

# The Quarrelsome Brothers

By P'u Sung-ling

At K'un-yang there lived a wealthy man named Tsêng. When he died, and before he was put in the coffin, tears were seen to gush forth from both eyes of the corpse, to the infinite amazement of his six sons. His second son, T'i, otherwise called Yu-yü, who had gained for himself the reputation of being a scholar, said it was a bad omen, and warned his brothers to be careful and not give cause for sorrow to the dead,—at which the others only laughed at him as an idiot.

Tsêng's first wife and eldest son having been carded off by the rebels when the latter was only seven or eight years old, he married a second wife, by whom he had three sons, Hsiao, Chung, and Hsin; besides three other sons by a concubine—namely, the above-mentioned T'i, or Yu-yü, Jen, and Vi. Now the three by the second wife handed themselves together against the three by the concubine, saying that the latter were a base-born lot; and whenever a guest was present and either of them happened to be in the room, Hsiao and his two brothers would not take the slightest notice of them. This enraged Jen and Yi very much, and they went to consult with Yu-yü as to how they should avenge themselves for such slights. Yu-yü, however, tried every means in his power to pacify them, and would not take part in any plot; and, as they were much younger than he, they took his advice,<sup>1</sup> and did nothing.

Hsiao had a daughter, who died shortly after her marriage to a Mr. Chou; and her father begged Yu-yü and his other brothers to go with him and give his late daughter's mother-in-law a sound beating.<sup>2</sup> Yu-yü would not hear of it for a moment; so Hsiao in a rage got his brothers Chung and Hsin, with a lot of rowdies from the neighbourhood, and went off and did it themselves, scattering the goods and chattels of the family about, and smashing everything they could lay their hands on. An action was immediately brought by the Chou family, and Hsiao and his two brothers were thrown into-prison by the angry mandarin, who purposed sending the case before a higher tribunal. Yu-yü, however, whose high character was well known to that official, interceded for them, and himself went to the Chou family and tendered the most humble apologies for what had occurred. The Chou family, out of respect for Yu-yü, suffered the case to drop, and Hsiao regained his liberty, though he did not evince the slightest gratitude for his brother's exertions. Shortly after, Yu-yü's mother died; but Hsiao and the other two refused to put on mourning for her, going on with their usual feasting and drinking as if nothing had happened. Jen and Vi were furious at this; but Yu-yü only observed, "What they do is their own indecorous behaviour; it does not injure us." Then, again, when the funeral was about to take place, Hsiao, Chung, and Hsin stood before the door of the vault, and would not allow the others to bury their mother there. So Yu-yü buried her alongside the principal grave. Before long Hsiao's wife died, and Yu-yü told Jen and Vi to accompany him to the house and condole with the widower; to which they both objected, saying, "He would not wear mourning for our mother;

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<sup>1</sup> Deference to elder brothers is held by the Chinese to be second only in importance to filial piety.

<sup>2</sup> In a volume of *Chinese Sketches*, published by me in 1876, occur (p. 129) the following words:—"Occasionally a young wife is driven to commit suicide by the harshness of her mother-in-law, but this is of rare occurrence, as the consequences are terrible to the family of the guilty woman. The blood-relatives of the deceased repair to the chamber of death, and in the injured victim's hand they place a broom. They then support the corpse round the room, making its dead arm move the broom from side to side, and thus sweep away wealth, happiness, and longevity from the accursed place for ever."

shall we do so for his wife?"<sup>3</sup> Ultimately Yu-yü had to go alone; and while he was pouring forth his lamentations beside the bier, he heard Jen and Yi playing drums and trumpets outside the door. Hsiao flew into a tremendous passion, and went after them with his own two brothers to give them a good thrashing. Yu-yü, too, seized a big stick and accompanied them to the house where Jen and Yi were; whereupon Jen made his escape; but as Yi was clambering over the wall, Yu-yü hit him from behind and knocked him down. Hsiao and the others then set upon him with their fists and sticks, and would never have stopped but that Yu-yü interposed his body between them and made them desist. Hsiao was very angry at this, and began to abuse Yu-yü, who said, "The punishment was for want of decorum, for which death 'would be too severe. I can neither connive at their bad behaviour, nor at your cruelty. If your anger is not appeased, strike me." Hsiao now turned his fury against Yu-yü, and being well seconded by his two brothers, they beat Yu-yü until the neighbours separated them and put an end to the row. Yu-yü at once proceeded to Hsiao's house to apologise for what had occurred; but Hsiao drove him away, and would not let him take part in the funeral ceremonies. Meanwhile, as Yi's wounds were very severe, and he could neither eat nor drink, his brother Jen went on his behalf to the magistrate, stating in the petition that the accused had not worn mourning for their father's concubine. The magistrate issued a warrant; and, besides causing the arrest of Hsiao, Chung, and Hsin, he ordered Yu-yü to prosecute them as well. Yu-yü, however, was so much cut about the head and face that he could not appear in court, but he wrote out a petition, in which he begged that the case might be quashed; and this the magistrate consented to do. Yi soon got better, the feeling of hatred and resentment increasing in the family day by day; while Jen and Vi, who were younger than the others, complained to Yu-yü of their recent punishment, saying, 'The relationship of elder and younger brothers exists for others, why not for us?' "Ah," replied Yu-yü, "that is what I might well say; not you." Yu-yü then tried to persuade them to forget the past; but, not succeeding in his attempt, he shut up his house, and went off with his wife to live somewhere else, about twenty miles away. Now, although when Yu-yü was among them he did not help the two younger ones, yet his presence acted as some restraint upon Hsiao and the other two; but now that he 'was gone their conduct was beyond all bounds. They sought out Jen and Yi in their own houses, and not only reviled them, but abused the memory of their dead mother, against which Jen and Yi could only retaliate by keeping the door shut against them. However, they determined to do them some injury, and carried knives about with them wherever they went for that purpose.

One day the eldest brother, Ch'êng, who had been carried off by the rebels, returned with his wife; and, after three days' deliberation, Hsiao and the other two determined that, as he had been so long separated from the family, he had no further claims upon them for house-room, &c. Jen and Yi were secretly delighted at this result, and at once inviting Ch'êng to stay with them, sent news of his arrival to Yu-yü, who came back directly, and agreed with the others to hand over a share of the property to their elder brother. Hsiao and his clique were much enraged at this purchase of Ch'êng's goodwill, and, hurrying to their brothers' houses, assailed them with every possible kind of abuse. Ch'êng, who had long been accustomed to scenes of violence among the rebels, now got into a great passion, and cried out, "When I came home none of you would give me a place to live in. Only these younger ones recognised the ties of blood, and you would punish them for so doing. Do you, think to drive me away?" Thereupon he threw a stone at Hsiao and knocked him down; and Jen and Vi rushed out with clubs and gave the three of them a severe thrashing. Ch'êng did not wait for them to lay a plaint, but set off to the magistrate on the spot, and preferred a charge against his three brothers. The magistrate, as before, sent for Yu-yü

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<sup>3</sup> A wife being an infinitely less important personage than a mother in the Chinese social scale.

to ask his opinion, and Yu-yü had no alternative but to go, entering the yamên with downcast head, his tears flowing in silence all the while. The magistrate inquired of him how the matter stood; to which he replied only by begging His Honour to hear the case; which the magistrate accordingly did, deciding that the whole of the property was to be divided equally among the seven brothers. Thenceforth Jen and Yi became more and more attached to Ch'êng; and one day, in conversation, they happened to tell him the story of their mother's funeral. Ch'êng was exceedingly angry, and declared that such behaviour was that of brute beasts, proposing at the same time that the vault should be opened and that she should be re-buried in the proper place. Jen and Yi went off and told this to Yu-yü, who immediately came and begged Ch'êng to desist from his scheme; to which, however, he paid no attention, and fixed a day for her interment in the family vault. He then built a hut near by, and, with a knife lopping the branches off the trees, informed the brothers that any of them who did not appear at the funeral in the usual mourning would be treated by him in a manner similar to the trees. So they were all obliged to go, and the obsequies were conducted in a fitting manner. The brothers were now at peace together, Ch'êng keeping them in first-rate order, and always treating Hsiao, Chung, and Hsin with much more severity than the others. To Yu-yü he showed a marked deference, and, whenever he was in a rage, would always be appeased by a word from him. Hsiao, too, was always going to Yu-yü to complain of the treatment he received at Ch'êng's hands when he did anything that Ch'êng disapproved of; and then, if Yu-yü quietly reproved him, he would be dissatisfied, so that at last Yu-yü could stand it no longer, and again went away and took a house at a considerable distance, where he remained almost entirely cut off from the others. By the time two years had passed away Ch'êng had completely succeeded in establishing harmony amongst them, and quarrels were of rare occurrence. Hsiao was then forty-six years old, and had five sons; Chi-yeh and Chi-tê, the first and third, by his wife; Chi-kung and Chi-chi, the second and fourth, by a concubine; and Chi-tsu, by a slave. They were all grown up, and exactly imitated their father's former behaviour, banding themselves together one against the other, and so on, without their father being able to make them behave better. Chi-tsu had no brothers of his own, and, being the youngest, the others bullied him dreadfully; until at length, being on a visit to his wife's family, who lived not far from Yu-yü's house, he went slightly out of his way to call and see his uncle. There he found his three cousins living peaceably together and pursuing their studies, and was so pleased that he remained with them some time; and said not a word as to returning home. His uncle urged him to go back, but he entreated to be allowed to stay; and then his uncle told him it was not that he grudged his daily food: it was because his father and mother did not know where he was. Chi-tsu accordingly went home, and a few months afterwards, when he and his wife were on the point of starting to congratulate his wife's mother on the anniversary of her birthday, he explained to his father that he should not come home again. When his father asked him why not, he partly divulged his reasons for going; whereupon his father said he was afraid his uncle would bear malice for what happened in the past, and that he would not be able to remain there long. "Father," replied Chi-tsu, "uncle Yu-yü is a good and virtuous man." He set out with his wife, and when they arrived Yu-yü gave them separate quarters, and made Chi-tsu rank as one of his own sons, making him join the eldest, Chi-san, in his studies. Chi-tsu was a clever fellow, and now enrolled himself as a resident of the place where his uncle lived.

Meanwhile, his brothers went on quarrelling among themselves as usual; and one day Chi-kung, enraged at an insult offered to his mother, killed Chi-yeh. He was immediately thrown into prison, where he was severely bamboozed, and in a few days he died. Chi-yeh's wife, whose maiden name was Fêng, now spent the days of mourning in cursing her husband's murderer; and

when Chi-kung's wife heard this, she flew into a towering passion, and said to her, "If your husband is dead, mine isn't alive." She then drew a knife and killed her, completing the tragedy by herself committing suicide in a well.

Mr. Fêng, the father of the murdered woman, was very much distressed at his daughter's untimely end; and, taking with him several members of the family with arms concealed under their clothes, they proceeded to Hsiao's house, and there gave his wife a most terrific beating. It was now Ch'êng's turn to be angry. "The members of my family are dying like sheep," cried he; "what do you mean by this, Mr. Fêng?" He then rushed out upon them with a roar, accompanied by all his own brothers and their sons; and the Fêng family was utterly routed. Seizing old Fêng himself, Ch'êng cut off both his ears; and when his son tried, to rescue him, Chi-chi ran up and broke both his legs with an iron crowbar. Every one of the Fêng family was badly wounded, and thus dispersed, leaving old Fêng's son lying in the middle of the road. The others not knowing what to do with him, Ch'êng took him under his arm, and, having thrown him down in the Fêng village, returned home, giving orders to Chi-chi to go immediately to the authorities and enter their plaint the first.

The Fêng family had, however, anticipated them, and all the Tsêngs were accordingly thrown into prison, except Chung, who managed to escape. He ran away to the place where Yu-yü lived, and was pacing backwards and forwards before the door, afraid lest his brother should not have forgiven past offences, when suddenly Yu-yü, with his son and nephew, arrived on their return from the examination. "What do you want, my brother?" asked Yu-yü; whereupon Chung prostrated himself at the roadside, and then Yu-yü, seizing his hand, led him within to make further inquiries. "Alas! alas!" cried Yu-yü, when he had heard the story, "I knew that some dreadful calamity would be the result of all this wicked behaviour. But why have you come hither? I have been absent so long that I am no more acquainted with the local authorities; and if I now went to ask a favour of them, I should probably only be insulted for my pains. However, if none of the Fêng family die of their wounds, and if we three may chance to be successful in our examination, something may perhaps be done to mitigate this calamity."

Yu-yü then kept Chung to dinner, and at night he shared their room, which kind treatment made him at once grateful and repentant. By the end of ten days he was so struck with the behaviour of the father, sons, uncle, nephew, and cousins, one towards the other, that he burst into tears, and said, "Now I know how badly I behaved in days gone by." His brother was overjoyed at his repentance, and sympathised with his feelings, when suddenly it was announced that Yu-yü and his son had both passed the examination for master's degree, and that Chi-tsu was *proxime accessit*. This delighted them all very much. They did not, however, attend the Fu-t'ai's congratulatory feast, but went off first to worship at the tombs of their ancestors.

Now, at the time of the Ming dynasty a man who had taken his master's degree was a very considerable personage, and the Fêngs accordingly began to draw in their horns. Yu-yü, too, met them half-way. He got a friend to convey to them presents of food and money to help them in recovering from their injuries, and thus the prosecution was withdrawn. Then all his brothers implored him with tears in their eyes to return home, and, after burning incense with them, and making them enter into a bond with him that bygones should be bygones, he acceded to their request. Chi-tsu, however, would not leave his uncle; and Hsiao himself said to Yu-yü, "I don't deceive such a son as that. Keep him, and teach him as you have done hitherto, and let him be as one of your own children; but if at some future time he succeeds in his examination, then I will beg you to return him to me." Yu-yü consented to this; and three years afterwards Chi-tsu did take his master's degree, upon which he sent him back to his own family.

Both husband and wife were very loth to leave their uncle's house, and they had hardly been at home three days before one of their children, only three years old, ran away and went back, returning to his great-uncle's as often as he was recaptured. This induced Hsiao to remove to the next house to Yu-yü's, aim, by opening a door between the two, they made one establishment of the whole. Ch'êng was now getting old, and the family affairs devolved entirely upon Yu-yü, who managed things so well that their reputation for filial piety and fraternal love was soon spread far and wide.