Editors note: This novel is divided into two books, of which this anger, and is it likely that you'll quietly look on, while some one comes and compasses my death as well as that of my son? Are you, pray, fearful lest I shouldn't give you any reward?"
Ma, the Taoist matron, greeted this remark with a smile. "You're right enough in what you say," she ventured, "of my being unable to bear the sight of yourself and son receiving insult from a third party; but as for your mention of rewards, why, what's there of yours that I still covet?"

This answer slightly reassured Mrs. Chao's mind. "How is it," she speedily urged, "that an intelligent person like you should have become so dense? If, indeed, the spell prove efficacious, and we exterminate them both, is there any apprehension that this family estate won't be ours? and when that time comes, won't you get all you may wish?"

At this disclosure, Ma, the Taoist matron, lowered her head for a long time. "When everything," she observed, "shall have been settled satisfactorily, and when there'll be, what's more, no proof at all, will you still pay any heed to me?"

"What's there hard about this?" remarked Mrs. Chao. "I've saved several taels from my own pin-money, and have besides a good number of clothes and head-ornaments. So you can first take several of these away with you. And I'll further write an I.O.U., and entrust it to you, and when that time does come, I'll pay you in full."

"That will do!" answered the Taoist matron, her eyes suffused with tears. She looked, in very truth, like a carved wooden image or one fashioned of mud. There she sat straight up to the second watch, even later, when she eventually fell asleep.

The whole night nothing remarkable transpired. The morrow was the 26th day of the fourth moon. Indeed on this day, at one p.m., commenced the season of the 'Sprouting seeds,' and, according to an old custom, on the day on which this feast of 'Sprouting seeds' fell, every one had to lay all kinds of offerings and sacrificial viands on the altar of the god of flowers. Soon after the expiry of this season of 'Sprouting seeds' follows summertide, and us plants in general then wither and the god of flowers resigns his throne, it is compulsory to feast him at some entertainment, previous to his departure.

In the ladies' apartments this custom was observed with still more rigour; and, for this reason, the various inmates of the park of Broad Vista had, without a single exception, got up at an early hour. The young people either twisted flowers and willow twigs in such a way as to represent chairs and horses, or made tufted banners with damask, brocaded gauze and silk, and bound them with variegated threads. These articles of decoration were alike attached on every tree and plant; and throughout the whole expanse of the park, embroidered sashes waved to and fro, and ornamented branches nodded their to put his foot in here."

"I understand," replied Lin Chih-hsiao hurriedly signifying his obedience. Next he uttered several yes's.

"Now," proceeded Chia Chen; "you can go on your way. But how is it, I don't see anything of Jung Erh?" he went on to ask.

This question was barely out of his lips, when he caught sight of Jung Erh running out of the belfry. "Look at him," shouted Chia Chen. "Look at him! I don't feel hot in here, and yet he must go in search of a cool place. Spit

But when I consider the circumstances in which she is placed, for she has certainly had the misfortune of being left, from her very infancy,
without father and mother, the very sight of her is too much for me, and my heart begins to bleed within me."

"Quite so! Quite so!" observed Hsi Jen, clapping her hands, after listening to her throughout. "It isn't strange then if she let me have the ten butterfly knots I asked her to tie for me only after ever so many days, and if she said that they were coarsely done, but that I should make the best of them and use them elsewhere, and that if I wanted any nice ones, I should wait until by and bye when she came to stay here, when she would work some neatly for me. What you've told me now reminds me that, as she had found it difficult to find an excuse when we appealed to her, she must have had to slave away, who knows how much, till the third watch in the middle of the night. What a stupid thing I was! Had I known this sooner, I would never have told her a word about it."

"Last time;" continued Pao-ch'ai, "she told me that when she was at home she had ample to do, that she kept busy as late as the third watch, and that, if she did the slightest stitch of work for any other people, the various ladies, belonging to her family, did not like it."

"But as it happens," explained Hsi Jen, "that mulish-minded and perverse-tempered young master of ours won't allow the evidence of my pious obedience, but no opportunity could I find to perform anything filial. When I had, some time back, to purchase flowers and plants, I succeeded, thanks to your vast influence, venerable senior, in finally making friends with several gardeners and in seeing a good number of gardens. As the other day I unexpectedly came across a white begonia, of a rare species, I exhausted every possible means to get some and managed to obtain just two pots. If you, worthy senior, an remember everything; and, were she nomes five make two taels five, and three times five make fifteen; and adding what was wanted for wines and eatables, the total must have come to something over twenty taels. O-mi-to-fu! why, this heap of money is ample for us country-people to live on through a whole year!"

"I expect you have seen our lady?" P'ing Erh then asked.

"Yes, I have seen her," assented old goody Liu. "She bade us wait." As she spoke, she again looked out of the window to see what the time of the day could be. "It's getting quite late," she afterwards proceeded. "We must be going, or else we mayn't be in time to get out of the city gates; and then we'll be in a nice fix."

"Quite right," Chou Jui's wife observed. "I'll go and see what she's up to for you."

With these words, she straightway left the room. After a long absence, she returned. "Good fortune has, indeed, descended upon you, old dame!" she smiled. "Why, you've won the consideration of those two ladies!"

"What about it?" laughingly inquired P'ing Erh and the others.

"Lady Secunda," Chou Jui's wife explained with a smile, "was with our venerable lady, so I gently whispered to her: 'old goody Liu wishes to go home; it's getting late and she fears she mightn't be in time to go out of the gates!' 'It's such a long way off!' Our lady Secunda rejoined, 'and she had all the trouble and fatigue of carrying that load of things; so if it's too late, why, let her spend the night here and start on the morrow!' Now isn't this having enlisted our mistress' sympathies? But not to speak of this! Our old lady also happened to
overhear what we said, and she inquired: 'who is old goody Liu?' Our lady Secunda forthwith told her all. 'I was just longing,' her venerable ladyship pursued, 'for some one well up in years to have a chat with; ask her in, and let me see her!' So isn't this coming in for consideration, when least unexpected?"

So speaking, she went on to urge old goody Liu to get down and betake herself to the front.

"With a figure like this of mine," old goody Liu demurred, "how could I very well appear before her? My dear sister-in-law, do tell her that I've gone!"

"Get on! Be quick!" P'ing Erh speedily cried. "What does it matter? Our old lady has the highest regard for old people and the greatest pity for the needy! She's not one you could compare with those haughty and overbearing people! But I fancy you're a little too timid, so I'll accompany you as far as there, along with Mrs. Chou."

While tendering her services, she and Chou Jui's wife led off old goody Liu and crossed over to dowager lady Chia's apartments on this side of the mansion. The boy-servants on duty at the second gate stood up when they saw P'ing Erh approach. But two of them also ran up to her, and, keeping close to her heels: "Miss!" they shouted out. "Miss!"

"What have you again got to say?" P'ing Erh asked.

"It's pretty late just now," one of the boys smilingly remarked; "and mother is ill and wants me to go and call the doctor, so I would, dear Miss, like to have half a day's leave; may I?"

"Your doings are really fine!" P'ing Erh exclaimed. "You've agreed among yourselves that each day one of you should apply for furlough; but instead of speaking to your lady, you come and bother me! The other day that Chu Erh went, Mr. Secundus happened not to want him, so I assented, though I also added that I was doing it as a favour; but here you too come to-day!"

"It's quite true that his mother is sick," Chou Jui's wife interceded; "so, Miss, do say yes to him also, and let him go!"

"Be back as soon as it dawns to-morrow!" P'ing Erh enjoined. "Wait, I've got something for you to do, for you'll again sleep away, and only turn up after the sun has blazed away on your buttocks. As you go now, give a message to Wang Erh! Tell him that our lady bade you warn him that if he does not hand over the balance of the interest due by to-morrow, she won't have anything to do with him. So he'd better let her have it to meet her requirements and finish."

The servant-lad felt in high glee and exuberant spirits. Expressing his obedience, he walked off.

P'ing Erh and her companions repaired then to old lady Chia's apartments. Here the various young ladies from the Garden of Broad Vista were at the time assembled paying their respects to their grandmother. As soon as old goody Liu put her foot inside, she saw the room thronged with girls (as seductive) as twigs of flowers waving to and fro, and so richly dressed, as to look enveloped in pearls, and encircled with king-fisher ornaments. But she could not make out who they all were. Her gaze was, however, attracted by an old dame, reclining alone on a divan. Behind her sat a girl, a regular beauty, clothed in gauze, engaged in
patting her legs. Lady Feng was on her feet in the act of cracking some joke.

Old goody Liu readily concluded that it must be dowager lady Chia, so promptly pressing forward, she put on a forced smile and made several curtseys. "My obeisance to you, star of longevity!" she said.

Old lady Chia hastened, on her part, to bow and to inquire after her health. Then she asked Chou Jui's wife to bring a chair over for her to take a seat. But Pan Erh was still so very shy that he did not know how to make his obeisance.

"Venerable relative," dowager lady Chia asked, "how old are you this year?"

Old goody Liu immediately rose to her feet. "I'm seventy-five this year," she rejoined.

"So old and yet so hardy!" Old lady Chia remarked, addressing herself to the party. "Why she's older than myself by several years! When I reach that age, I wonder whether I shall be able to move!"

"We people have," old goody Liu smilingly resumed, "to put up, from the moment we come into the world, with ever so many hardships; while your venerable ladyship enjoys, from your birth, every kind of blessing! Were we also like this, there'd be no one to carry on that farming work."

"Are your eyes and teeth still good?" Dowager lady Chia went on to inquire.

"They're both still all right," old goody Liu replied. "The left molars, however, have got rather shaky this year."

"As for me, I'm quite an old fossil," dowager lady Chia observed. "I'm no good whatever. My eyesight is dim; my ears are deaf, my memory is gone. I can't even recollect any of you, old family connections. When therefore any of our relations come on a visit, I don't see them for fear lest I should be ridiculed. All I can manage to eat are a few mouthfuls of anything tender enough for my teeth; and I can just dose a bit or, when I feel in low spirits, I distract myself a little with these grandsons and grand-daughters of mine; that's all I'm good for."

"This is indeed your venerable ladyship's good fortune!" old goody Liu smiled. "We couldn't enjoy anything of the kind, much though we may long for it."

"What good fortune!" dowager lady Chia exclaimed. "I'm a useless old thing, no more."

This remark made every one explode into laughter.

Dowager lady Chia also laughed. "I heard our lady Feng say a little while back," she added, "that you had brought a lot of squash and vegetables, and I told her to put them by at once. I had just been craving to have newly-grown melons and vegetables; but those one buys outside are not as luscious as those produced in your farms."

"This is the rustic notion," old goody Liu laughed, "to entirely subsist on fresh things! Yet, we long to have fish and meat for our fare, but we can't afford it."
"I've found a relative in you to-day," dowager lady Chia said, "so you shouldn't go empty-handed! If you don't despise this place as too mean, do stay a day or two before you start! We've also got a garden here; and this garden produces fruits too; you can taste some of them to-morrow and take a few along with you home, in order to make it look like a visit to relatives."

When lady Feng saw how delighted old lady Chia was with the prospects of the old dame's stay, she too lost no time in doing all she could to induce her to remain. "Our place here," she urged, "isn't it?" Yuan Yang laughingly inquired. "But, after all, what kind of wood is this cup made of?"

"It isn't to be wondered at," old goody Liu smiled, "that you can't make it out Miss! How ever could you people, who live inside golden doors and embroidered apartments, know anything of wood! We have the whole day long the trees in the woods as our neighbours. When weary, we use them as our pillows and go to sleep on them. When exhausted, we sit with our backs leaning against them. When, in years of dearth, we feel the pangs of hunger, we also feed on them. Day after day, we see them with our eyes; day after day we listen to them with our ears; day after day, we talk of them with our mouths. I am therefore well able to tell whether any wood be good or bad, genuine or false. Do let me then see what it is!"

As she spoke, she intently scanned the cup for a considerable length of time. "Such a family as yours," she then said, "could on no account own mean things! Any wood that is easily procured, wouldn't even find a place in here. This feels so heavy, as I weigh it in my hands, that if it isn't aspen, it must, for a certainty, be yellow cedar."

Her rejoinder amused every one in the room. But they then perceived an old matron come up. After asking permission of dowager lady Chia to speak: "The young ladies," she said, "have got to the Lotus Fragrance pavilion, and they request your commands, as to whether they should start with the rehearsal at onchien-erh has caught a chill and is laid up at home with fever."

Goody Liu, at these words, speedily heaved a sigh. "Her venerable ladyship," she said, "is a person advanced in years and not accustomed to any intense fatigue!"

"She has never before been in such high spirits as yesterday!" lady Feng observed. "As you were here, so anxious was she to let you see everything, that she trudged over the greater part of the garden. And Ta Chieh-erh was given a piece of cake by Madame Wang, when I came to hunt you up, and she ate it, who knows in what windy place, and began at once to get feverish."

"Ta Chieh-erh," goody Liu remarked, "hasn't, I fancy, often put her foot into the garden; and young people like her mustn't really go into strange places, for she's not like our children, who are able to use their legs! In what graveyards don't they ramble about! A puff of wind may, on the one hand, have struck her, it's not at all unlikely; or being, on the other, so chaste in body, and her eyes also so pure she may, it is to be feared, have come across some spirit or other. I can't help thinking therefore that you should consult some book of exorcisms on her behalf; for mind she may have run up against some evil influence."

This remark suggested the idea to lady Feng. There and then she called
P'ing Erh to fetch the 'Jade Box Record.' When brought, she desired Ts'ai Ming to look over it for her. Ts'ai Ming turned over the pages for a time, and then read: 'Those who fall ill on the 25th day of the 8th moon have come across, in a due westerly quarter, of some flower spirit; they feel heavy, with no inclination for drink or food. Take seven sheets of white paper money, and, advancing forty steps due west, burn them and exorcise the spirit; recovery will follow at once!'"

"There's really no mistake about that!" lady Feng smiled. "Are there not flower spirits in the garden? But what I dread is that our old lady mayn't have come across one too."

Saying this, she bade a servant purchase two lots of paper money. On their arrival, she sent for two proper persons, the one to exorcise the spirits for dowager lady Chia and the other to expel them from Ta Chieh-erh; and these observances over, Ta Chieh-erh did, in effect, drop quietly to sleep.

"It's verily people advanced in years like you," lady Feng smilingly exclaimed; "who've gone through many experiences! This Ta Chieh-erh of mine has often been inclined to ail, and it has quite puzzled me to make out how and why it was."

"This isn't anything out of the way!" goody Liu said. "Affluent and honourable people bring up their offspring to be delicate. So naturally, they are not able to endure the least hardship! Moreover, that young child of yours is so excessively cuddled that she can't stand it. Were you, therefore, my lady, to pamper her less from henceforth, she'll steadily improve."

"There's plenty of reason in that too!" lady Feng observed. "But it strikes me that she hasn't as yet got a name, so do give her one in order that she may borrow your long life! In the next place, you are country-people, and are, after all,--I don't expect you'll get angry when I mention it,--somewhat in poor circumstances. Were a person then as poor as you are to suggest a name for her, you may, I trust, have the effect of counteracting this influence for her."

When old goody Liu heard this proposal, she immediately gave herself up to reflection. "I've no idea of the date of her birth!" she smiled after a time.

"She really was born on no propitious date!" lady Feng replied. "By a remarkable coincidence she came into the world on the seventh day of the seventh moon!"

"This is certainly splendid!" old goody Lin laughed with alacrity. "You had better name her at once Ch'iao Chieh-erh (seventh moon and ingenuity). This is what's generally called: combating poison by poison and attacking fire by fire. If therefore your ladyship fixes upon this name of mine, she will, for a surety, attain a long life of a hundred years; and when she by and bye grows up to be a big girl, every one of you will be able to have a home and get a patrimony! Or if, at any time, there occur anything inauspicious and she has to face adversity, why it will inevitably change into prosperity; and if she comes across any evil fortune, it will turn into good fortune. And this will all arise from this one word, 'Ch'iao' (ingenuity.)"

Lady Feng was, needless to say, delighted by what she heard, and she lost no time in expressing her gratitude. "If she be preserved," she exclaimed, "to accomplish your good wishes, it will be such a good
thing!" Saying this, she called P'ing Erh. "As you and I are bound to be busy to-morrow," she said, "and won't, I fear, be able to spare any leisure moments, you'd better, if you have nothing to do now, get ready the presents for old goody Liu, so as to enable her to conveniently start at early dawn to-morrow."

"How could I presume to be the cause of such reckless waste?" goody Liu interposed. "I've already disturbed your peace and quiet for several days, and were I to also take your things away, I'd feel still less at ease in my heart!"

"There's nothing much!" lady Feng protested. "They consist simply of a few ordinary things. But, whether good or bad, do take them along, so that the people in the same street as yourselves and your next-door neighbours may have some little excitement, and that it may look as if you had been on a visit to the city!"

But while she endeavoured to induce the old dame to accept the presents, she noticed P'ing Erh approach. "Goody Liu," she remarked, "come over here and see!"

Old goody Liu precipitately followed P'ing Erh into the room on the off side. Here she saw the stove-couch half full with piles of things. P'ing Erh took these up one by one and let her have a look at them. "This," she explained, "is a roll of that green gauze you asked for yesterday. Besides this, our lady Feng gives you a piece of thick bluish-white gauze to use as lining. These are two pieces of pongee, which will do for wadded coats and jupes as well. In this bundle are two pieces of silk, for you to make clothes with, for the end of the year. This is a box containing various home-made cakes. Among them are some you've already tasted and some you haven't; so take them along, and put them in plates and invite your friends; they'll be ever so much better than any that you could buy! These two bags are those in which the melons and fruit were packed up yesterday. This one has been filled with two bushels of fine rice, grown in the imperial fields, the like of which for congee, it would not be easy to get. This one contains fruits from our garden and all kinds of dry fruits. In this packet, you'll find eight taels of silver. These various things are presents for you from our Mistress Secunda. Each of these packets contains fifty taels so that there are in all a hundred taels; they're the gift of Madame Wang. She bids you accept them so as to either carry on any trade, for which no big capital is required, or to purchase several acres of land, in order that you mayn't henceforward have any more to beg favours of relatives, or to depend upon friends." Continuing, she added smilingly, in a low tone of voice, "These two jackets, two jupes, four head bands, and a bundle of velvet and thread are what I give you, worthy dame, as my share. These clothes are, it is true, the worse for use, yet I haven't worn them very much. But if you disdain them, I won't be so presuming as to say anything."

After mention of each article by P'ing Erh, goody Liu muttered the name of Buddha, so already she had repeated Buddha's name several thousands of times. But when she saw the heap of presents which P'ing Erh too bestowed on her, and the little ostentation with which she did it, she promptly smiled. "Miss!" she said, "what are you saying? Could I ever disdain such nice gifts as these! Had I even the money, I couldn't buy them anywhere. The only thing is that I feel overpowered with shame. If I keep. Secundus himself arrived only a few minutes back," the maid began. "The moment, however, he came, he opened a bog, and, taking two pieces of silver, two hairpins, and a couple of rolls of silk, he bade me stealthily take them to Pao Erh's wife and tell her to come in. As soon
as she put the things away, she hurried to our house, and Master Secundus ordered me to keep an eye on your ladyship; but of what happened after that, I've no idea whatever."

When these disclosures fell on lady Feng's ears, she flew into such a rage that her whole person felt quite weak; and, rising immediately, she straightway repaired home. The instant she reached the gate of the courtyard, she espied a waiting-maid peep out of the entrance. Seeing lady Feng, she too drew in her head, and tried at once to effect her escape. But lady Feng called her by name, and made her stand still. This girl had ever been very sharp, so when she realised that she could not manage to beat a retreat, she went so far as to run out to her. "I was just going to tell your ladyship," she smiled, "and here you come! What a strange coincidence!"

"Tell me what?" lady Feng exclaimed.

"That Mr. Secundus is at home," the girl replied, "and has done so and so." She then recounted to her all the incidents recorded a few minutes back.

"Ts'ui!" ejaculated lady Feng. "What were you up to before? Now, that I've seen you, you come and try to clear yourself!"

As she spoke, she raised her arm and administered the maid a slap, which upset her equilibrium. So with hurried step, she betook herself away. Lady Feng then drew near the window. Lending an ear to what was going on inside, she heard some one in the room laughingly observe: "When that queen-of-hell sort of wife of yours dies, it will be a good riddance!"

"When she's gone," Chia Lien rejoined, "and I marry another, the like of her, what will I again do?"

"When she's dead and gone," the woman resumed, "just raise P'ing Erh to the rank of primary wife. I think she'll turn out considerably better than she has."

"At present," Chia Lien put in, "she won't even let me enjoy P'ing Erh's society! P'ing Erh herself is full of displeasure; yet she dares not speak. How is it that it has been my fate to bring upon myself the influence of this evil star?"

Lady Feng overheard these criticisms and flew into a fit of anger, which made her tremble violently. When she, however, also caught the praise heaped by both of them upon P'ing Erh, she harboured the suspicion that P'ing Erh too must, as a matter of course, have all along employed the sly resentful language against her. And, as the wine bubbled up more and more into her head, she did not so much as give the matter a second thought, but, twisting round, she first and foremost gave P'ing Erh a couple of whacks, and, with one kick, she banged the door open, and walked in. Then, without allowing her any time to give any explanation in her own defence, she clutched Pao Erh's wife, and, tearing her about, she belaboured her with blows. But the dread lest Chia Lien should slip out of the room, induced her to post herself in such a way as to obstruct the doorway. "What a fine wench!" she shouted out abusingly. "You make a paramour of your mistress' husband, and then you wish to compass your master's wife's death, for P'ing Erh to transfer her quarters in here! You base hirelings! You're all of the same stamp, thoroughly jealous of me; you try to cajole me by your outward display!"

While abusing them, she once more laid hold of P'ing Erh and beat her
several times. P'ing Erh was pummelled away till her heart thrilled with
a sense of injury, but she had nowhere to go, and breathe her woes. Such
resentment overpowered her feelings that she sobbed without a sign of a
tear. "You people," she railingly shouted, "go and do a lot of shameful
things, and then you also deliberately involve me; but why?"

So shouting, she too clutched Pao Erh's wife and began to assail her.
Chia Lien had freely primed himself with wine, so, on his return home,
he was in such exuberance of spirits that he observed no secrecy in his
doings. The moment, however, he perceived lady Feng appear on the scene,
got to his wits' end. Yet when he saw P'ing Erh also start a rumpus,
the liquor he had had aroused his ire. The sight of the assault
committed by lady Feng on Pao Erh's wife had already incensed him and
put him to shame, but he had not been able with any consistency to
interfere; but the instant he espied P'ing Erh herself lay hands on her,
vehemently jumped forward and gave her a kick. "What a vixen!" he
cried. "Are you likewise going to start knocking people about?"

P'ing Erh was of a timid disposition. At once, therefore, she withheld
her hands, and melted into tears. "Why do you implicate me," she said,
"in things you say behind my back?"

When lady Feng descried in what fear and dread P'ing Erh was of Chia
Lien, she lost more than ever control over her temper, and, starting
again in pursuit of her, she struck P'ing Erh, while urging her to go
for Pao Erh's wife.

P'ing Erh was driven to exasperation; and forthwith rushing out of the
apartment, she went in search of a knife to commit suicide with. But the
company of old matrons, who stood outside, hastened to place impediments
in her way, and to argue with her.

Lady Feng, meanwhile, realised that P'ing Erh had gone to take her life,
and rolling, head foremost, into Chia Lien's embrace, "You put your
heads together to do me harm," she said, "and, when I overhear your
designs, you people conspire to frighten me! But strangle me and have
done."

Chia Lien was driven to despair; to such a degree that unsheathing a
sword suspended on the wall, "There's no need for any one of you to
commit suicide!" he screamed. "I too am thoroughly exasperated, so I'll
kill the whole lot of you and pay the penalty with my own life! We'll
all then be free from further trouble!"

The bustle had just reached a climax beyond the chance of a settlement,
when they perceived Mrs. Yu and a crowd of inmates make their appearance
in the room. "What's the matter?" they asked. "There was nothing up just
now, so why is all this row for?"

At the sight of the new arrivals, Chia Lien more than ever made the
three parts of intoxication, under which he laboured, an excuse to
assume an air calculated to intimidate them, and to pretend, in order to
further his own ends, that he was bent upon despatching lady Feng.

But lady Feng, upon seeing her relatives appear, got into a mood less
pervasive than the one she had been in previous to their arrival; and,
leaving the whole company of them, she scampered, all in tears, over to
the off side, into dowager lady Chia's quarters.

By this time, the play was over. Lady Feng rushed consequently into the
old lady's presence and fell into her lap. "Venerable ancestor! help
"What's up?" precipitately inquired dowager lady Chia, Mesdames Hsing and Wang and the rest.

"I was just going to my rooms to change my dress," lady Feng wept, "when I unexpectedly found Mr. Chia Lien at home, talking with some one. Fancying that visitors had come, I was quite taken aback, and not presuming to enter, I remained outside the window and listened. It turned out, in fact, to be Pao Erh's wife holding council with him. She said that I was dreadful, and that she meant to poison me so as to get me out of the way and enable P'ing Erh to be promoted to be first wife. At this, I lost my temper. But not venturing, none the less, to have a row with him, I simply gave P'ing Erh two slaps; and then I asked him why he wished to do me harm. But so stricken did he get with shame that he tried there and then to despatch me."

Dowager lady Chia treated every word that fell on her ear as truth. "Dreadful!" she ejaculated. "Bring here at once that low-bred offspring!"

Barely was, however, this exclamation out of her lips, than they perceived Chia Lien, a sword in hand, enter in pursuit of his wife, followees that you beat your wife and belabour the inmates of your quarters? You've nevertheless had the good fortune of starting in life as the scion of a great family; and do you, with eyes wide open, bring disgrace upon your own head? If you have any regard for me, well, then get up and I'll spare you! And if you make your apologies in a proper manner to your wife and take her home, I'll be satisfied. But if you don't, just you clear out of this, for I won't even presume to have any of your genuflexions!"

Chia Lien took to heart the injunctions that fell on his ear. Espying besides lady Feng standing opposite to him in undress, her eyes swollen from crying, and her face quite sallow, without cosmetic or powder, he thought her more lovable and charming than ever. "Wouldn't it be well," he therefore mused, "that I should make amends, so that she and I may be on friendly terms again and that I should win the good pleasure of my old ancestor?"

At the conclusion of his reflections, he forthwith put on a smile. "After your advice, venerable senior," he said, "I couldn't be so bold as not to accede to your wishes! But this is shewing her more indulgence than ever!"

"What nonsense!" exclaimed dowager lady Chia laughingly. "I am well aware that with her extreme decorum she couldn't hurt any one's susceptibilities. But should she, in the future, wrong you in any way, I shall, of course, take the law into my own hands and bid you make her submit to your authority and finish."

Chia Lien, at this assurance, crawled up and made a bow to lady Feng. "It was really my fault, so don't be angry, lady Secunda," he said.

Every one in the room laughed.

"Now, my girl Feng," lady Chia laughingly observed, "you are not to lose your temper; for if you do, I'll lose mine too!"

Continuing, she directed a servant to go and call P'ing Erh; and, on her arrival, she advised lady Feng and Chia Lien to do all they could to
reconcile her. At the sight of P'ing Erh, Chia Lien showed less regard than ever for the saying that 'a primary wife differs from a secondary wife,' and the instant he heard old lady Chia's exhortation he drew near her. "The injuries," he remarked, "to which you were subjected yesterday, Miss, were entirely due to my shortcoming. If your lady hurt your feelings, it was likewise all through me that the thing began. So I express my regret; but, besides this, I tender my apologies as well on behalf of your mistress."

Saying this, he made another bow. This evoked a smile from dowager lady Chia. Lady Feng, however, also laughed. Their old ancestor then desired lady Feng to come and console P'ing Erh, but P'ing Erh hastily advanced and knocked her head before lady Feng. "I do deserve death," she urged, "for provoking your ladyship to wrath on the day of your birthday!"

Lady Feng was at the moment pricked by shame and remorse for having so freely indulged in wine the previous day as to completely have lost sight of longstanding friendships, and for allowing her temper to so thoroughly flare up as to lend a patient ear to the gossip of outsiders, and unjustly put P'ing Erh out of countenance, so when she contrariwise now saw her make advances, she felt both abashed and grieved, and, promptly extending her arms, she dragged her up and gave way to tears.

"I've waited upon your ladyship for all these years," P'ing Erh pleaded, "and you've never so much as given me a single fillip; and yet, you beat me yesterday. But I don't bear you any grudge, my lady, for it was that wench, who was at the bottom of it all. Nor do I wonder that your ladyship lost control over your temper."

As she spoke, tears trickled down her cheeks too.

"Escort those three home!" dowager lady Chia shouted to the servants. "If any one of them makes the least allusion to the subject, come at once and tell me of it; for without any regard as to who it may be, I shall take my staff and give him or her a sound flogging."

The trio then prostrated themselves before dowager lady Chia and the two ladies, Mesdames Hsing and Wang. And assenting to her old mistress' injunctions, an old nurse accompanied the three inmates to their quarters.

When they got home, lady Feng assured herself that there was no one about. "How is it," she next asked, "that I'm like a queen of hell, or like a 'Yakcha' demon? That courtesan swore at me and wished me dead; and did you too help her to curse me? If I'm not nice a thousand days, why, I must be nice on some one day! But if, poor me, I'm so bad as not even to compare with a disorderly woman, how can I have the face to come and spend my life with you here?"

So speaking, she melted into tears.

"Aren't you yet gratified?" cried Chia Lien. "Just reflect carefully who was most to blame yesterday! And yet, in the presence of so many people, it was I who, after all, fell to-day on my knees and made apologies as well. You came in for plenty of credit, and do you now go on jabber, jabber? Can it be that you'd like to make me kneel at your feet before you let matters rest? If you try and play the bully beyond bounds, it won't be a good thing for you!"

To these arguments, lady Feng could find no suitable response.
P'ing Erh then blurted out laughing.

"She's all right again!" Chia Lien smiled. "But I'm really quite at a loss what to do with this one."

These words were still on his lips, when they saw a married woman walk in. "Pao Erh's wife has committed suicide by hanging herself," she said.

This announcement plunged both Chia Lien and lady Feng into great consternation. Lady Feng, however, lost no time in putting away every sign of excitement. "Dead, eh? What a riddance!" she shouted instead. "What's the use of making such a fuss about a mere trifle?"

But not long elapsed before she perceived Lin Chih-hsiao's wife make her appearance in the room. "Pao Erh's wife has hung herself," she whispered to lady Feng in a low tone of voice, "and her mother's relatives want to take legal proceedings."

Lady Feng gave a sardonic smile. "That's all right!" she observed. "I myself was just thinking about lodging a complaint!"

"I and the others tried to dissuade them," Lin Chih-hsiao's wife continued. "And by having recourse to intimidation as well as to promises of money, they, at last, agreed to our terms."

"I haven't got a cash," lady Feng replied. "Had I even any money, I wouldn't let them have it; so just let them go and lodge any charge they fancy. You needn't either dissuade them or intimidate them. Let them go and complain as much as they like. But if they fail to establish a case against me, they'll, after all, be punished for trying to make the corpse the means of extorting money out of me!"

Lin Chih-hsiao's wife was in a dilemma, when she espied Chia Lien wink at her. Comprehending his purpose, she readily quitted the apartment and waited for him outside.

"I'll go out and see what they're up to!" Chia Lien remarked.

"Mind, I won't have you give them any money!" shouted lady Feng.

Chia Lien straightaway made his exit. He came and held consultation with Lin Chih-hsiao, and then directed the servants to go and use some fair means, others harsh. The matter was, however, not brought to any satisfactory arrangement until he engaged to pay two hundred taels for burial expenses. But so apprehensive was Chia Lien lest something might occur to make the relatives change their ideas, that he also despatched a messenger to lay the affair before Wang Tzu-t'eng, who bade a few constables, coroners and other official servants come and help him to effect the necessary preparations for the funeral. The parties concerned did not venture, when they saw the precautions he had adopted, to raise any objections, disposed though they may have been to try and bring forward other arguments. Their sole alternative therefore was to suppress their resentment, to refrain from further importunities and let the matter drop into oblivion.

Chia Lien then impressed upon Lin Chih-hsiao to insert the two hundred taels in the accounts for the curr the glue, whose property is mainly to coagulate, cannot be moistened, so I feared that, were I to have gone on with the painting, it wouldn't be worth looking at; and I therefore put it away."
"I must have it by the close of the year," dowager lady Chia laughed, "so don't idle your time away. Produce it at once and go on painting for me, as quick as you can."

But scarcely had she concluded her remark, than she unexpectedly perceived lady Feng arrive, smirking and laughing, with a purple pelisse, lined with deer fur, thrown over her shoulders. "Venerable senior!" she shouted, "You don't even so much as let any one know to-day, but sneak over stealthily. I've had a good hunt for you!"

When old lady Chia saw her join them, she felt filled with delight. "I was afraid," she rejoined, "that you'd be feeling cold. That's why, I didn't allow any one to tell you. You're really as sharp as a spirit to have, at last, been able to trace my whereabouts! But according to strict etiquette, you shouldn't show filial piety to such a degree!"

"Is it out of any idea of filial piety that I came after you? Not at all!" lady Feng added with a laugh. "But when I got to your place, worthy senior, I found everything so quiet that not even the caw of a crow could be heard, and when I asked the young maids where you'd gone, they wouldn't let me come and search in the garden. So I began to give way to surmises. Suddenly alas lying in bed dangerously ill, and that she was so longing to see her daughter that he had come to beg for the favour of taking Hsi Jen home on a visit. As soon as Madame Wang heard the news, she dilated for a while upon people's mothers and daughters, and of course she did not withhold her consent. Sending therefore at the same time for lady Feng, she communicated the tidings to her, and enjoined her to deliberate, and take suitable action.

Lady Feng signified her willingness to do what was necessary, and, returning to her quarters, she there and then commissioned Chou Jui's wife to go and break the news to Hsi Jen. "Send also," she went on to direct Mrs. Chou, "for one of the married-women, who are in attendance when we go out-of-doors, and let you two, together with a couple of young maids, follow Hsi Jen home. But despatch four cart attendants, well up in years, to look everywhere for a spacious curricle for you as well as her, and a small carriage for the maids."

"All right!" acquiesced Chou Jui's wife. But just as she was about to start, lady Feng continued her injunctions. "Hsi Jen," she added; "is a person not fond of any fuss, so tell her that it's I who have given the orders; and impress upon her that she must put on several nice, coloured clothes, and pack up a large valise full of wearing apparel. Her valise, must be a handsome one; and she must take a decent hand-stove. Bid her too firs every kind of happiness and good healteach kind,

he told Chia Jung to have them taken to the Jung mansion. After this, he himself kept what was required for his own use at home; and then allotting the rest, with due compliance to gradation, he had share after share piled up at the foot of the moon-shaped platform, and sending servants to summon the young men of the clan, he distributed them among them.

In quick succession, numerous contributions for the ancestral sacrifices were likewise sent from the Jung mansion; also presents for Chia Chen. Chia Chen inspected the things, and having them removed, he completed preparing the sacrificial utensils. Then putting on a pair of slip-shod shoes and throwing over his shoulders a long pelisse with 'She-li-sun' fur, he bade the servants spread a large wolf-skin rug in a sunny place on the stone steps below the pillars of the pavilion, and with his back to the warm sun, he leisurely watched the young people come and receive
the new year gifts. Perceiving that Chia Ch'in had also come to fetch his share, Chia Chen called him over. "How is it that you've come too?" he asked. "Who told you to come?"

Chia Ch'in respectfully dropped his arms against his sides. "I heard," he replied, "that you, senior Sir, had sent for us to appear before you here and receive our presents; so I didn't wait for the servants to go and tell me, but came straightway."

"These things," Chia Chen added, "are intended for distribution among all those uncles and cousins who have nothing to do and who enjoy no source of income. Those two years you had no work, I gave you plenty of things too. But you're entrusted at present with some charge in the other mansion, and you exercise in the family temples control over the bonzes and taoist priests, so that you as well derive every month your share of an allowance. Irrespective of that, the allowances and money of the Buddhist priests pass through your hands. And do you still come to fetch things of this kind? You're far too greedy. Just you look at the fineries you wear. Why, they look like the habiliments of one who has money to spend, of a regular man of business. You said some time back that you had nothing which could bring you in any money, but how is it that you've got none again now? You really don't look as if you were in the same plight that you were in once upon a time."

"I have in my home a goodly number of inmates," Chia Ch'in explained, "so my expenses are great."

Chia Chen gave a saturnine laugh. "Are you trying again to excuse yourself with me?" he cried. "Do you flatter yourself that I have no idea of your doings in the family temples? When you get there, you, of course, play the grand personnage and no one has the courage to run counter to your wishes. Then you've also got the handling of money. Besides you're far away from us, so you're arrogant and audacious. Night after night, you get bad characters together; you gamble for money; and you keep women and young boys. And though you now fling away money with such a high hand, do you still presume to come and receive gifts? But as you can't manage to filch anything to take along with you, it will do you good to get beans, with the pole used for carrying water. Wait until the new year is over, and then I'll certainly report you to your uncle Secundus."

Chia Ch'in got crimson in the face, and did not venture to utter a single word by way of extenuation. A servant, however, then announced that the Prince from the Pei mansion had sent a pair of scrolls and a purse.

At this announcement, Chia Chen immediately told Chia Jung to go out and entertain the messengers. "And just say," he added, "that I'm not at home."

Chia Jung went on his way. Chia Chen, meanwhile, dismissed Chia Ch'in; and, seeing the things taken away, he returned to his quarters and finished his evening meal with Mrs. Yu. But nothing of any note occurred during that night.

The next day, he had, needless to say, still more things to give his mind to. Soon arrived the twenty ninth day of the twelfth moon, and everything was in perfect readiness. In the two mansions alike, the gate guardian gods and scrolls were renovated. The hanging tablets were newly varnished. The peach charms glistened like new. In the Ning Kuo mansion, every principal door, starting from the main entrance, the ceremonial
gates, the doors of the large pavilions, of the winter apartments, and
inner pavilions, the inner three gates, the inner ceremonial gates and
the inner boundary gates, straight up to the doors of the main halls,
was flung wide open. At the bottom of the steps, were placed on either
side large and lofty vermilion candles, of uniform colour; which when
lit presented the appearance of a pair of golden dragons.

On the morrow, dowager lady Chia and those with any official status,
donned the court dress consistent with their grade, and taking first and
foremost a retinue of inmates with them, they entered the palace in
eight bearer state chairs, and presented their congratulations. After
acquitting themselves of the ceremonial rites, and partaking of a
banquet, they betook themselves back, and alighted from their chairs on
their arrival at the winter hall of the Ning mansion. The young men, who
had not followed the party to court, waited, arranged in their proper
order, in front of the entrance the King mansion, and subsequently led
the way into the ancestral temple.

But to return to Pao-ch'in. This was the first occasion, on which she
put her foot inside to look at the inner precincts of the Chia ancestral
temple, and as she did so, she scrutinized with minute attention all the
details that met her gaze in the halls dedicated to their forefathers.
These consisted, in fact, of a distinct courtyard on the west side of
the Ning mansion. Within the balustrade, painted black, stood five
apartments. Over the main entrance to these was suspended a flat tablet
with the inscription in four characters: 'Ancestral hall of the Chia
family.' On the side of these was recorded the fact that it had been the
handiwork of Wang Hsi-feng, specially promoted to the rank of Grand
Tutor of the Heir Apparent, and formerly Chancellor of the Imperial
Academy. On either side, was one of a pair of scrolls, bearing the
motto:

Besmear the earth with your liver and brains, all ye people, out of
gratitude for the bounty of (the Emperor's) protection!
The reputation (of the Chia family) reaches the very skies. Hundred
generations rejoice in the splendour of the sacrifices accorded
them.

This too had been executed by Wang, the Grand Tutor.

As soon as the court was entered, a raised road was reached, paved with
white marble, on both sides of which were planted deep green fir trees,
and kingfisher-green cypress trees. On the moon-shaped platform were
laid out antiquities, tripods, libation-vases, and other similar
articles. In front of the antechamber was hung a gold-coloured flat
tablet, with nine dragons, and the device:

Like a dazzling star is the statesman, who assists the Emperor.

This was the autograph of a former Emperor.

On both sides figured a pair of antithetical scrolls, with the motto:

Their honours equal the sun and moon in lustre.
Their fame is without bounds. It descends to their sons and grandsons.

These lines were likewise from the imperial pencil. Over the five-roomed
main hall was suspended a tablet, inlaid with green, representing
wriggling dragons. The sentiments consisted of:

Mindful of the remotest and heedful of the most distant ancestors.
A pair of antithetical scrolls was hung on the sides; on which was written:

After their death, their sons and grandsons enjoy their beneficent virtues.

Up to the very present the masses think of the Jung and Ning families.

Both these mottoes owed their origin to the imperial pencil.

Inside, lanterns and candles burnt with resplendent brightness. Embroidered curtains and decorated screens were hung in such profusion that though a large number of ancestral tablets were placed about in a clepsydra. Or quick, as when beans are being sown. Or with the velocity of the pace of a scared horse, or that of the flash of a swift lightning. The sound of the drum came to a standstill abruptly. The twig of plum blossom had just reached old lady Chia, when by a strange coincidence, the rattle ceased. Every one blurted out into a boisterous fit of laughter. Chia Jung hastily approached and filled a cup. "It's only natural," they laughingly cried, "that you venerable senior, should be the first to get exhilarated; for then, thanks to you, we shall also come in for some measure of good cheer."

"To gulp down this wine is an easy job," dowager lady smiled, "but to crack jokes is somewhat difficult."

"Your jokes, dear ancestor, are even Wittier than those of lady Feng," the party shouted, "so favour us with one, and let's have a laugh!"

"I've nothing out of the way to evoke laughter with," old lady Chia smilingly answered. "Yet all that remains for me to do is to thicken the skin of my antiquated phiz and come out with some joke. In a certain family," she consequently went on to narrate, "there were ten sons; these married ten wives. The tenth of these wives was, however, so intelligent, sharp, quick of mind, and glib of tongue, that her father and mother-in-law loved her best of all, and maintained from morning to night that the other nine were not filial. These nine felt much aggrieved and they accordingly took counsel together. 'We nine,' they said, 'are filial enough at heart; the only thing is that that shrew has the gift of the gab. That's why our father and mother-in-law think her so perfect. But to whom can we go and confide our grievance?' One of them was struck with an idea. 'Let's go to-morrow,' she proposed, 'to the temple of the King of Hell and burn incense. We can then tell the King our grudge and ask him how it was that, when he bade us receive life and become human beings, he only conferred a glib tongue on that vixen and that we were only allotted such blunt mouths?' The eight listened to her plan, and were quite enraptured with it. 'This proposal is faultless!' they assented. On the next day, they sped in a body to the temple of the God of Hell, and after burning incense, the nine sisters-in-law slept under the altar, on which their offerings were laid. Their nine spirits waited with the special purpose of seeing the carriage of the King of Hell arrive; but they waited and waited, and yet he did not come. They were just giving way to despair when they espied Sun Hsing-che, (the god of monkeys), advancing on a rolling cloud. He espied the nine spirits, and felt inclined to take a golden rod and beat them. The nine spirits were plunged in terror. Hastily they fell on their knees, and pleaded for mercy."

'What are you up to?' Sun Hsing-che inquired."

"The nine women, with alacrity, told him all."
"After Sun Ch'un and Li Wan) spent their whole days in the hall, Pao-ch'ai tarried all day in the drawing-rooms, to keep an eye over what was going on; and they only betook themselves back to their quarters after Madame Wang's return. Of a night, they whiled away their leisure hours by doing needlework; but they would, previous to retiring to sleep, get into their chairs, and, taking along with them the servants, whose duty it was to be on night watch in the garden, and other domestics as well, they visited each place on their round. Such was the control exercised by these three inmates that signs were not wanting to prove that greater severity was observed than in the days when the management devolved on lady Feng. To this reason must be assigned the fact that all the servants attached inside as well as outside cherished a secret grudge against them. "No sooner," they insinuated, "has one patrolling ogre come than they add three more cerberean sort of spring josses so that even at night we've got less time than ever to sip a cup of wine and indulge in a romp!"

On the day that Madame Wang was going to a banquet at the mansion of the Marquis of Chin Hsiang, Li Wan and T'an Ch'un arranged their coiffure and performed their ablutions at an early hour; and after waiting upon her until she went out of doors, they repaired into the hall and installed themselves in their seats. But just as they were sipping their tea, they espied Wu Hsin-teng's wife walk in. "Mrs. Chao's brother, Chao Kuo-chi," she observed, "departed this life yesterday; the tidings have already been reported to our old mistress and our lady, who said that it was all right, and bade me tell you, Miss."

At the close of this announcement, she respectfully dropped her arms against her body, and stood aloof without adding another word. The servants, who came at this season to lay their reports before (T'an Ch'un and Li Wan), mustered no small number. But they all endeavoured to find out how their two new mistresses ran the household; for as long they managed things properly, one and all willingly resolved to respect them, but in the event of the least disagreement or improper step, not only did they not submit to them, but they also spread, the moment they put their foot outside the second gate, numberless jokes on their account and made fun of them. Wu Hsin-teng's wife had thus devised an experiment in her own mind. Had she had to deal with lady Feng, she would have long ago made an attempt to show off her zeal by proposing numerous alternatives and discovering various bygone precedents, and then allowed lady Feng to make her own choice and take action; but, in this instance, she looked with such disdain on Li Wan, on account of her simplicity, and on T'an Ch'un, on account of her youthfulness, that she volunteered only a single sentence, in order to put both these ladies to the test, and see what course they would be likely to adopt.

"What shall we do?" T'an Ch'un asked Li Wan.

Li Wan reflected for a while. "The other day," she rejoined, "that Hsi Jen's mother died, I heard that she was given forty taels. So now give her forty taels as well and have done!"

Upon hearing this proposal, Wu Hsin-teng's wife eagerly expressed her acquiescence, by uttering a yes; and taking over the permit she was going on her way at once.

"Come back," shouted T'an Ch'un.

"Wu Hsing-teng's wife had perforce to retrace her footsteps."
"Wait, don't get the money yet," T'an Ch'un remarked. "I want to ask you something. Some of the old secondary wives, attached years back to our venerable senior's rooms, lived inside the establishment; others outside; there were these two distinctions between them. Now if any of them died at home, how much was allowed them? And how much was allotted to such as died outside? Tell us what was given in either case for our guidance."

As soon as Wu Hsin-teng's wife was asked this question, every detail bearing on the subject slipped from her memory. Hastily forcing a smile, "This is," she replied, "nothing of any such great consequence. Whether much or little be allowed, who'll ever venture to raise a quarrel about it?"

T'an Ch'un then smiled. "This is all stuff and nonsense!" she exclaimed. "My idea is that it would be better to give a hundred taels. For if we don't comply with what's right, we shall, not to speak of your ridiculing us, find it also a hard job by and bye to face your mistress Secunda."

"Well, in that case," laughed Wu Hsin-teng's wife, "I'll go and look up the old accounts. I can't recollect anything about them just at this moment."

"You're quite an old hand in the management of affairs," T'an Ch'un observed with a significant smile, "and can't you remember, but come instead to perplex us? Whenever you've had anything of the kind to lay before your lady Secunda, have you also had to go first and look it up? But if this has been the practice, lady Feng can't be looked upon as being such a dreadful creature. One could very well call her lenient and kind. Yet don't you yet hurry to go and hunt them up and bring them to me to see? If we dilly-dally another day, they won't run you people down for your coarse-mindedness, but we will seem to have been driven to our wits' ends!"

Wu Hsin-teng's wife got quite scarlet in the face. Promptly twisting herself round, she quitted the hall; while the whole bevy of married women stretched out their tongues significantly.

During her absence, other matters were reported. But in a little while, Wu Hsin-teng's wife returned with the old accounts. On inspection, T'an Ch'un found that for a couple of secondary wives, who had lived in the establishment, twenty-four taels had been granted, and that for two, whose quarters had been outside, forty taels had in each case been allowed. Besides these two, others were mentioned, who had lived outside the mansion; to one of whom a hundred taels had been given, and to the other, sixty taels. Under these two records, the reasons were assigned. In the one case, the coffins of father and mother had had to be removed from another province, and sixty taels extra had consequently been granted. In the other, an additional twenty taels had been allowed, as a burial-place had to be purchased at the time.

T'an Ch'un handed the accounts to Li Wan for her perusal.

"Give her twenty taels," readily suggested T'an Ch'un. "Leave these accounts here for us to examine minutely."

Wu Hsin-teng's wife then walked away. But unexpectedly Mrs. Chao entered the hall. Li Wan and T'an Ch'un speedily pressed her to take a seat.

Mrs. Chao then broke the silence. "All the inmates of these rooms have
trampled me under heel," she said, "but never mind! Yet, my child, just ponder, it is only fair that you should take my part."

While ventilating her grievances, her eyes got moist, her nose watered, and she began to sob.

"To whom are you alluding Mrs. Chao?" T'an Ch'un hastily inquired. "I can't really make out what you're driving at. Who tramples you under foot? Speak out and I'll take up your cudgels."

"You're now trampling me down yourself, young lady," Mrs. Chao observed. "And to whom can I go and tell my grievance?"

T'an Ch'un, at these words, jumped up with alacrity. "I never would presume to do any such thing," she protested.

Li Wan too vehemently sprung to her feet to proffer her some good counsel.

"Pray seat yourselves, both of you," Mrs. Chao cried, "and listen to what I have to say. I've had, like simmering oil, to consume away in these rooms to this advanced age. There's also your brother besides. Yet I can't compare myself now even to Hsi Jen, and what credit do I enjoy? But you haven't as well any face, so don't let's speak of myself."

"It was really on account of this," T'an Ch'un smiled, "that I said that I didn't presume to disregard right and to violate propriety."

While she spoke, she resumed her seat, and taking up the accounts, she turned them over for Mrs. Chao to glance at, after which she read them out to her for her edification. "These are old customs," she proceeded, "enforced by the seniors of the family, and every one complies with them, and could I ever, pray, have changed them? These will hold good not only with Hsi Jen; but even when by and bye Huan-erh takes a concubine, the same course will naturally be adopted as in the case of Hsi Jen. This is no question for any large quarrels or small disputes, and no mention should be made about face or no face. She's our Madame Wang's servant-girl, and I've dealt with her according to a long-standing precedent. Those who say that I've taken suitable action will come in for our ancestors' bounty and our lady's bounty as well. But should any one uphold that I've adopted an unfair course, that person is devoid of all common sense and totally ignorant of what a blessing means. The only thing she can do is to foster as much resentment as she chooses. Our lady, Madame Wang, may even give a present of a house to any one; what credit is that to me? Again, she may not give a single cash, but even that won't imply any loss of face, as far as I am concerned. What I have to say is that as Madame Wang is away from home, you should quietly look after yourself a bit. What's the good of worrying and fretting? Our lady is extremely fond of me; and, if, at different times, a chilliness has sprung up on her part, it's because you, Mrs. Chao, have again and again been officious. Had I been a man and able to have gone abroad, I would long ago have run away and started some business. I would then have had something of my own to attend to. But, as it happens, I am a girl, so that I can't even recklessly utter so much as a single remark. Madame Wang is well aware of it in her heart. And it's now because she entertains a high opinion of me that she recently bade me assume the charge of domestic affairs. But before I've had time enough to do a single good act, here you come, Mrs. Chao, to lay down the law. If this reaches Madame Wang's ear, I fear I shall get into trouble. She won't let me exercise any control, and then I shall, in real earnest, come in for no face. But even you, Mrs. Chao, will then
actually lose countenance."

Reasoning with her, she so little could repress her tears that they rolled down her cheeks.

Mrs. Chao had not a word more to say to refute her arguments with. "If Madame Wang loves you," she simply responded, "there's still more reason why you should have drawn us into her favour. (Instead of that), all you think about is to try and win Madame Wang's affections, and you forget all about us."

"How ever did I forget you?" T'an Ch'un exclaimed. "How would you have me drag you into favour? Go and ask every one of them, and you'll see what mistress is indifferent to any one, who exerts her energies and makes herself useful, and what worthy person requires being drawn into favour?"

Li Wan, who stood by, did her best to pacify them with her advice. "Mrs. Chao," she argued, "don't lose your temper! Neither should you feel any ill-will against this young lady of yours. Had she even at heart every good intention to lend you a hand, how could she put it into words?"

"This worthy senior dame," T'an Ch'un impatiently interposed, "has also grown quite dense! Whom could I drag into favour? Why, in what family, do the young ladies give a lift to slave-girls? Their qualities as well as defects should all alike be well known to you people. And what have they got to do with me?"

Mrs. Chao was much incensed. "Who tells you," she asked, "to give a lift to any one? Were it not that you looked after the house, I wouldn't have come to inquire anything of you. But anything you may suggest is right; so had you, now that your maternal uncle is dead, granted twenty or thirty taels in excess, is it likely that Madame Wang would not have given you her consent? It's evident that our Madame Wang is a good woman and that it's you people who are mean and stingy. Unfortunately, however, her ladyship has with all her bounty no opportunity of exercising it. You could, my dear girl, well set your mind at ease. You wouldn't, in this instance, have had to spend any of your own money; and at your marriage by and bye, I would still have borne in mind the exceptional regard you had shown the Chao family. But now that you've got your full plumage, you've forgotten your extraction, and chosen a lofty branch to fly to."

Before T'an Ch'un had heard her to the end, she flew into such a rage that her face blanched; and choking for breath, she gasped and panted. Sobbing, she asked the while: "Who's my maternal uncle? My maternal uncle was at the end of the year promoted to be High Commissioner of the Nine Provinces! How can another maternal uncle have cropped up? It's because I've ever shown that reverence enjoined by the rites that other relatives have now more than ever turned up. If what you say be the case, how is it that every day that Huan-erh goes out, Chao Kuo-chi too stands up, and follows him to school? Why doesn't he put on the airs of an uncle? What's the reason that he doesn't? Who isn't aware of the fact that I'm born of a concubine? Would it require two or three months' time to trace my extraction? But the fact is you've come to kick up all this hullabaloo for fear lest people shouldn't be alive to the truth; and with the express design of making it public all over the place! But I wonder who of us two will make the other lose face? Luckily, I've got my wits about me; for had I been a stupid creature ignorant of good manners, I would long ago have lost all patience."
Li Wan was much concerned, but she had to continue to exhort them to desist. But Mrs. Chao proceeded with a long rigmarole until a servant was unexpectedly heard to report that lady Secunda had sent Miss Ping to deliver a message. Mrs. Chao caught the announcement, and eventually held her peace, when they espied P'ing erh making her appearance. Mrs. Chao hastily forced a saturnine smile, and motioned to her to take a seat. "Is your lady any better?" she went on to inquire with vehemence. "I was just thinking of going to look her up; but I could find no leisure!"

Upon seeing P'ing Erh enter, Li Wan felt prompted to ask her the object of her visit.

"My lady says," P'ing Erh smilingly responded, "that she apprehends, now that Mrs. Chao's brother is dead, that your ladyship and you, miss, are not aware of the existence of an old precedent. According to the ordinary practice no more need be given than twenty taels; but she now requests you, miss, to consider what would be best to do; if even you add a good deal more, it will do well enough."

T'an Ch'un at once wiped away all traces of tears. "What's s a mere girl, she can't be placed on the same footing as a man! By and bye, when any one aspires to her hand, the sort of supercilious parties, who now tread the world, will, as a first step, ask whether this young lady is the child of a No. 1 or No. 2 wife. And many of these won't have anything to say to her, as she is the child, of a No. 2. But really people haven't any idea that, not to speak of her as the offspring of a secondary wife, she would be, even as a mere servant-girl of ours, far superior than the very legitimate daughter of any family. Who, I wonder, will in the future be so devoid of good fortune as to break off the match; just because he may be inclined to pick and choose between a wife's child and a concubine's child? And who, I would like to know, will be that lucky fellow, who'll snatch her off without any regard to No. 1 and No. 2?"

Continuing, she resumed, turning smilingly towards P'ing Erh, "You know well enough how many ways and means I've had all these years to devise in order to effect retrenchment, and how there isn't, I may safely aver, a single soul in the whole household, who doesn't detest me behind my back. But now that I'm astride on the tiger's back, (I must go on; for if I put my foot on the ground, I shall be devoured). It's true, my tactics have been more or less seen through, but there's no help for it; I can't very well become more open-handed in a moment! In theaced the four kinds of eatables allotted to P'ing Erh on the table. After which, she filled a bowl of rice for her. Then with one leg bent on the edge of the stove-couch, while the other rested on the ground, P'ing Erh kept lady Feng company during her repast; and waiting on her, afterwards, until she finished rinsing her mouth, she issued certain directions to Feng Erh, and crossed over at length to T'an Ch'un's quarters. Here she found the courtyard plunged in perfect stillness, for the various inmates, who had been assembled there, had already taken their leave.

But, reader, do you wish to follow up the story? If so, listen to the circumstances detailed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER LVI.
The clever T'an Ch'un increases their income and removes long-standing abuses.
The worthy Pao-ch'ai preserves intact, by the display of a little intelligence, the great reputation enjoyed by the Chia family.

But let us pick up the clue of our story. P'ing Erh bore lady Feng company during her meal; then attending to her, while she rinsed her mouth and washed her hands, she betook herself eventually to T'an Ch'un's quarters, where she discovered the courtyard in perfect stillness. Not a soul was about beyond several maids, matrons and close attendants of the inner rooms, who stood outside the windows on the alert to obey any calls. P'ing Erh stepped into the hall. The two cousins and their sister-in-law were all three engaged in discussing some domestic affairs. They were talking about the feast, to which they had been invited during the new year festivities by Lai Ta's wife, and various details in connection with the garden she had in her place. But as soon as she (P'ing Erh) appeared on the scene, T'an Ch'un desired her to seat herself on her footstool.

"What was exercising my mind," she thereupon observed, "confines itself to this. I was computing that the head-oil, and rouge and powder, we use during the course of a month, are also a matter of a couple of taels; and I was thinking that what with the sum of two taels, already allotted us every month, and the extra monthly amount given as well to the maids, allowances are, with the addition again of that of eight taels for school expenses, we recently spoke about, piled to be sure one upon another. The thing is, it's true, a mere trifle, and the amount only a bagatelle, but it doesn't seem to be quite proper. But how is it that your mistress didn't take this into account?"

P'ing Erh smiled. "There's a why and a wherefore," she answered. "All the things required by you, young ladies, must absolutely be subject to a fixed rule; for the different compradores have to lay in a stock of each every month; and to send them to us by the maids to take charge of; but purely and simply to keep in readiness for you to use. No such thing could ever be tolerated as that each of us should have to get money every day and try and hunt up some one to go and buy these articles for us! That's how it is that the compradores outside receive a lump sum, and that they send us, month by month, by the female servants the supplies allotted for the different rooms. As regards the two taels monthly allowed you, young ladies, they were not originally intended that you should purchase any such articles with, but that you should, if at any time the ladies in charge of the household affairs happened to be away from home or to have no leisure, be saved the trouble of having to go in search of the proper persons, in the event of your suddenly finding yourselves in need of money. This was done simply because it was feared that you would be subjected to inconvenience. But an unprejudiced glance about me now shows me that at least half of our young mistresses in the various quarters invariably purchase these things with ready money of their own; so I can't help suspecting that, if it isn't a question of the compradores shirking their duties, it must be that what they buy is all mere rubbish."

T'an Ch'un and Li Wan laughed. "You must have kept a sharp lookout to have managed to detect these things!" they said. "But as for shirking the purchases, they don't actually do so. It's simply that they're behind time by a good number of days. Yet when one puts on the screw with them, they get some articles from somewhere or other, who knows where? These are however only a sham; for, in reality, they aren't fit for use. But as they're now as ever obtained with cash down, a couple of
taels could very well be given to the brothers or sons of some of the other people's nurses to purchase them with. They'll then be good for something! Were we however to employ any of the public domestics in the establishment, the things will be just as bad as ever. I wonder how they do manage to get such utter rot as they do?"

"The purchases of the compradores may be what they are," P'ing Erh smiled; "but were anyone else to buy any better articles, the compradores themselves won't ever forgive them. Besides other things, they'll aver that they have no desire to hurt the feelings of the managers outside, (by purchasing anything of superior quality). But if you, young ladies, requisition the services of the nurses, these men won't have the arrogance to make any nonsensical remarks."

"This accounts for the unhappy state my heart is in," T'an Ch'un observed. "But as we're called upon to squander money right and left, and as the things purchased are half of them uselessly thrown away, wouldn't it, after all, be better for us to eliminate this monthly allowance to the compradores? This is the first thing. The next I'd like to ask you is this. When they went, during the new year festivities, to Lai Ta's house, you also went with them; and what do think of that small garden as compared with this of ours?"

"It isn't half as big as ours," P'ing Erh laughingly explained. "The trees and plants are likewise fewer by a good deal."

"When I was having a chat with their daughter," T'an Ch'un proceeded, "she said that, besides the flowers they wear, and the bamboo shoots, vegetables, fish and shrimps they eat from this garden of theirs, there's still enough every year for people to take over under contract, and that at the close of each year there's a surplus in full of two hundred taels. Ever since that day is it that I've become alive to the fact that even a broken lotus leaf, and a blade of withered grass are alike worth money."

"This is, in very truth, the way wealthy and well-to-do people talk!" Pao-ch'ai laughed. "But notwithstanding your honourable position, young ladies, you really understand nothing about these concerns. Yet, haven't you, with all your book-lore, seen anything of the passage in the writing of Chu Fu-tzu: 'Throw not they self away?'

"I've read it, it's true," T'an Ch'un smiled, "but its object is simply to urge people to exert themselves; it's as much empty talk as any random arguments, and how could it be bodily treated as gospel?"

"Chu-tzu's work all as much empty talk as any random arguments?" Pao-ch'ai exclaimed. "Why every sentence in it is founded on fact. You've only had the management of affairs in your hands for a couple of days, and already greed and ambition have so beclouded your mind that you've come to look upon Chu-tzu as full of fraud and falsehood. But when you by and bye go out into the world and see all those mighty concerns reeking with greed and corruption, you'll even go so far as to treat Confucius himself as a fraud!"

"Haven't you with all your culture read a book like that of Chi-tzu's?" Pan Ch'un laughed. "Chi-tzu said in bygone days 'that when one descends into the arena where gain and emoluments are to be got, and enters the world of planning and plotting, one makes light of the injunctions of
Yao and Shun, and disregards the principles inculcated by Confucius and Mencius."

"What about the next line?" Pao-ch'ai insinuated with a significant smile.

"I now cut the text short," T'an Ch'un smilingly rejoined, "in order to adapt the sense to what I want to say. Would I recite the following sentence, and heap abuse upon my own self; is it likely I would; eh?"

"There's nothing under the heavens that can't be turned to some use," Pao-ch'ai added. "And since everything can be utilised, everything must be worth money. But can it be that a person gifted with such intelligence as yours can have had no experience in such great matters and legitimate concerns as these?"

"You send for a person," Li Wan laughingly interposed, 'and you don't speak about what's right and proper, but you start an argument on learning."

"Learning is right and proper," Pao-ch'ai answered. "If we made no allusion to learning, we'd all soon enough drift among the rustic herd!"

The trio bandied words for a while, after which they turned their attention again to pertinent affairs.

T'an Ch'un took up once more the thread of the conversation. "This garden of ours," she argued, "is only half as big as theirs, so if you double the income they derive, you will see that we ought to reap a net profit of four hundred taels a year. But were we also now to secure a contract for our surplus products, the money, we'd earn, would, of course, be a mere trifle and not one that a family like ours should hanker after. And were we to depute two special persons (to attend to the garden), the least permission given by them to any one to turn anything to improper uses, would, since there be so many things of intrinsic value, be tantamount to a reckless destruction of the gifts of heaven. So would it not be preferable to select several quiet, steady and experienced old matrons, out of those stationed in the grounds, and appoint them to put them in order and look after things? Neither will there be any need then to make them pay any rent, or give any taxes in kind. All we can ask them is to supply the household with whatever they can afford during the year. In the first place, the garden will, with special persons to look after the plants and trees, naturally so improve from year to year that there won't be any bustle or confusion, whenever the time draws nigh to utilise the grounds. Secondly, people won't venture to injure or uselessly waste anything. In the third place, the old matrons themselves will, by availing themselves of these small perquisites, not labour in the gardens year after year and day after day all for no good. Fourthly, it will in like manner be possible to effect a saving in the expenditure for gardeners, rockery-layers, sweepers and other necessary servants. And this excess can be utilised for making up other deficiencies. I don't see any reason why this shouldn't be practicable!"

Pao-ch'ai was standing below contemplating the pictures with characters suspended on the walls. Upon hearing these suggestions, she readily nodded her head assentingly and smiled. "Excellent!" she cried. "Within three years, there will be no more famines and dearths."

"What a first-rate plan!" Li Wan chimed in. "This, if actually adopted, will delight the heart of Madame Wang. Pecuniary economies are of
themselves a paltry matter; but there will be then in the garden those to sweep the grounds, and those whose special charge will be to look after them. Besides, were the persons selected allowed to turn up an honest cash by selling part of the products, they will be so impelled by a sense of their responsibilities, and prompted by a desire of gain that there won't any longer be any who won't acquit themselves of their duties to the fullest measure."

"It remained for you, miss, to put these suggestions in words," P'ing Erh remarked. "Our mistress may have entertained the idea, but it is by no means certain that she thought it nice on her part to give utterance to it. For as you, young ladies, live at present in the garden, she could not possibly, unable as she is to supply such additional ornaments as will make it more showy, contrariwise depute people to exercise authority in it, and to keep it in order, with a view of effecting a reduction in expenses. Such a proposal could never have dropped from her lips."

Pao-ch'ai advanced up to her with alacrity. Rubbing her face: "Open that mouth of yours wide," she laughed, "and let me see of what stuff your teeth and tongue are made! Ever since you put your foot out of bed this morning you've jabbered away up to this very moment! And your song has all been in one strain. For neither have you been very complimentary to Miss Tertia, nor have you admitted that your mistress is, as far as wits go, so much below the mark as to be unable to effect suitable provision. Yet whenever Miss Tertia advanced any arguments, you've at once made use of endless words to join issue with her. This is because the plan devised by Miss Tertia was also hit upon by your lady Feng. But there must surely have been a reason why she couldn't carry it into execution. Again, as the young ladies have now their quarters in the garden, she couldn't, with any decency, direct any one to go and rule over it, for the mere sake of saving a few cash. Just consider this. If the garden is actually handed to people to make profit out of it, the parties interested will, of course, not even permit a single spray of flowers to be plucked, and not a single fruit to be taken away. With such as come within the category of senior young ladies, they won't naturally have the audacity to be particular; but they'll daily have endless rows with the junior girls. (Lady Feng) has, with her fears about the future and her misgivings about the present, shown herself neither too overbearing nor too servile. This mistress of theirs is not friendly disposed towards us, but when she hears of her various proposals, shame might induce her to turn over a new leaf."

"Early this morning," T'an Ch'un laughingly observed, "I was very cross, but as soon as I heard of her (P'ing Erh's) arrival, I casually remembered that her mistress employed, during her time, such domestics as were up to all kinds of larks, and at the sight of her, I got more cross than ever. But, little though one would have thought it, she behaved from the moment she came, like a rat that tries to get out of the way of a cat. And as she had had to stand for ever so long, I pitied her very much; but she took up the thread of the conversation, and went on to spin that long yarn of hers. Yet, instead of mentioning that her mistress treats me with every consideration, she, on the contrary, observed: 'The kindness with which you have all along dealt with our lady miss, has not been to no purpose.' This remark therefore not only dispelled my anger, but filled me with so much shame that I began to feel sore at heart. And, when I came to think carefully over the matter, I failed to see how I, a mere girl, who had personally done so much mischief that not a soul cared a straw for me and not a soul took any interest in me, could possess any such good qualities as to treat any one kindly...."
When she reached this point, she could not check her tears from brimming over. Li Wan and her associates perceived how pathetically she spoke; and, recalling to mind bow Mrs. Chao had always run her down, and how she had ever been involved in some mess or other with Madame Wang, on account of this Mrs. Chao, they too found it difficult to refrain from melting into sobs. But they then used their joint efforts to console her.

"Let's avail ourselves of this quiet day," they suggested, "to try and find out how we could increase our revenue and remove abuses, so as not to render futile the charge laid on us by Madame Wang. What use or purpose is it to allude to such trivial matters?"

"I've already grasped your object," P'ing Erh hastily ventured. "Miss, speak out; who do you consider fit? And as soon as the proper persons have been fixed upon, everything will be square enough."

"What you say is all very well," T'an Ch'un rejoined, "but it will be necessary to let your lady know something about it. It has never been the proper thing for us in here to scrape together any small profits. But as your mistress is full of gumption, I adopted the course I did. Had she been at all narrowminded, with many prejudices and many jealousies, I wouldn't have shown the least willingness in the matter. But, as it will look as if I were bent upon pulling her to pieces, how can I take action without consulting her?"

"In that case," P'ing Erh smiled, "I'll go and tell her something about it."

With this response, she went on the errand; and only returned after a long lapse of time. "I said," she laughed, "that it would be perfectly useless for me to go. How ever could our lady not readily accede to an excellent proposal like this?"

Hearing this, T'an Ch'un forthwith joined Li Wan in directing a servant to ask for the roll, containing the names of the matrons in the garden, and bring it to them. When produced, they all held council together, and fixing cursorily upon several persons, they summoned them to appear before them. Li Wan then explained to them the general outline of their duties; and not one was there among the whole company, who listened to her, who would not undertake the charge. One said: "If you confide that bamboo tree for twelve months to my care, it will again next year be a single tree, but beside the shoots, which will have been eaten at home, I shall be able, in the course of the year, to also pay in some money."

"Hand me over," another one remarked, "that portion of paddy field, and there will, during the year, be no need to touch any public funds on account of the various birds, large and small, which are kept for mere fun. Besides that, I shall be in a position to give in something more."

T'an Ch'un was about to pass a remark when a servant reported that the doctor had come; and that he had entered the garden to see Miss Shih. So the matrons were obliged to go and usher the doctor in.

"Were there a hundred of you here," promptly expostulated P'ing Erh, "you wouldn't know what propriety means! Are there perchance no couple of housekeepers about to push themselves forward and see the doctor in?"

"There's dame Wu and dame T'an," the servant, who brought the message, replied. "The two are on duty at the south-west corner at the 'accumulated splendour' gate."
At this answer, P'ing Erh allowed the subject to drop.

After the departure of the matrons, T'an Ch'un inquired of Pao-ch'ai what she thought of them.

"Such as are diligent at the outset," Pao-ch'ai answered smiling, "become remiss in the end; and those who have a glib tongue have an eye to gain."

T'an Ch'un listened to her reply; and nodding her head, she extolled its wisdom. Then showing them with her finger several names on the list, she submitted them for the perusal of the trio. P'ing Erh speedily went and fetched a pen and inkslab.

"This old mother Chu," the trio observed, "is a trustworthy woman. What's more, this old dame and her sons have generation after generation done the sweeping of the bamboo groves. So let's now place the various bamboo trees under her control. This old mother T'ien was originally a farmer, and everything in the way of vegetables and rice, in and about the Tao Hsiang village, should, albeit they couldn't, planted as they are as a mere pastime, be treated in such earnest as to call for large works and extensive plantations, be entrusted to her care; for won't they fare better if she can be on the spot and tend them with extra diligence at the proper times and seasons?"

"What a pity it is," T'an Ch'un proceeded smilingly, "that two places so spacious as the Heng Wu garden and the I Hung court bring no grit to the mill."

"Things in the Heng Wu garden are in a worse state," Li Wan hastily interposed. "Aren't the scented wares and scented herbs sold at present everywhere in perfumery shops, large fairs and great temples the very counterpart of these things here? So if you reckon up, you will find how much greater a return these articles will give than any other kind of product. As for the I Hung court, we needn't mention other things, but only take into account the roses that bud during the two seasons of spring and summer; to how many don't they amount in all? Besides these, we've got along the whole hedge, cinnamon roses and monthly roses, stock roses, honey-suckle and westeria. Were these various flowers dried and sold to the tea and medicine shops, they'd also fetch a good deal of money."

"Quite so!" T'an Ch'un acquiesced with a smile. "The thing is that there's no one with any notion how to deal with scented herbs."

"There's Ying Erh who waits on Miss Pao-ch'ai," P'ing Erh promptly smiled. "Her mother is well-versed in these things. It was only the other day that she plucked a few, and plaited them, after drying them well in the sun, into a flower-basket and a gourd, and gave them to me to play with. But miss can you have forgotten all about it?"

"I was this very minute speaking in your praise," Pao-ch'ai observed smiling, "and do you come to chaff me?"

"What makes you say so?" exclaimed the trio, in utter astonishment.

"It will on no account do," Pao-ch'ai added. "You employ such a lot of people in here that they all lead a lazy life and have nothing to put a hand to, and were I also now to introduce some more, that tribe will look even upon me with utter contempt. But let me think of some one for
you. There's in the I Hung court, an old dame Yeh; she's Pei Ming's mother. That woman is an honest old lady; and is furthermore on the best of terms with our Ying Erh's mother. So wouldn't it be well were this charge given to this dame Yeh? Should there even be anything that she doesn't know, there'll be no necessity for us to tell her. She can go straightway and consult with Ying Erh's mother. And if she can't attend to everything herself, it won't matter to whom she relegates some of her duties. These will be purely private favours. In the event too of any one making any mean insinuations, the blame won't fall on our shoulders. By adopting this course, you'll be managing things in such a way as to do extreme justice to all; and the trust itself will also be placed on a most satisfactory footing."

"Excellent!" ejaculated Li Wan and P'ing Erh simultaneously.

"This may be well and good," T'an Ch'un laughed, "but the fear is that at the sight of gain, they'll forget all about propriety."

"That's nothing to do with us!" P'ing Erh rejoined a smile playing about her lips. "It was only the other day that Ying Erh recognised dame Yeh as her adopted mother, and invited her to eat and drink with them, so that the two families are on the most intimate terms."

At this assurance, T'an Ch'un relinquished the topic of conversation, and, holding council together, they selected several persons, all of whom the four had ever viewed with impartial favour and they marked off their names, by dotting them with a pen.

In a little while, the matrons came to report that 'the doctor had gone;' and they handed the prescription. Their three mistresses then perused its contents. On the one hand, they despatched domestics to take it outside, so that the drugs should be got, and to superintend their decoction. On the other, T'an Ch'un and Li Wan explicitly explained to the various servants chosen what particular place each had to look after. "Exclusive," they added, "of what fixed custom requires for home consumption during the four seasons, you are still at liberty to pluck whatever remains and have it taken away. As for the profits, we'll settle accounts at the close of the year."

"I've also bethought myself of something," T'an Ch'un smiled. "If the settlement of accounts takes place at the end of the year, the money will, at the time of delivery, be naturally paid into the accountancy. Those high up will then as usual add a whole lot of controllers; and these will, on their part, fleece their own share as soon as the money gets into the palms of their hand. But as by this system, we've now initiated, you've been singled out for appointment, you've already ridden so far above their heads, that they foster all sorts of animosity against you. They don't, however, give vent to their feelings; but if they don't seize the close of the year, when you have to deliver your accounts, to play their tricks on you, for what other chances will they wait? Moreover, they obtain, in everything that comes under their control during the year, half of every share their masters get. This is an old custom. Every one is aware of its existence. But this is a new regime I now introduce in this garden, so don't let the money find its way into their hands! Whenever the annual settling of accounts arrives, bring them in to us."

"My idea is," Pao-ch'ai smilingly suggested, "that no accounts need be handed even inside. This one will have a surplus, that one a deficit, so that it will involve no end of trouble; wouldn't it be better therefore if we were to find out who of them would take over this or that
particular kind and let them purvey the various things? These are for
the exclusive use of the inmates of the garden; and I've already made an
estimate of them for you. They amount to just a few sorts, and simply
consist of head-oil, rouge, powder and scented paper; in all of which,
the young ladies and maids are subject to a fixed rule. Then, besides
these, there are the brooms, dust-baskets and poles, wanted in different
localities, and the food for the large and small animals and birds, and
the deer and rabbits. These are the only kinds of things required. And
if they contract for them, there'll be little need for any one to go to
the accountancy for money. But just calculate what a saving will thus be
effected!"

"All these items are, I admit, mere trifles," P'ing Erh smiled, "but if
you lump together what's used during a year, you will find that a saving
of four hundred taels will be effected."

"Again!" smilingly remarked Pao-ch'ai, "it would be four hundred taels
in one year; but eight hundred taels in two years; and with these, we
could purchase a few more houses and let them; and in the way of poor,
sandy land we could also add several acres to those we've already got.
'There will, of course, still remain a surplus; but as they will have
ample trouble and inconvenience to put up with during the year, they
should also be allowed some balance in hand so as to make up what's
wanted for themselves. The main object is, of course, to increase
profits and curtail expenses, yet we couldn't be stingy to any excessive
degree. In fact, were we even able to make any further economy of over
two or three hundred taels, it would never be the proper thing; should
this involve a breach of the main principles of decorum. With this
course duly put into practice, outside, the accountancy will issue in
one year four or five hundred taels less, without even the semblance of
any parsimony; while, inside, the matrons will obtain, on the other
hand, some little thing to supply their wants with; the nurses, who have
no means of subsistence, will likewise be placed in easy circumstances;
and the plants and trees in the garden will year by year increase in
strength and grow more abundantly. In this wise, you too will have such
articles as will be fit for use. So that this plan will, to some extent,
not constitute a breach of the high principles of propriety. And if ever
we want to retrench a little more from where won't we be able to get
money? But if the whole balance, if any, be put to the credit of the
public fund, every one, inside as well as outside, will fill the streets
with the din of murmurings! And won't this be then a slur upon the code
of honour of a household such as yours? So were any charge to be
entrusted to this one, out of the several tens of old nurses at present
employed in the garden, and not to that one, the remainder will
naturally resent such injustice. As I said a while back all that these
women will have to provide among themselves amounts to a few articles,
so they will unavoidably have ample means. Hence each should be told to
contribute, beyond the articles that fall to her share during the year,
a certain number of tiaos, whether she may or may not realise any
balance, and then jointly lump these sums together, and distribute them
among those nurses only on service in the garden. For although they may
not have anything to do with the control of these things, they
themselves will have to stay in the grounds, to keep an eye over the
servants on duty, to shut the doors, to close the windows and to get up
early and retire late. Whenever it rains in torrents or it snows hard
and chairs have to be carried, for you, young ladies, to go out and come
in; or boats have to be punted, and sledges drawn, these rough and
arduous duties come alike within their sphere of work. They have to
labour in the garden from one year's end to the other, and though, they
earn something in those grounds, it's only right that they should able
to get some small benefits in the discharge of their legitimate duties.
But there's another most trivial point that I would broach with less reserve. If you only think of your ease, and don't share the profits with them, they will, of course, never presume to show their displeasure, but in their hearts they won't cherish you any good feeling. What they'll do will be to make public business a pretext to serve their own private ends with; they'll pluck more of your fruits than they should; and cut greater quantities of your flowers than they ought. And you people will have a grievance, but you won't have anywhere to go and confide it. But should they too reap some gain, they'll readily look after such things on your behalf as you won't have the time to attend to."

The matrons listened to her explanations; (and finding that) they would be removed from the control of the accountancy, that they would not be compelled to go and settle accounts with lady Feng, and that all that they would be called upon to do every year would be to supply a few more tiaos, were each and all delighted to an exceptional degree. So much so, that every one of them exclaimed in a chorus that they were quite prepared to agree to the terms. "It is better," they said, "than to be obliged to go out and be squeezed by them; and to have to fork out our own money as well."

Those too not entrusted with the care of any portion of land were also highly elated, when they heard that at the close of each year they would, though they had no valid claim, come in for some share of hard cash.

"They'll have to bear the trouble," they however argued, "to keep things in order, so it's only right that they should be left with a few cash to meet their various wants with; and how could we very well gobble our three meals without doing a stroke of work?"

"Worthy dames," Pao-ch'ai smiled, "you mustn't decline. These duties are within your province and you should fulfil them. All you need do is to exert yourselves a bit by day and night, and not be so remiss and careless as to suffer any of the servants to drink and gamble; that's all. Otherwise, I myself must have nothing to do with the control. But you, yourselves, know well enough that it's my aunt who appealed to me with her own lips three and five times to do it as a favour to her. 'Your eldest sister-in-law,' she represented, 'has at present no leisure, and the other girls are young,' and then she asked me to look after things. So if I now don't accede, it's as clear as day that I shall be the cause of much worry to my aunt. Our lady Feng herself is seriously ill, and our domestic affairs can't hang fire. I'm really with nothing to do, so were even a mere neighbour to solicit my help, I would also feel bound to lend her a hand in her pressure of work. How much more therefore when it's my own aunt, who invokes my aid? Setting aside the way I'm execrated by one and all, how would I ever be able to stare my aunt in the face, if, while I gave my so " 30: "Who _not_ Who

XXXII "  128 "  13: stitch _not_ stich
XXXIII "  137 "  2: fidgetted _not_ figetted
XXXIV "  147 "  28: promptly _not_ promply
XXXIV "  155 "  32: questions?" _not_ questions?
XXXIV "  157 "  7: contrariwise _not_ contrarivise
XXXV "  163 "  4: eat," _not_ eat"
XXXV "  163 "  13: successive _not_ succession
XXXV "  163 "  35: forty _not_ fourty
XXXV "  171 "  12: birthday _not_ brithday
XXXVI "  180 "  2: tael. _not_ tael."
XXXVI "  190 "  20: birthday _not_ brithday
XXXVII "  194 "  18: comes _not_ come's
XXXVII " 198 " 10: To-morrow _not_ To-morow
XXXVII " 199 " 32: "Well," _not_ "Well",
XXXVII " 199 " 33: done." _not_ done?
XXXVII " 199 " 40: fairest _not_ fairest
XXXVII " 206 " 13: mustn't _not_ musn't
XXXVII " 207 " 36: get _not_ ged
XXXVII " 211 " 16: do?" _not_ do?
XXXVII " 219 " 6: stomachaches." _not_ stomachaches.
XXXVIII " 228 " 13: while _not_ whily
XXXIX " 232 " 5: with?" _not_ with?,'
XXXIX " 237 " 9: conscious _not_ concious
XXXIX " 242 " 1: temple." _not_ temple.
XL " 245 " 38: little _not_ litte
XL " 248 " 11: silk." _not_ silk?"
XL " 254 " 12: They're _not_ The're
XL " 255 " 8: autograph _not_ authograph
XL " 257 " 16: mustn't _not_ musn't
XL " 258 " 13: fogies _not_ foggies
XL " 258 " 20: predilection _not_ predeliction
XL " 258 " 35: curtains." _not_ curtains.
XL " 258 " 39: enough." _not_ enough.
XL " 263 " 8: peony _not_ peone
XLII " 278 " 11: haven't _not_ have'nt
XLII " 282 " 4: haven't _not_ have'nt
XLII " 282 " 19: haven't _not_ have'nt
XLII " 283 " 14: ensconce _not_ ensconse
XLII " 284 " 26: medicine _not_ medecine
XLII " 284 " 39: medicines _not_ medecines
XLII " 285 " 27: medicines _not_ medecines
XLII " 288 " 5: aren't _not_ are'nt
XLII " 290 " 27: locust _not_ lucust
XLII " 290 " 27: feed.'" _not_ feed.'
XLIII " 309 " 31: grandiloquent _not_ grandeloquent
XLIV " 314 " 12: shouldn't _not_ should'nt
XLIV " 316 " 4: mustn't _not_ must'nt
XLIV " 317 " 6: employed the _not_ employed on
   the
XLIV " 322 " 3: differed _not_ differred
XLIV " 322 " 31: swelled _not_ swole
XLIV " 323 " 15: unhappiness _not_ uuhappiness
XLV " 337 " 30: ginseng _not_ ginsing
XLV " 338 " 22: medicines _not_ medecines
XLV " 343 " 30: uselessly _not_ uselesly
XLVI " 352 " 26: mightn't _not_ mighn't
XLVII " 372 " 32: friendship _not_ frienship
XLVII " 378 " 3: proffered _not_ proffered
XLVIII " 380 " 21: worldly _not_ wordly
XLVIII " 386 " 4: antithetical _not_ antetithical
XLVIII " 386 " 23: Ling _not_ Ling,
XLVIII " 386 " 23: smile _not_ smiled
XLVIII " 386 " 35: stanzas _not_ stanaas
XLVIII " 389 " 24: cockatoo _not_ cuckatoo
XLVIII " 391 " 27: 'Tis _not_ T'is
XLVIII " 391 " 31: 'Tis _not_ T'is
XLIX " 393 " 34: would'nt _not_ woulds't
XLIX " 393 " 37: 'tis _not_ t'is
XLIX " 401 " 1: simultaneously _not_ simultaneously
L " 411 " 25: 'tis _not_ t'is
L " 413 " 17: 'tis _not_ t'is
But by and bye _not_ But and bye
'tis _not_ t'is
'very twice in the same line'
'tis _not_ t'is
haven't _not_ have'nt
blossom _not_ blossom
matter."
"_not_ matter."
music _not_ medecine
medicines _not_ medecines
medicines _not_ medecines
anniversary _not_ anniversay
perspiring _not_ prespiring
peonies _not_ peones
haven't _not_ have'nt
Apparent _not_ Apparrent
homage _not_ hommage
consonant _not_ consonant
trod _not_ trode
"This _not_ This
Isn't _not_ Is'nt
me?" _not_ me?
say, _not_ say,"
comfortable _not_ confortable
exhilarated _not_ exhilarated
smilingly _not_ similingly
and _not_ aud
Mrs. _not_ "Mrs.
making _not_ make
 Aren't _not_ Are'nt
mustn't _not_ musn't
notwithstanding _not_ notwithstanding
aren't _not_ are'nt

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