

The Wolf Dream

By P'u Sung-ling

Mr. Pai was a native of Chih-li, and his eldest son was called Chia. The latter had been some two years holding an appointment¹ as magistrate in the south; but because of the great distance between them, his family had heard nothing of him. One day a distant connection, named Ting, called at the house; and Mr. Pal, not having seen this gentlemen for a long time, treated him with much cordiality. Now Ting was one of those persons who are occasionally employed by the Judge of the Infernal Regions to make arrests on earth;² and, as they were chatting together, Mr. Pal questioned him about the realms below. Ting told him all kinds of strange things, but Pai did not believe them, answering only by a smile. Some days afterwards, he had just lain down to sleep when Ting walked in and asked him to go for a stroll; so they went off together, and by-and-by reached the city. "There," said Ting, pointing to a door, "lives your nephew," alluding to a son of Mr. Pai's elder sister, who was a magistrate in Honan; and when Pai expressed his doubts as to the accuracy of this statement, Ting led him in, when, lo and behold! there was his nephew sitting in his court dressed in his official robes. Around him stood the guard, and it was impossible to get near him; but Ting remarked that his son's residence was not far off, and asked Pai if he would not like to see him too. The latter assenting, they walked along till they came to a large building, which Ting said was the place. However, there was a fierce wolf at the entrance,³ and Mr. Pai was afraid to go in. Ting bade him enter, and accordingly they walked in, when they found that all the employees of the place, some of whom were standing about and others lying down to sleep, were all wolves. The central pathway was piled up with whitening bones, and Mr. Pai began to feel horribly alarmed; but Ting kept close to him all the time, and at length they got safely in. Pai's son, Chia, was just coming out; and when he saw his father accompanied by Ting, he was overjoyed, and, asking them to sit down, bade the attendants serve some refreshment. Thereupon a great big wolf brought in in his mouth the carcase of a dead man, and set it before them, at which Mr. Pal rose up in consternation, and asked his son what this meant. "It's only a little refreshment for you, father," replied Chia; but this did not calm Mr. Pai's agitation, who would have retired precipitately, had it not been for the crowd of wolves which barred the path. Just as he was at a loss what to do, there was a general stampede among the animals, which scurried away, some under the couches and some under the tables and chairs; and while he was wondering what the cause of this could be, in marched two knights in golden armour, who looked sternly at Chia, and, producing a black rope, proceeded to bind him hand and foot. Chia fell down before them, and was changed into a tiger with horrid fangs; and then one of the knights drew a glittering sword and would have cut off its head, had not the other cried out, "Not yet! not yet I that is for the fourth month next year. Let us now only take out its teeth." Immediately that knight produced a huge mallet, and, with a few blows, scattered the

¹ Literally, "had been allotted the post of Nan-fu magistrate," such appointments being always determined by drawing lots.

² Such is one common explanation of catalepsy it being further averred that the proper lictors of the Infernal Regions are unable to remain long in the *light* of the upper world.

³ Upon a wall at the entrance to every official residence is painted a huge fabulous animal, called *Greed*, in such a position that the resident mandarin must see it every time he goes out of his front gates. It is to warn him against greed and the crimes that are sure to flow from it.

tiger's teeth all over the floor, the tiger roaring so loudly with pain as to shake the very hills, and frightening all the wits out of Mr. Pai—who woke up with a start. He found he had been dreaming, and at once set off to invite Ting to come and see him; but Ting sent back to say he must beg to be excused. Then Mr. Pai, pondering on what he had seen in his dream, despatched his second son with a letter to Chia, full of warnings and good advice; and lo! when his son arrived, he found that his elder brother had lost all his front teeth, these having been knocked out, as he averred, by a fall he had had from his horse when tipsy; and, on comparing dates, the day of that fall was found to coincide with the day of his father's dream. The younger brother was greatly amazed at this, and took out their father's letter, which he gave to Chia to read. The latter changed colour, but immediately asked his brother what there was to he astonished at in the coincidence, of a dream. And just at that time he was busily engaged in bribing his superiors to put him first on the list for promotion, so that he soon forgot all about the circumstance; while the younger, observing what harpies Chia's subordinates were, taking presents from one man and using their influence for another, in one unbroken stream of corruption, sought out his elder brother, and, with tears in his eyes, implored him to put some check upon their rapacity. "My brother," replied Chia, "your life has been passed in an obscure village; you know nothing of our official routine. We are promoted or degraded at the will of our superiors, and not by the voice of the people. He, therefore, who gratifies his superiors is marked out for success; "whereas he who consults the wishes of the people is unable to, gratify his superiors as well." Chia's brother saw that his advice was thrown away; he accordingly returned home and told his father all that had taken place. The old man was much affected, but there was nothing that he could do in the matter, so he devoted himself to assisting the poor, and such acts of charity, daily praying, the Gods that the wicked son alone might suffer for his crimes, and not entail misery on his innocent wife and children. The next year it was reported that Chia had been recommended for a post in the Board of Civil Office, and friends crowded the father's door, offering their congratulations upon the happy event. But the old man sighed and took to his bed, pretending he was too unwell to receive visitors. Before long another message came, informing them that Chia had fallen in with bandits while on his way home, and that he and all his retinue had been killed. Then his father arose and said, "Verily the Gods are good unto me, for they have visited his sins upon himself alone;" and he immediately proceeded to burn incense and return thanks. Some of his friends would have persuaded him that the report was probably untrue; but the old man had no doubts as to its correctness, and made haste to get ready his son's grave. But Chia was not yet dead. In the fatal fourth moon he had started on his journey and had fallen in with bandits, to whom he had offered all his money and valuables; upon which the latter cried out, "We have come to avenge the cruel wrongs of many hundreds of victims; do you imagine we want only *that*?" They then cut off his head, and the head of his wicked secretary, and the heads of several of his servants who had been foremost in carrying out his shameful orders, and were now accompanying him to the capital. They then divided the booty between them, and made off with all speed. Chia's soul remained near his body for some time, until at length a high mandarin passing by asked who it was that was lying there dead. One of his servants replied that he had been a magistrate at such and such a place, and that his name was Pai. "What!" said the mandarin, "the son of old Mr. Pal? It is hard that his father should live, to see such sorrow as this. Put his head on again."⁴ Then a man stepped forward and placed Chia's head upon his

⁴ The great sorrow of decapitation as opposed to strangulation is that the body will appear in the realms below without a head. The family of any condemned man who may have sufficient means always bribe the executioner to sew it on again.

shoulders again, when the mandarin interrupted him, saying, "A crooked-minded man should not have a straight body: put his head on sideways." By-and-by Chia's soul returned to its tenement; and when his wife and children arrived to take away the corpse, they found that he was still breathing. Carrying him home, they poured some nourishment down his throat, which he was able to swallow; but there he was at an out-of-the-way place, without the means of continuing his journey. It was some six months before his father heard the real state of the case, and then he sent off the second son to bring his brother home. Chia had indeed come to life again, but he was able to see down his own back, and was regarded ever afterwards more as a monstrosity than as a man. Subsequently the nephew, whom old Mr. Pai had seen sitting in state surrounded by officials, actually became an Imperial Censor, so that every detail of the dream was thus strangely realised.