

# Adulteration<sup>1</sup> Punished

By P'u Sung-ling

At Chin-ling there lived a seller of spirits, who was in the habit of adulterating his liquor with water and a certain drug, the effect of which was that even a few cups would make the strongest-headed man as drunk as a jelly-fish.<sup>2</sup> Thus his shop acquired a reputation for having a good article on sale, and by degrees he became a rich man. One morning, on getting up, he found a fox lying drunk alongside of the spirit vat; and tying its legs together, he was about to fetch a knife, when suddenly the fox waked up, and began pleading for its life, promising in return to do anything the spirit-merchant might require. The latter then released the animal, which instantly changed into the form of a human being. Now, at that very time, the wife of a neighbour was suffering under fox influence, and this recently-transformed animal confessed to the spirit-merchant that it was he who had been troubling her. Thereupon the spirit-merchant, who knew the lady in question to be a celebrated beauty, begged his fox friend to secretly introduce him to her. After raising some objections, the fox at length consented, and conducted the spirit-merchant to a cave, where he gave him a suit of serge clothes, which he said had belonged to his late brother, and in which he told him he could easily go. The merchant put them on, and returned home, when, to his great delight, he observed that no one could see him, but that if he changed into his ordinary clothes everybody could see him as before. Accordingly he set off with the fox for his neighbour's house; and, when they arrived, the first thing they beheld was a charm on the wall, like a great wriggling dragon. At this the fox was greatly alarmed, and said, "That scoundrel of a priest! I can't go any farther," He then ran off home, leaving the spirit-merchant to proceed by himself. The latter walked quietly in, to find that the dragon on the wall was a real one, and preparing to fly at him, so he too turned, and ran away as fast as his legs could carry him. The fact was that the family had engaged a priest to drive away the fox influence; and he not being able to go at the moment himself, gave them this charm to stick up on the wall. The following day the priest himself came, and, arranging an altar, proceeded to exorcise the fox. All the villagers crowded round to see, and among others was the spirit-merchant, who, in the middle of the ceremony, suddenly changed colour, and hurried out of the front door; where he fell on the ground in the shape of a fox, having his clothes still hanging about his arms and legs. The bystanders would have killed him on the spot, but his wife begged them to spare him; and the priest let her take the fox home, where in a few days it died.

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<sup>1</sup> In no country in the world is adulteration more extensively practised than in China, the only formal check upon it being a religious one—the dread of punishment in the world below.

<sup>2</sup> The text has here a word (literally, "mud") explained to be the name of a boneless aquatic creature, which on being removed from the water lies motionless like a lump of mud. The common term for a jelly-fish is *shui-mu*, "water-mother."