

Mr. Chu, The Considerate Husband

By P'u Sung-ling

At the village of Chu -in Chi-yang, there was a man named Chu, who died at the age of fifty and odd years. His family at once proceeded to put on their mourning robes, when suddenly they heard the dead man cry out. Rushing up to the coffin, they found that he had come to life again; and began, full of joy, to ask him all about it. But the old gentleman replied only to his wife, saying, "When I died I did not expect to come back. However, by the time I had got a few miles on my way, I thought of the poor old body I was leaving behind me, dependent for everything on others, and with no more enjoyment of life. So I made up my mind to return, and take you away with me." The bystanders thought this was only the disconnected talk of a man who had just regained consciousness, and attached no importance to it; but the old man repeated it, and then his wife said, "It's all very well, but you have only just come to life; how can you go and die again directly?" "It is extremely simple," replied her husband; "you go and pack up everything ready." The old lady laughed and did nothing; upon which Mr. Chu urged her again to prepare, and then she left the house. In a short time she returned, and pretended that she had done what he wanted. "Then you had better dress," said he; but Mrs. Chu did not move until he pressed her again and again, after which she did not like to cross him, and by-and-by came out all fully equipped. The other ladies of the family were laughing on the sly, when Mr. Chu laid his head upon the pillow, and told his wife to do likewise. "It's too ridiculous," she was beginning to say, when Mr. Chu banged the bed with his hand, and cried out, "What is there to laugh at in dying?" upon which the various members of the family, seeing the old gentleman was in a rage, begged her to gratify his whim. Mrs. Chu then lay down alongside of her husband, to the infinite amusement of the spectators; but it was soon noticed that the old lady had ceased to smile, and by-and-by her two eyes closed. For a long time not a sound was heard, as if she was fast asleep; and when some of those present approached to touch her, they found she was as cold as ice, and no longer breathing; then, turning to her husband, they perceived that he also had passed away.

This story was fully related to me by a younger sister-in-law of Mr. Chu's, who, in the twenty-first year of the reign K'ang Hsi was employed in the house of a high official named Pi.