

# Dishonesty Punished

By P'u Sung-ling

At Chiao-chou there lived a man named Liu Hsi-ch'uan, who was steward to His Excellency Mr. Fa. When already over forty a son was born to him, whom he loved very dearly, and quite spoilt by always letting him have his own way. When the boy grew up he led a dissolute, extravagant life, and ran through all his father's property. By-and-by he fell sick, and then he declared that nothing would cure him but a slice off a fat old favourite mule they had; upon which his father had another and more worthless animal killed; but his son found out he was being tricked, and, after abusing his father soundly, his symptoms became more and more alarming. The mule was accordingly killed, and some of it was served up to the sick man; however, he only just tasted it and sent the rest away. From that time he got gradually worse and worse, and finally died, to the great grief of his father, who would gladly have died too. Three or four years afterwards, as some of the villagers were worshipping on Mount Tai, they saw a man riding on a mule, the very image of Mr. Liu's dead son; and, on approaching more closely, they saw that it was actually he. Jumping from his mule, he made them a salutation, and then they began to chat with him on various subjects, always carefully avoiding that one of his own death. They asked him what he was doing there; to which he replied that he was only roaming about, and inquired of them in his turn at what inn they were staying; "For," added he, "I have an engagement just now, but I will visit you to-morrow." So they told him the name of the inn, and took their leave, not expecting to see him again. However, the next day he came, and, tying his mule to a post outside, went in to see them. "Your father," observed one of the villagers, "is always thinking about you. Why do you not go and pay him a visit?" The young man asked to whom he was alluding; and, at the mention of his father's name, he changed colour and said, "If he is anxious to see me, kindly tell him that on the 7th of the 4th moon I will await him here." He then went away, and the villagers returned and told Mr. Liu all that had taken place. At the appointed time the latter was very desirous of going to see his son; but his master dissuaded him, saying that he thought from what he knew of his son that the interview might possibly not turn out as he would desire; "Although," added he, "if you are bent upon going, I should be sorry to stand in your way. Let me, however, counsel you to conceal yourself in a cupboard, and thus, by observing what takes place, you will know better how to act, and avoid running into any danger." This he accordingly did, and, when his son came, Mr. Fa received him at the inn. "Where's Mr. Liu?" cried the son. "Oh, he hasn't come," replied Mr. Fa. "The old beast! What does he mean by that?" exclaimed his son; whereupon Mr. Fa asked him what *he* meant by cursing his own father. "My father!" shrieked the son; "why he's nothing more to me than a former rascally partner in trade, who cheated me out of all my money, and for which I have since avenged myself on him. What sort of a father is that, I should like to know?" He then went out of the door; and his father crept out of the cupboard from which, with the perspiration streaming down him and hardly daring to breathe, he had heard all that had passed, and sorrowfully wended his way home again.