

Feasting the Ruler of Purgatory

By P'u Sung-ling

At Ching-hai there lived a young man, named Shao, whose family was very poor. On the occasion of his mother completing her cycle, he arranged a quantity of meat-offerings and wine on a table in the court-yard, and proceeded to invoke the Gods in the usual manner; but when he rose from his knees, lo and behold, all the meat and wine had disappeared. His mother thought this was a bad omen, and that she was not destined to enjoy a long life; however, she said nothing on the subject to her son, who was himself quite at a loss to account for what had happened. A short time afterwards the Literary Chancellor arrived; and young Shao, scraping together what funds he could, went off to present himself as a candidate. On the road he met with a man who gave him such a cordial invitation to his house that he willingly accepted; and the stranger led him to a stately mansion, with towers and terraces rising one above the other as far as the eye could reach. In one of the apartments was a king, sitting upon a throne, who received Shao in a very friendly manner; and, after regaling him with an excellent banquet, said, "I have to thank you for the food and drink you gave my servants that day we passed your house." Shao was greatly astonished at this remark, when the King proceeded, "I am the Ruler of Purgatory. Don't you recollect sacrificing on your mother's birthday?" The King then bestowed on Shao a packet of silver, saying, "Pray accept this in return for your kindness." Shao thanked him and retired; and in another moment the palace and its occupants had one and all vanished from his sight, leaving him alone in the midst of some tall trees. On opening his packet he found it to contain five ounces of pure gold; and after defraying the expenses of his examination, half was still left, which he carried home and gave to his mother.