too old to learn my trade. Besides, the hills where I go to cut wood are a most lonely and desolate place. My only companions are the yellow-haired tigers and the white-faced monkeys.* To leave your trade

* When the navigation of the Upper Yangtze was under consideration the Chinese officials made the objection that these baboons would stone the steamers and thus destroy them. How could the Government be made responsible for the action of monkeys?

for mine would be jumping from the frying-pan into the fire. You speak of the drought. Why do you not consult the celebrated fortune-teller of our great country, Merak Longrobe? He will tell you exactly when to expect rain." Saying this, the woodcutter departed.

The fisherman was overjoyed, and prepared immediately for a journey to the city to interview the famous Merak. Leaving the old fishwife in charge of the house, and with only a few cents in his girdle, he made his way towards the metropolis and was soon within the walls, threading his way among the narrow streets to the place where the fortune-teller had pitched his tent. When he got near he found crowds of people, men and women, coming and going. Some were enquiring about money, some about their farms, some about the prospect of posterity, while others who had diseases were asking whether they would recover. Although the tent was thronged, the fisherman entered and made his way up to where the fortune-teller sat. Making a respectful bow he told his name and stated his pitiable case, exclaiming excitedly, "When, oh teacher, will this dreadful famine end, and when will the rain come upon the parched earth?"

The fortune-teller replied, "To get an answer to your question requires only a few cents. Pay these, and burn some incense, kneeling reverently the while, and I will consult the gods." The fisherman did so and Merak retired, but presently returned saying joyfully, "I congratulate you, old Longbow," for that was the fisherman's name, "on your good luck. To-night about eleven o'clock the sky will become cloudy and by six to-morrow morning a typhoon will prevail followed by a heavy rainfall at a quarter past one. But this rain will

be limited to the Channa district, and no more than three feet and three inches will fall. After the rain the sun will suddenly burst out in ruddy beams." Hearing this, Longbow could scarcely repress a shout of joy. He saluted the fortune-teller and left the tent, and was soon on his way home. Upon arriving, the old woman was soon made acquainted with the success of his mission, and they lost no time, but began to prepare at once for fishing. Longbow led the way with the stakes and ropes, while his wife followed with the nets, to the mouth of Golden River. The stakes were soon set, and Longbow began to drive them into the ground. Now, it so happened that these stakes had been placed just above the Palace of the Dragon King who at that moment was sitting peacefully within. Crash! crash! came the sturdy blows of the fisherman, who little dreamed of the possibilities beneath, and the commotion he was making in the Dragon's *yamén*. The King could stand it no longer. His red ears standing on end and his crimson face puffing with anger, he loudly roared out to his underlings. Two sprites, called Pitchforks, appeared. "What is the meaning of this noise above?" he yelled, as the blows of Longbow continued to rain upon the stakes. "Go above and find out at once." Hastily assuming the shape of young men the Pitchforks rose to the surface just in time to see Longbow gathering his strength for another blow. "Hold," they shouted, "what are you scoundrels doing there?" "We are preparing to fish," said Longbow. "To fish," they exclaimed with an oath, "when you know the bed of the river is as dry as dust. You fools, you had better go home and soak your heads." The heart of the fisherman waxed hot; "You villains," he cried, "what do you mean by speaking to us in this way? It is your youth only that saves you from a good punching. But as you wish to know what we are doing, I will tell you. The black tiger has descended the hills, and the great Merak of Channa has declared there will be rain to-morrow."

Hearing this the sprites hastily returned to their master and reported the

words of Longbow. The wrath of the Dragon broke out in curses. "Merak! a lying devil, trying to deceive the simple people of Channa," he exclaimed, the sparks flying from his temples as he spoke. "I'll go to the city and settle the matter with him myself." So saying, he called his Dragon sons and charging them to guard the sea in his absence, he rose to the surface, leaped upon a passing cloud and was soon soaring off in the direction of the metropolis. Arriving there he took the shape of a young student. Decked out in raiment of the red goose yellow hue, supported by a girdle of crimson silk, his glossy white-soled shoes on his feet, and his gold be-sprinkled fan in his hand, he swaggered slowly along the street, three struts* to a step, until in time he reached the great street on which was pitched the tent of the fortune-teller.

CHAPTER II.

THE WAGER.

With head erect the Dragon King entered the noisy tent and loudly called, "Sir Merak Dignus, fortune-teller of Channa, I demand that you foretell me three things. First, when will we have rain? Second, will I be Senior Wrangler at the next examinations? Third, where do I live?"

Merak looked up with dignity and, without betraying it, recognised at once the Dragon King of Golden River.

"Does the gentleman really wish to enquire of me, or does he come for braggadocio?" said he.

"I come to have my fortune told," said the King.

"Then I'll consult the God of Literature," replied Merak, and retired. He soon returned with a smile upon his classic face and gave the answer. "You are to be congratulated upon your good luck," he said, "for to-morrow at about twelve noon a great rain will fall—three feet three inches, no more no less, and

* It has been remarked that the people of all nationalities when feeling their importance strut; the young literate of the T'ang Dynasty was no exception to the rule.

the rainfall will be confined to the district of Channa."

"You are a liar," shouted the Dragon; "how can any one who lives on earth foretell the will of Heaven? I will be willing to bet you any amount of gold and silver against that lying sign-board that it will not rain any three feet three inches to-morrow. See here, if it does not rain I will come and smash your sign and make you close your shop and quit deceiving the good people of Channa. If it does rain," said he contemptuously, "then I'll plank down the shekels. What say you?"

Merak softly smiled: "Silver, gold, and sign-boards are nothing compared with reputation, why not bet our heads? What say you, young gentleman, to-morrow if no rain falls, then hang my head on this street; but if there does come a shower, I will decorate the avenue with your honorable pate."

"A bargain," said the Dragon King, and the two, standing the one on the east of the street and the other on the west shook hands.

Meanwhile a large crowd had gathered from all classes, poor and rich, sick and well, eager to behold the men who would thus rashly hazard their lives on such an issue. The tall people got the front place, which obliged those of low stature to peer under their arms, or stand on tiptoe. The short of breath came puffing to the spot and the "fatties" sweated, whilst the deaf were yelling in the ears of the bystanders and asking what the row was, and the blind were sprawling on the ground in their haste to hear the outcome. Soon the elders of the town appeared and exhorted the adversaries to peace. "Why discuss this matter? To rain or not to rain is a prerogative of Heaven," said they. Thus they cajoled the parties and advised that Merak return to his tent and resume his business, and "You, young sir," they sternly said, "go to your home."

Let us now shift the scene to the Court of the Pearly Emperor who presides over the affairs of men. The god is sitting on his throne, his trusty servants standing before him ready to do his bidding. The divinity opens his

golden mouth, and speaks: "I have before me from the Great White Golden Star an urgent petition for rain in the Channa district. What Dragon rules that locality?"

"The Dragon of Golden River," replied a retainer.

"Then order the two sprites who attend to this business to proceed at once to Golden River and command the Dragon King to begin to rain to-morrow at noon, and pour out three feet three inches of water, no more no less, to relieve the drought of that region."

The two sprites receiving the decree quitted the august presence and in their cloud chariot flew swiftly across the thirty-three heavens through the azure sky until they came to the palace of the Dragon King. Standing on the edge of the cloud they called, "Dragon King of Golden River, there comes a decree from the Great Emperor of Pearls. Quickly receive the messengers." Hearing these words the King ordered two of his underlings to go above and admit the two sprites, while preparation was made in the palace for the reception of the mandate.* Before the lighted incense the Dragon King hastily broke the Imperial seal and began to read line by line, his face growing paler and paler towards the end. In black and white the order from the Pearly Emperor for rain on the morrow lay before him. He grew more excited each moment until at last in sheer desperation, with the tears rolling down his face, he beat his breast. The Princes came in: "Why, what is the matter, Father King?" they exclaimed in dismay, "that you weep so and tear your hair?"

"Alas! my children," said the unlucky King, "I am unbound." He then related to them his meeting with Merak and the wager he had made. "And now," said he, "the order has come from the Pearly Emperor for rain to-morrow in the Channa district. What shall I do?" The heir apparent became excited, the

* In China the reception of an Imperial Decree is attended with the same reverence that the Emperor himself would receive.

second Prince hung down his head and said nothing. Only the third son replied: "Father," said he, "dry your tears and cheer up. The fortune-teller bet you that three feet three inches would fall in Channa; why not rain *six feet* of water in Shantung and you will win the bet and hang old Merak's head on the street after all?" "Son, thou art the Prince of Wisdom," replied the King, "you know more than the rest of us all put together. Now this excitement has wearied me and I will enter the recesses of the palace and retire to rest in preparation for the events of the morrow."

Aurora was just adorning the eastern hills with ruddy light when the great iron drum of the palace beat three to summon the sea hosts of fish and dragons to prepare for assisting in the arduous labour of making rain. Soon they came bearing aloft their various banners, the soldier fish leading the van. Presently the Wind Goddess appeared attended by the God of Thunder who descended with a crash, and the Lightning Mother darted from the clouds; others followed in quick succession, until a large number of powerful deities had assembled at the Dragon Palace, fully equipped to bring the much-needed rain. In the meantime the King had left his Court and was now coursing his flight to the abode of Buddha to receive from him the three drops of heavenly water that were to serve as stock for the three feet three inches of earth water that were to be poured out on the drought-smitten district of Channa.

CHAPTER III.

THE FLOOD.

After receiving the drops necessary for the rain, the Dragon King continued to kneel before the throne of Buddha. "August Sovereign," he implored, "the drought in Channa has been unusually severe for three years and the black-haired people have suffered intensely. Can you not add a few drops." Buddha paid no heed and remained immovable. The King lifting his eyes perceived the ink-slab of the god lying on the desk. Watching the opportunity, with one

whisk of his ample tail he swept clean the ink from the slab unbeknown to Buddha, and winged his flight from the Western Heavens to his palace.

The time for the rain had now arrived and over the six districts of Shantung the unnaturally bright sky which betokens the rain illuminated the earth. Then from the west a black cloud arose, then another from the south-east. These, approaching each other were met in the middle by a dark purple cumulus from the north-east. The deep thunder rolled and the lightning flashed. The portentous stillness of the atmosphere was disturbed by a fierce wind which blew gently at first but soon increased to a hurricane. Huge trees were blown up by the roots, and carts, sheds, and branches flew about in the air like butterflies, while people were whirled about and tossed bleeding to the ground. Mothers were shrieking for their children. "Mercy on us!" said the old men, "never within our memory has there been such a typhoon."

Soon the rain began to fall, softly at the beginning but gathering intensity each moment. From early morning till noon, from noon to a quarter-past one, three feet three inches of white water fell and the drought was over.

But the rain did not cease. The black water began to descend upon the already submerged fields. It reached the willow tops, the houses became flooded, and the people took refuge in the second stories. Corpses of men, pigs, dogs, oxen, and sheep, beaten about by the waves, filled the air with unwholesome odours. The deluge was over and the devastation was complete. The local deities looked upon the scene with awe and wonder. "Why were we not apprised of this flood?" said they. Soon they framed a petition to the Pearly Emperor and sent it on in hot haste.

The Emperor's wrath knew no bounds. "How dares the Dragon King thus to thwart the decrees of Heaven?" he thundered, and hastily seizing his pen he wrote and signed the death warrant of the offender. "Hand this to Minister Demonde of the present T'ang Dynasty and order him to decapitate the Dragon

King on the festival of the fifth moon," said he.

King Dragon had returned to his palace and was quietly sleeping off the fatigues of the day. After some time he awoke refreshed and suddenly remembered his bet with the fortune-teller. Calling the Crown Prince to govern the sea in his absence, he flew off to Channa where Merak was, and once more assuming the shape and garb of the young scholar, he stood at the door of the tent. "Sir Merak," he contemptuously called, "I have won the bet." Saying this he tore down the fortune teller's sign-board and overthrew the table, thus scattering the tickets and bamboo slips. The money rolled into the street. Merak caught his arm saying, "Sir, listen to me. I knew from the first that you were one of the immortals, the Dragon King of Golden River. I am also aware of the fact that you stole ink water from Buddha and flooded the six districts of Shantung although no rain was needed in that quarter, and strewed the shore with corpses until the stench has ascended to heaven. Do you know that the local deities have petitioned the Pearly Emperor, that he is very angry, and has issued your death warrant, and that he has sent the Prime Minister to execute you to-morrow."

The heart of the Dragon King stood still. He grew exceedingly pale and fell at the feet of the fortune-teller, exclaiming, "Oh, save me, immortal Merak, you have the power, for you are one of the gods come down to earth. I will give you untold treasures if you will save me."

"You waste your words," replied Merak, "in thus beseeching me to deliver you. I am only a man and no human being can interpose in this matter. Only the Emperor of China, the Son of Heaven, can do anything for you. T'ang is very avaricious, and your executioner is his Minister. I would advise you to take your treasure to him and seek his aid in your behalf. But exact a promise from him that he will exert himself to save you."

When the Dragon heard this, his heart was rejoiced. He handed Merak a fee, thanked him profusely, and hastily returned home. Arriving at the palace, he sounded the great drum to awaken his attendants. Soon the princes appeared. "What is it, father?" exclaimed they, "why do you sound the alarm?" "Matter enough," returned he, "I was advised by one of you to thwart the decrees of Heaven, and now for my folly I am to lose my life, unless I can prevail upon the Emperor of China to intercede for me. So open quickly the treasury doors, go in and bring forth those things that will move the avaricious heart of the Son of Heaven."

The Princes disappeared and soon returned carrying with them the enormous wealth of the Dragon King. Ten large boxes of gold, ten of silver, bushels of pearls, rubies, diamonds, amethysts, topazes, with every other kind of precious stones all sparkling and flashing in the light were exposed to view. Besides, there were the soul transforming cap and shoes, with the pillow and bed which could produce marvellous results. All these the King hastily gathered up and leaving his underground palace he ascended the ethereal. Passing through the sky with inconceivable rapidity he arrived at the Emperor's abode where the Son of Heaven was sleeping, and kneeling down by the pearly bedside, thus addressed the sovereign in his dreams.

CHAPTER IV.

THE EMPEROR'S PROMISE.

"August sovereign of Ten Thousand Years, you behold kneeling at your feet a pitiful and miserable creature, I am the Dragon King of Golden River. By mistake, I rained upon Shantung instead of Ch'anna, and for my fault I am to be decapitated to-morrow. Oh, save me from this dreadful fate. You are the Son of Heaven and have the power. I promise you the highest prosperity to your Kingdom, and the untold wealth of the sea—treasures of gold, silver and precious stones."

The Emperor in his dream replied: "Dragon King, make your heart easy.

I have long heard of your wealth. I will intercede for you. Go home in peace and let the burden rest upon me." "But what guarantee can you give?" answered the doubting Dragon. Emperor T'ang, the Son of Heaven, opened his golden mouth. "If Minister Demonde decapitates you, I will answer for it with my life." The Soul of the Dragon leapt with joy. He prostrated himself before the Emperor, arose, and left the capital for the sea.

When the Sovereign awoke he perceived that what had happened was no mere dream. He was all excitement and the perspiration poured down upon his body and drenched his Imperial clothes. Hastily summoning the eunuchs of the Palace he commanded them to search the grounds at the outer gate. They immediately reported with wonder and astonishment, that countless millions of gold and silver with precious stones, were piled up at the gate. The Emperor rushed out and sure enough, there was the promise of the Dragon King literally fulfilled? His eyes were dazzled and he was overcome with joy, and commanded the servants to bring the treasure in and deposit it in the imperial chest.

But how was he to save the Dragon King? Should he relate the whole occurrence to the Minister and bribe him with half the proceeds? The avaricious heart of the Emperor could not entertain such a thought. He meditated. At last a better plan suggested itself. "I will engage the Minister in a game of chess until after the hour appointed for the execution," said he aloud, "and then by the laws of justice the offender can go free. All this wealth will then belong to me."

Six o'clock on the morning of the execution had arrived. The Emperor arose and passing through the host of civil and military officials who prostrated themselves, ascended the throne. The Son of Heaven opened his golden mouth. "Mandarins of the Presence," said he, "my heart is overburdened with the serious business of State, and I long for relaxation. Let Minister Demonde remain and engage with me in a game of

chess to divert my mind." The Premier started. "What," said he, "a humble man like myself play chess with the Emperor? Impossible!" "Why do you say impossible, when I command it," returned he. So without more ado he ordered a eunuch to set out the chess table. The pieces were quickly placed, first the red, then the black. The game proceeded, first the pawns were moved out and the knights and bishops followed. The combatants grew excited. Soon the Premier got his castle down on the Emperor's King line. "Check!" The King was moved, but the other castle checked him again and the retreat began. The king moving in vain to escape the attack of the castles fell within reach of a hostile knight and the game was over.* "Bravo!" cried the Emperor clapping his hands, "what a player you are! But one game of chess is not sufficient to test our skill. Let us play two more."

The chessmen were replaced and another game begun. It did not last long, however, for the Premier by an unexpected move checkmated his adversary's King, causing the Emperor to clap his hands again, and smile, but more feebly than before.

"Set them up again, two games are not enough; let us keep on playing. I promise you," said he, excitedly, "that if you beat me again you shall be Emperor for three days; but if I beat you I will degrade you from the high position you now occupy, and send you home to your native village."

Demonde trembled, but there was no help for it. So he began the trial with extreme caution. The Emperor, too, was on his guard and the game proceeded. They played from the early morning till the hour was approaching when the execution of the Dragon King was to take place.

Meanwhile the six gods who preside at the decapitation of criminals began to bestir themselves for the approaching event. The Pearly Emperor commanded them to look up the execu-

* In describing this game of chess the translator does not exactly follow the original.

tioner. They flew to earth—to the Emperor's palace where the interesting game of chess was being played, and loudly called above: "Minister Demonde, Minister Demonde, why do you not proceed at once to Golden River and apprehend the Dragon King? The time will soon arrive for you to execute him—the hour of twelve is nearly here."

The Premier was appalled and trembled with fear. What should he do? He was commanded by the Son of Heaven to play chess, and at the same time he was ordered by the powers above to decapitate the Dragon. In his dilemma he heard the six gods calling out more loudly than before: "Why do you not obey the command of the Pearly Emperor?"

The unfortunate Minister knew not what to do. Twelve o'clock had nearly arrived, the gods were impatient, and a most momentous game of chess was on the board. The six gods finding that he hesitated, brought out the "sleeping worm" and casting it upon his body awaited the result. The Minister quickly became drowsy, and in making a move by accident he swept one of the chessmen off the board with his sleeve. He essayed to pick it up, but in bending down the spirit of sleep overcame him, his arms dropped listlessly down, and his head fell heavily upon the chess board. The Premier was fast asleep.*

The Emperor was elated and used every means in his power to get the Minister to sleep past the hour of twelve. He hastily summoned the officers of the court and commanded a complete silence throughout the palace until Demonde should awake, little suspecting that his true soul had gone out of the body. For indeed it had. Gurgling up through the seven openings in the head, it flew out into empty space in the full possession of all its faculties and powers untrammelled by the incubus of the body. Demonde soon reached the Dragon palace, led by the six gods. But where should he find an executioner's

sword? It was the feast of the fifth moon and the calamus was growing by the river. So of the root he made a sword and with the same material twisted some ropes.* Having done this, he rushed unceremoniously into the palace and dragged out the astonished King. "What are you doing?" said he, weeping and trembling violently. "I have paid the Emperor to intercede for me." "Be quiet," answered Demonde. "You know you have offended Heaven and deserve the punishment we expect to inflict upon you. Who then can interpose?"

So without further parley they bound the unfortunate King and led him struggling away. The execution ground was soon reached, the headsman stood ready, the sun reached the meridian, and the sword descended. The powerful stroke required no repetition, for the Dragon head rolled to the earth and the blood spurted up and sprinkled the sand. The two pieces hopped about the ground, quivered and then were still, and the "flying blood"† ascended to Heaven. In the south-east the sound of the celestial drum was heard, and the Dragon star fell to the earth. The Princes, who had followed, took up the corpse and, weeping and wailing as they went, carried it back to the palace.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE DEMON BARRIER.

With the head in his hand, the executioner ascended to the Hall of Heaven, and gave his report to the Pearly Emperor.

"Star-born guardian of China's Sovereign," said the god, "I approve your report and now I delegate you to carry the head of the Dragon King to earth

* The people of China hang calamus over their doors on the 5th of the fifth month to keep off demons and evil influences. The dragon boat festival also takes place on this day. It is one of the three great feasts of the year.

† It is commonly believed that if a drop of a criminal's blood falls upon a person his death will soon follow. The clapping of hands at executions in China is done to ward off the "flying blood."

* When the Chinese believe in such things as the sleeping worm, it is no wonder that they are afraid of foreign physicians.

and fix it to the Meridian Gate of the Emperor's Palace."

The Minister received these instructions with reverence, bowed himself, and returned swiftly to the world. Unseen by the guard, he entered the Palace and hung the head in the place indicated. Having accomplished its mission, the true soul of Demonde then returned to the body in the same way that it had left it, and the Minister awoke. Realising the gravity of the offence of sleeping in the Emperor's presence, he fell at the feet of his Sovereign and begged for mercy, on the ground that he had been called away to execute the Dragon King.

"The offence is forgiven," said the Emperor, thinking the Minister had been dreaming, and feeling sure that the Dragon would now escape and the treasure would be his. His pleasant manner, however, soon changed, for at this moment one of the guards rushed in and announced with terror, that by the Meridian gate a headless demon was shrieking for redress, while his head, dripping blood, was hanging above. The wrath of the Emperor waxed hot; with an oath he charged the Minister with unfaithfulness in not announcing beforehand the execution of the Dragon King. "I have received his treasure and guaranteed his safety," said he, "and notwithstanding your long service to the Empire you shall answer for this murder."

The Minister replied, "O Sovereign, your Majesty commanded me to play chess and I had no opportunity to communicate with you. If a Minister deceives his Prince there is crime, but if a Prince deceives his Minister, what then?"

The Emperor deigned no reply but waving his hand impatiently, ordered the Minister from his presence. Demonde retired, and the Emperor was left alone to nurse his disappointment, but not for long for—oh! horrible sight! the headless Dragon carrying in his hand the gory head leapt into the Hall. The tears wererunning down the face mingling with the blood, and the lips were moving as if to speak. The hands clutched the terrified Emperor who then understood what was said. "Treacherous villain, you have

cheated me out of my treasure and refused to intercede for me. I have come for revenge; I charge you with being an avaricious scoundrel."

As he spoke, his anger increased, and soon worked itself up to a perfect fury. With the head he began to beat the conscience-stricken Emperor until he shrieked aloud, "Help, help, guards of the door, come quickly."* The attendants appeared and interposed. "Never mind," yelled the disappointed King, overcome with rage and cursing with all his might, "if I cannot get justice on earth, I will take the case to the Infernal Regions before Yenlo, the God of Darkness." As he said this, a gust of wind hot from the spirit world blew past the Palace, and the Dragon, head in hand, slowly melted from view. Smoothly, gently and swiftly it carried him on and on through the trackless death regions until it bore him within sight of the Demon Barrier.† Arriving there, and swinging the tear-and-blood-stained head in his hand, ready to burst with mingled anger, pain, and disappointment, the headless Dragon began to scream his grievances to Yenlo, the Ruler of the spirit world.

"Stop that clatter, you headless devil," shouted Oxhead and Horseface, the keepers of the Barrier. "What are you walking to and fro before this gate with that thing in your hand for? Get out."

"Have pity on me," said the wretch, "I am not an orphan soul or a sonless ghost, but the Dragon King of Golden River, who for a small error was beheaded. I come for justice on the Emperor of China for commanding his

* On the official residences of Chinese mandarins these "Door Gods" are painted today, to keep off evil spirits. It is needless to say that they are inefficient; for the late war with Japan has proved that the mandarin is utterly rotten and corrupt.

† These are matters of practical belief, and cause untold mischief among the poor ignorant Chinese. Thousands of angry women every year commit suicide in the hope of working ruin to their husbands or mothers-in-law in the manner described in the story. The "spirit wind" is an object of much fear, and to it sickness and disease are often attributed.

Minister to decapitate me when I had paid him to intercede in my behalf." When the guards heard these words they uttered the vilest imprecations. "You lying villain," they yelled, "the Emperor of China is the Son of Heaven and Demonde is his Minister. How dare you accuse him when we know your accusation is false? You are wasting your breath here, so make yourself scarce, you miserable headless ghost, and don't trouble us with your noise." The Dragon began to weep afresh and scream in a louder key, so loud indeed that the sound reached the ears of Yenlo. The God asked the Registrar of Accusations what it meant. He was told, and immediately ordered the accuser to appear. The Dragon prostrated himself before the Vermilion Steps and repeated the charge. "I am not a desolate spirit * but the Dragon King; for years I have sent the rain in the sixth moon and the snow in the twelfth, and given prosperity to the Empire. And now the Emperor is peacefully seated on his throne enjoying himself, whilst I withal am suffering this awful punishment."

Yenlo swore a fearful oath, "Do you know whom you accuse? The presumption is that you are lying and I cannot admit the charge."

"Bring him here, then, oh, bring him here," screamed the Dragon, "and hear all the evidence."

"Perhaps the Emperor *has* been avaricious," mused Yenlo. "At any rate I'll see."

So he issued a warrant for the arrest of the Emperor of China.

CHAPTER VI.

AD INFEROS.

The god's anger burned. "He had no right to take bribes in any case, and

* Homeless beggars and people who die without issue are supposed to wander to and fro in the spirit world without rest. To this inordinate desire for sons to burn money, etc., at the graves of deceased ancestors, may be attributed the enormous population of China. Mencius said: "There are three unfilial crimes; to be without issue is the greatest;" but we cannot hold the Sage entirely responsible for the horrible beliefs that are now entertained by the Chinese.

I'll send the demon sheriffs, Oxhead and Horseface*, to apprehend him," he exclaimed.

One of the criminal judges standing by, hastily replied: "Oh, King of Darkness, the Emperor of China is the ruler of all men, why do you send such coarse, rough fellows as Oxhead and Horseface to arrest him like a common criminal? Would it not be better to send servants with your card inviting him to visit you?" "It would be better," said Yenlo. So he despatched at once two of his trusted officers, wearing close-fitting caps and azure garments, to the Palace.

Let us now turn our attention to the affairs of earth where the Emperor was peacefully sleeping at midnight in the Palace. Suddenly the Sovereign's rest was disturbed by a wonderful dream. He beheld the Imperial tree turned upside down. While he was gazing upon this wonder, one of the golden beams of the Palace was broken, the plum blossoms were blown off by a wind, and a staff held by an unseen hand struck asunder the pair of Imperial birds.

T'ang awoke with a start, and tried in vain to discover the meaning of the dream. The Court Soothsayers, Merak Dignus and another, were summoned, the dream told, and the Emperor awaited the interpretation. It was this: "The uprooted tree is your Imperial sway, the broken beam is your priceless body, the scattered plum blossoms an invitation to visit the Infernal Regions, and the separated birds are yourself and your wife. August Sovereign, your days are numbered, you must soon die."

When the Emperor heard this he grew very angry and commanded the jailer, Golden Claws, to seize the Soothsayers and carry them off to the Imperial prison, saying: "If your interpretation of the dream is not fulfilled within three days, you shall die."

The Minister, who had been forgiven and was still in the Palace, learned of the fate of the Soothsayers, and feeling

* Images of these monstrosities can be seen at the city temples. People who die violent deaths are supposed to be seized by them.

sure that their interpretation of the portent was true, humbly approached the Emperor. "Sovereign," said he, "the Dragon King is at the bottom of this. He has appealed to Yenlo, King of the Infernal Regions, and I hear that the demon sheriffs are even now on their way to arrest you." The Emperor trembled at the words of Demonde, and said pitifully: "How can I go and leave my wives and sons? The Princes are not yet grown, and who will govern the Empire if I die?"

The faithful Minister replied: "If it is true that you must go, I have a plan through which you may return to the earth. A relative of mine named Despatch is one of the Judges of the Demon Court. I can give you a letter of recommendation* to him and I know he will exert himself to save you." "Let me have it quickly then," said the Emperor.

"You shall," said Demonde, and producing a sheep's hair pencil, he wrote: "To Judge Despatch:

"My dear relative—The bearer of this is the Emperor of China, and at present I am his Minister. I hope you will do your best for him and if possible secure his return to the earth. Any other favour you can do him will be gratefully received.

"DEMONDE."

The letter was sealed, three corners burnt to insure haste, and it was hung around the Emperor's neck. This being done, the Sovereign made his will and settled up his accounts, then seven pieces of baked cake were put in his sleeve to quiet the fierce animals of Mad Dog Village on the way to the land of shades.

Meanwhile the servants of Yenlo had arrived and hung up the name of their victim in the City Temple. They presented the card of their master. The Emperor turned pale. "Officers from the spirit world," he said piteously, "I

cannot, cannot, accompany you. My sons are too young to govern the Empire, and who will shield China against the attacks of foreign countries if I leave? Excuse me to Yenlo and I will reward you bountifully with silver and gold."

The officers smiled blandly. "Listen, Emperor of China, if money could buy life only the poor would die. Your time has come; the boat has started, it is too late to long for the shore. Mortal, come with us." With that they seized upon the soul of the weeping and unwilling Emperor. His eyes closed, he uttered no sound, but fell heavily back upon the Imperial couch—dead.

The inmates of the Palace entered and with affrighted faces commenced to bewail the deceased Sovereign. Demonde commanded silence and related to them briefly the occasion of the Emperor's decease, adding, "In three days your father, young Princes, will return to the earth."

So they laid the corpse on the soul-transforming bed and ordered the Court Physician to embalm it. The eldest son kept the watch and the whole Palace was clothed in the habiliments of grief.

But what of the Emperor? He had followed the officers of Yenlo out of the city escorted by the presiding deity of the City Temple. From the city they made straight for the border line of the seen and the unseen. Soon the border stone was passed and they sped more swiftly towards the Demon Barrier. The gates were opened, when out rushed the Dragon King with the bloody head and attacked the accused with the greatest fury. The Emperor screamed with terror; but the Dragon continued the blows, and it would have gone hard with the unfortunate Sovereign had not another actor appeared upon the scene. An ancient officer wearing a camellia in his cap, and holding in one hand the hoop of heaven and earth, and in the other a wolf-tooth staff, caught the assailant by the arm and said angrily: "Why do you assault the Emperor of China, and make this disturbance? The case has not been tried and how dare you act before it is?"

* The foreign resident in China knows the great value set upon letters of recommendation by the natives. Even though the applicant may be most unworthy he seems to think the letter ought to be written. Certainly their ideas on this subject are antipodal to ours.

Saying this, he struck the Dragon King to the ground.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RESCUE.

"Who are you that comes to my aid in such a timely way?" said the agitated Emperor.

The officer replied: "My father's name was Rubo and he lived in the Celestial Star Street of Yangchow. He was very wealthy and married rich. When quite young I accidentally fell into a vat of indigo and was drowned. My body, you see, is of a sky blue colour and my hair has turned red.* Yenlo, seeing that I was honest and faithful, appointed me one of the Judges of the Criminal Court in the spirit world. Hearing that your Majesty was coming to this land, I hastened out to receive you."

The Emperor felt more secure, and gratefully followed his rescuer in silence. They had not proceeded far before they met another official wearing a cap of black gauze and holding a tablet in his hand.

"Who is this that approaches?" asked the Emperor.

The new-comer hastily replied: "On earth I was a Minister of the Court and was so badly treated that I died of anger. When I came here I presented my case to Yenlo, who soon found out my merits and made me the Chief Judge of the Court. I am the President of the Judicial Court which consists of thirty-six members. I am also the Ruler of Life and Death. Finding out that you were coming, I left my business to greet you. My name is Despatch."

The Emperor grasped his hand. "I have a letter for you," he cried, and eagerly produced the recommendation from Demonde.

The Judge broke the seal and carefully scanned the contents. "Aha," said he reading slowly, "'The bearer of this is the Emperor of China, I hope you will

do your best for him and if possible secure his return to the earth.' Well, that may be difficult but I will consult the Associate Judges." So, bidding the Emperor follow, he led the way to the Hall where the Court sat. The Judges saluted the Emperor, and Despatch having read the letter presented the case. When he had finished, one of the number, a worthy official named Dewlap, the Registrar of Life and Death, arose and said: "Fellow Judges, it will be impossible to save the Emperor of China in this emergency, much as we may desire to oblige the President; for by the records, I find that it has been appointed to the present sovereign of earth to live *thirteen years*. This time has passed and the Emperor ought to die.

"The records also show that *thirty-three years* were allotted to the Dragon King. He has lived only thirteen so that there are twenty more for him to live on earth, and he has come too soon to the land of shades."

The Judges sighed. "Then the Emperor cannot be saved," they all exclaimed. Judge Rubo, who was always ready in an emergency, arose. "We can yet secure his return," he cried, excitedly. "We can easily alter these records. Fortunately the numerals are written in simple Chinese characters. By adding two strokes of the pen to the Emperor's allotted time we can make it read thirty. By erasing two from that of the Dragon we can change it to thirteen."*

The plan was universally applauded, and the necessary changes made. These things being done, the Court arose and led the way to the Palace of Yenlo. The arrival of the Emperor with the Judges was announced, and the King of the Infernal Regions appeared in person and bowed his respects, saying, "You are the Ruler of the Seen, and I of the Unseen. Both governments are on the same prin-

* In some parts of China foreigners are known as "red-haired devils," and all light-haired people are regarded with wonder and astonishment everywhere.

* The heathen mind cannot comprehend the iniquity of the above transaction, although the moral obliquity is detected. If their objects of worship are confessedly so dishonest, what can we expect from the Chinese but craftiness and deceit in every department of life?

ciple. You have your mandarins under you, so have I."

So saying, he invited the Emperor in, but apologised for his lack of courtesy, remarking, "I cannot ask you to have a cup of tea or wine in this place, for you have come on a visit, and those who taste these things here can never return to earth, for their destiny then is unalterably fixed." *

With these ceremonies the business in hand proceeded. Three departed souls appeared against the Emperor, charging him with high crime and misdemeanour. These accusations were written out and placed on the heads of the accusers. The first two were for murder, the last, that of the Dragon King, for covetousness. Yenlo immediately changed countenance. His polite demeanour disappeared and a stern look settled upon his countenance. "Unfaithful Prince of Earth," he cried, in anger, "why are these charges made against you? You have had it your own way for years in the world, but I am the master here and you are the culprit." Then turning to his attendants: "Call Oxhead and Horseface to seize this criminal."†

At Yenlo's side stood the faithful Judge Despatch. "Listen, oh King," said he, "while I answer these charges for the Emperor of Earth. The first two are for murder. The men were decapitated for crime against the government. Has not the sovereign a right to uphold the law of the realm? As for the Dragon King, I cannot see how the accused has anything whatever to do with him. He openly thwarted the decree of Heaven and drowned out a whole district, and deserves the punishment he has got." Having stated the whole transaction he closed his argument with these remarks: "I find in the Register of Life and Death that the Dragon has lived out his allotted

time, whilst the Emperor of China still has twenty years in the world. The Judges of the Court unanimously recommend that the Sovereign return to earth and resume his position as Emperor of China."

Yenlo examined the Register. "So it is written," he said, and turning to the affrighted Emperor he said with a smile, "Excuse my behaviour; I had not heard the case when I spoke. Had it not been for Judge Despatch I fear me you would have suffered. You have my permission to return home and govern the Empire for twenty years more.

"But the Dragon King has met a dreadful fate. You must promise me that on your return you will obtain the Buddhist Classic and engage priests to say mass for the repose of his soul."

"If you will only let me return," cried the sovereign, almost beside himself with joy, "I will give you my solemn promise to do this, and more."

"Go then," said Yenlo, "and you Despatch accompany him to the border."

The Emperor with his escort hastily withdrew and was soon on the way to the earth. Swiftly they moved until they came in sight of Mad Dog Village through which they must pass. The dogs at once attacked them. With gaping jaws the furious creatures sprang upon the travellers. Despatch they could not hurt, but the Emperor knew his danger. He started back appalled *et vox hæsit in faucibus*. He quickly recovered, and bethought him of the cakes. Hastily taking them out he threw them to the beasts by whom they were soon being greedily devoured. While the dogs were engaged with the cakes, the two brushed swiftly past and were soon at a safe distance from the place.

But hardly had they escaped this danger than another and a greater awaited them.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RETURN TO EARTH.

For they had now arrived at the City of the Lost Dead. This is the locality where decapitated criminals, wretched beggars, and sonless souls dwell, and a

* Chinese often visit us, but many refuse to take any refreshment in the belief that by so doing they would be changed into Christians or foreigners. "Deception tea" is very much feared.

† A picture of most mandarins, who nearly always assume this bullying manner which is both sublime and ridiculous.

horrible place it is. The Emperor was soon beset by a mob of headless, footless, and armless demons who cursed and hooted him on the way. The crowd increased and soon became violent and refused to allow him to pass. "Unfaithful Prince," they shouted, "You are going back to earth where you will be happy with your children. We, on the contrary, are wretched souls who are destined to live here; you must help us. Give us money or it will be the worse for you.* Out with the silver and let each of us have something, or else you shall not go back." Terrified beyond measure, the Emperor replied, "You shall have money; I am the Ruler of the Earth and my treasury is full, but being here on a visit I have brought none with me."

The clamour increased, and the mob grew more violent. "Is there no money lender in the Infernal Regions?" he tremulously asked his guide. "I will pay good interest; one hundred chests of Imperial treasure I will give for ten here."

His guide answered, "There is a temple kept by an old woman where you can perhaps get what you want. Shall I conduct you to it?"

"By all means," said the Emperor; so he led the way followed by the mortal, and the unsightly crowd. It was some distance out of the way but they went rapidly along and in a short time reached the spot. The Judge called out and an old hag appeared. "Here is the Emperor of China come to borrow money for distribution to the Lost Dead; he pays good interest," said he.

* So strong is the belief that the dead have wants similar to those of the living that millions of dollars are annually wasted in burning paper sycee, houses, boats, etc., for the supposed use of the dead. A whole month is set apart for saying prayers for lost souls, and Buddhist priests are hired by the public to perform this ceremony called "passing over." Lonely roads, grave-yards and execution grounds are visited and unlimited paper money burnt to supply the dead. The Chinese are very much afraid of offending these imaginary spirits, as will be seen by the crookedness of their streets, the construction of their houses and many other things.

"Oh, the Emperor has come," screeched the old creature. "I cannot by any means let him have money for he is different from other men."

"Why not?" said Despatch, remonstrating with her for her disrespect.

"Because the Emperor must make obeisance to me and he has not yet done so. If he will make his respects to me I will lend him the money at the interest he offers."

"Why should I, the Emperor of China make obeisance to you, you wretched creature. I ——" "Don't forget where you are," interrupted the Judge. "I think to secure your safety you would better do as she bids."

"Is there no help for it?" said he. "None," impatiently replied his companion. So the Emperor made a bow, and the hag paid the money. "Ha, ha," she chuckled, "the Sovereign of China bows to a woman. Why should I henceforth fear even the King of Devils?"* A large sum of money was borrowed and distribution being made to the eager and persistent spirits, the two were allowed to proceed. Through a trackless reach of territory they passed until they came to the district which lies on the border. Here Judge Despatch said: "I cannot accompany you any farther, and as I know you are anxious to return to the earth I must leave you. Before bidding you goodbye, I have a favour to ask." "State it," said the Emperor.

"My kinsman Demonde, your Minister, has served you faithfully and long, I wish you to reward him. Should he sometimes offend you, and I fear he will as he is getting old, forgive him and continue him in office as long as he lives." "Make yourself easy on that score," quickly responded the other, "my Minister Demonde shall never want so long as I am alive."

While this conversation was going on, the Spirit Judge began to grow uneasy. They had arrived at the bridge and the air of earth seemed to unsettle him.

*The story states that since that time the men of the world (China) are afraid of old women.

"Look over and see the young dragons sporting in the water," he cried.

Pleased to behold such a sight, the Emperor leaned over the bridge, when the Judge gave him an unexpected push and over he fell, down, down into the depths below. Suddenly he struck he knew not what, but he heard the words, "The Emperor has come to life," uttered by some familiar voice. He opened his eyes expecting to see the Judge, when behold! there was the identical room in which he had received the summons to appear before Yenlo. The Princes, led by Demonde, rushed into the room with tears of gladness and embraced the Sovereign. The civil and military mandarins also appeared and congratulated His Majesty on his return. The house of sorrow and mourning was quickly changed to one of gladness and joy.

The Emperor spoke first to the Minister: "You have saved my life and I extend to you my heartiest thanks. To show you that I am sincere, I give you the title of Duke of the Peaceful King-

dom, and make you the Ruler of a tributary State. Instead of standing in the Imperial presence, as other officials do, I give you a seat of honour. The military officers when they meet you shall dismount. You are exempt from punishment. These Imperial favours I bestow upon you because you have saved your Sovereign's life."

The Minister was overjoyed.

"Most grateful am I, oh Sovereign," he replied. Saying this, he bowed himself and quitted the Palace, escorted by a whole train of high officials—a deservedly promoted man.

The next day when the Court was assembled, the Emperor announced that he had made a promise in the Infernal Regions, and consulted with his Cabinet as to the best way to fulfil it. In the end, one of his trusted followers was sent to the west for the Buddhist Classic and a company of priests were invited to come and chant prayers for the release of the Dragon King who was suffering for his misdemeanour in raining upon Shantung instead of the district of Channa.