

WANG-HO AND THE BURIAL ROBE

By ERNEST BRAMAH

THERE was a time when it did not occur to anyone in this pure and enlightened Empire to question the settled and existing order of affairs. It would have been well for the merchant Wang-Ho had he lived in that happy era. But, indeed, it is now no unheard-of thing for an ordinary person to suggest that customs which have been established for centuries might with advantage be changed—a form of impiety which is in no degree removed from declaring oneself to be wiser or more profound than one's ancestors! Scarcely more seemly is this than irregularity in maintaining the Tablets or observing the Rites; and how narrow is the space dividing these delinquencies from the actual crimes of overturning images, counselling rebellion, joining in insurrection and resorting to indiscriminate piracy and bloodshed!

Certainly the merchant Wang-Ho would be five hundred taels wealthier if he had fully considered this in advance. Nor would Cheng Lin—but who attempts to eat an orange without first disposing of the peel, or what manner of a dwelling could be erected unless an adequate foundation be first provided?

Wang-Ho, then let it be stated, was one who had early in life amassed a considerable fortune by advising those whose intention it was to hazard their earnings in the State lotteries as to the numbers that might be relied upon to be successful, or, if not actually successful, those at least that were not already predestined by malign influences to be absolutely incapable of success. These chances Wang-Ho at first forecast by means of dreams, portents, and other manifestations of an admittedly supernatural tendency, but as his name grew large and the number of his clients increased vastly, while his capacity of dreaming remained the same, he found it no less effective to close his eyes and to become inspired rapidly of numbers as they were thus revealed to him.

Occasionally Wang-Ho was the recipient of an appropriate bag of money from one who had profited by his advice, but it was not his custom to rely upon this contingency as a source of profit, nor did he in any eventuality return the amount which had been agreed upon (and invariably deposited with him in advance) as the reward of his inspired efforts. To those who sought him in a contentious spirit, inquiring why he did not find it more profitable to secure the prizes for himself, Wang-Ho replied that his enterprise consisted in forecasting the winning numbers for State lotteries and not in solving enigmas, writing deprecatory odes, composing epitaphs, and not in solving enigmas, writing deprecatory odes, composing epitaphs, and not in conducting any of the other numerous occupations that could be mentioned. As this plausible evasion was accompanied by the courteous display of the many weapons which he always wore at various convenient points

of his attitude, the incident invariably ended in a manner satisfactory to Wang-Ho.

Thus positioned, Wang-Ho prospered, and he had in the course of years acquired a waist of honourable proportions when the unrolling course of events influenced him to abandon his lucrative enterprise. It was not that he failed in any way to become as inspired as before : indeed, with increasing practice he attained a fluency that enabled him to outdistance every rival, so that on the occasion of one lottery he afterwards privately discovered that he had predicted the success of every possible combination of numbers, thus enabling those who followed his advice (as he did not fail to announce in inscriptions of vermilion assurance) to secure—among them—every variety of prize offered.

But about this time the chief wife of Wang-Ho having been greeted with amiable condescension by the chief wife of a high official of the Province, and therefrom in an almost equal manner by the wives of even higher officials, the one in question began to abandon herself to a more rapidly-outlined manner of existence than formerly and to involve Wang-Ho in a like display ; so that presently this ill-considering merchant, who but a short time before would have unhesitatingly cast himself bodily to earth on the approach of a city magistrate, now acquired the habit of alluding to mandarins in casual conversation by names of affectionate abbreviation. Also, being advised of the expediency by a voice speaking in an undertone, he sought still further to extend beyond himself by suffering his nails to grow long and obliterating his name from the public announcements upon the city walls.

In spite of this ambitious sacrifice Wang-Ho could not entirely shed from his habit a propensity to associate with those requiring advice on matters involving financial transactions. He could no longer conduct enterprises which entailed many clients and the lavish display of his name, but in the society of necessitous persons who were related to others of distinction he allowed it to be inferred that he was benevolently disposed and had a greater sufficiency of taels than he could otherwise make use of. He also involved himself for the benefit of those whom he esteemed in transactions connected with pieces of priceless jade, jars of wine of an especially fragrant character, and pictures of reputable antiquity. In the written matter of these transactions (for it is useless to conceal the fact that Wang-Ho was incapable of tracing the characters of his own name) he employed a youth whom he never suffered to appear from beyond the background. Cheng Lin is thus brought naturally and unobtrusively into the narrative.

Had Cheng Lin come into the world when a favourably-disposed band of demons was in the ascendant he would certainly have merited an earlier and more embellished appearance in this written chronicle. So far, however, nothing but omens of an ill-destined obscurity had beset his career. For many years two ambitions alone had contained his mind, both inextricably merged into one current and neither with any appearance of ever flowing

into its desired end. The first was to pass the examination of the fourth degree of proficiency in the great literary competitions, and thereby qualify for a small official post where in the course of a few years he might reasonably hope to be forgotten in all beyond the detail of being allotted every third moon an unostentatious adequacy of taels. This distinction Cheng Lin felt to be well within his power of attainment could he but set aside three uninterrupted years for study, but to do this would necessitate the possession of something like five hundred taels of silver, and Lin might as well fix his eyes upon the great sky lantern itself.

Dependent on this, but in no great degree removed from it, was the hope of being able to entwine into that future the actuality of Hsi Meän, a very desirable maiden whom it was Cheng Lin's practice to meet by chance on the river bank when his heavily-weighted duties for the day were over.

To those who will naturally ask why Cheng Lin, if really sincere in his determination, could not imperceptibly acquire even so large a sum as five hundred taels, while in the house of the wealthy Wang-Ho, immersed as the latter person was with the pursuit of the full face of high mandarins and further embarrassed by a profuse illiteracy, it should be sufficient to apply the warning : Beware of helping yourself to corn from the manger of the blind mule.

In spite of his preoccupation Wang-Ho never suffered his mind to wander when sums of money were concerned, and his inability to express himself by written signs only engendered in his alert mind an ever-present decision not to be entrapped by their use. Frequently Cheng Lin found small sums of money lying in such a position as to induce the belief that they had been forgotten, but upon examining them closely he invariably found upon them marks by which they could be recognised if the necessity arose ; he therefore had no hesitation in returning them to Wang-Ho, with a seemly reference to the extreme improbability of the merchant actually leaving money thus unguarded, and to the lack of respect which it showed to Cheng Lin himself to expect that a person of his integrity should be tempted by so insignificant an amount. Wang-Ho invariably admitted the justice of the reproach, but he did not on any future occasion materially increase the sum in question, so that it is to be doubted if his heart was sincere.

It was on the evening of such an occasion that Lin walked with Meän by the side of the lotus-burdened Hoang-keng, expressing himself to the effect that instead of lilies her head was worthy to be bound up with pearls of a like size, and that beneath her feet there should be spread a carpet not of verdure but of the finest Shang-hi silk, embroidered with five-clawed dragons and other emblems of royal authority, nor was Meän in any way displeased by this indication of extravagant taste on her lover's part, though she replied :

"The only jewels that this person desires are the enduring glances of pure affection with which you, O my phoenix one, entwined the lilies about her hair, and the only carpet that she would crave would be the

embroidered design created by the four feet of the two persons who are now conversing together for ever henceforth walking in uninterrupted harmony."

"Yet, alas!" exclaimed Lin, "that enchanting possibility seems to be more remotely positioned than ever. Again has the clay-souled Wang-Ho, on the pretext that he can no longer make his in-and-out taels meet, sought to diminish the monthly inadequacy of cash with which he rewards this person's conscientious services."

"Undoubtedly that opaque-eyed merchant will shortly meet a revengeful fire-breathing vampire when walking alone on the edge of a narrow precipice," exclaimed Meän sympathetically. "Yet have you pressing laid the facts before the spirits of your distinguished ancestors with a request for their direct intervention?"

"The expedient has not been neglected," replied Lin, "and appropriate sacrifices have accompanied the request. But even while in the form of an ordinary existence the venerable ones in question were becoming distant in their powers of hearing, and doubtless with increasing years the infirmity has grown. It would almost seem that in the case of a person so obtuse as Wang-Ho is more direct means would have to be employed."

"It is well said," assented Meän, "that those who are unmoved by the threat of a vat of flaming sulphur in the Beyond rend the air if they chance to step on a burning cinder here on earth."

"The suggestion is a timely one," replied Lin. "Wang-Ho's weak spot lies between his hat and his sandals. Only of late, feeling the natural infirmities of time pressing about him, he has expended five hundred taels in the purchase of an elaborate burial robe, which he wears on every fit occasion, so that the necessity for its ultimate use may continue to be remote."

"Five hundred taels!" repeated Meän. "With that sum you could——"

"Assuredly. The coincidence may embody something in the nature of an omen favourable to ourselves. At the moment, however, this person has not any clear-cut perception of how the benefit may be attained."

"The amount referred to has already passed into the hands of the merchant in burial robes?"

"Irrevocably. In the detail of the transference of actual sums of money Wang-Ho walks hand in hand with himself from door to door. The pieces of silver are by this time beneath the floor of Shen Heng's inner chamber."

"Shen Heng?"

"The merchant in silk and costly fabrics who lives beneath the sign of the Golden Abacus. It was from him——"

"Truly. It is for him that this person's sister Min works the finest embroideries. Doubtless this very robe——"

"It is of blue silk edged with sand pearls in a line of three depths. Felicitations on long life and a list of the most venerable persons of all times serve to remind the controlling deities to what length human endurance can proceed if suitably encouraged. These are designed in

letters of threaded gold. Inferior spirits are suitably invoked in characters of silver."

"The description is sharp-pointed. It was upon this robe that the one referred to had been ceaselessly engaged for several moons. On account of her narrow span of years, no less than her nimble-jointed dexterity, she is justly esteemed among those whose wares are guaranteed to be permeated with the spirit of rejuvenation."

"Thereby enabling the enterprising Shen Heng to impose a special detail into his account: For employing the services of one who will embroider into the fabric of the robe the vital principles of youth and long-life-to-come, an added fifty taels. Did she of your house benefit to a proportionate extent?"

Meän indicated a contrary state of things by a graceful movement of her well-arranged eyebrows.

"Not only that," she added, "but the sordid-minded Shen Heng, on a variety of pretexts, has diminished the sum Min was to receive at the completion of the work, until that which should have required a full hand to grasp could be efficiently covered by two attenuated fingers. From this cause Min is vindictively inclined towards him, and, steadfastly refusing to bend her feet in the direction of his workshop, she has, between one melancholy and another, involved herself in a dark distemper."

As Meän unfolded the position lying between her sister Min and the merchant Shen Heng, Lin grew thoughtful, and although it was not his nature to express the changing degrees of emotion by varying the appearance of his face, he did not conceal from Meän that her words had fastened themselves upon his imagination.

"Let us rest here awhile," he suggested presently. "That which you say, added to what I already know, may, under the guidance of a sincere mind, put a much more rainbow-like appearance on our combined future than has hitherto appeared probable."

So they composed themselves about the bank of the river, while Lin questioned her more closely as to those things of which she had spoken. Finally, he laid certain injunctions upon her for her immediate guidance. Then, it being now the hour of middle light, they returned, Meän accompanying her voice to the melody of stringed wood as she related songs of those who have passed through great endurances to a state of assured contentment. To Lin it seemed as though the city leapt forward to meet them, so narrow was the space of time involved in reaching it.

A few days later Wang-Ho was engaged in the congenial occupation of marking a few pieces of brass cash before secreting them where Cheng Lin must inevitably displace them, when the person in question quietly approached him. Thereupon Wang-Ho returned the money to his inner sleeve, ineptly remarking that when the sun rose it was futile to raise a lantern to the sky to guide the stars.

"Rather is it said, 'From three things cross the road to avoid: a falling tree, your chief and second wives whispering in agreement, and a goat

wearing a leopard's tail,' ” replied Lin, thus rebuking Wang-Ho not only for his crafty intention, but also as to the obtuseness of the proverb he had quoted. “ Nevertheless, O Wang-Ho, I approach you on a matter of weighty consequence.”

“ To-morrow approaches,” replied the merchant evasively. “ If it concerns the detail of the reduction of your monthly adequacy, my word has become unbending iron.”

“ It is written : ‘ Cho Sing collected feathers to make a garment for his canary when it began to moult,’ ” replied Lin acquiescently. “ The care of so insignificant a person as myself may safely be left to the Protecting Forces, esteemed. This matter touches your own condition.”

“ In that case you cannot be too specific.” Wang-Ho lowered himself into a reclining couch, thereby indicating that the subject was not one for hasty dismissal, at the same time motioning to Lin that he should sit upon the floor. “ Doubtless you have some remunerative form of enterprise to suggest to me ? ”

“ Can a palsied finger grasp a proffered coin ? The matter strikes more deeply at your very existence, honoured chief.”

“ Alas ! ” exclaimed Wang-Ho, unable to retain the usual colour of his appearance, “ the attention of a devoted servant is somewhat like Tohen-hi Yang's spiked throne—it torments those whom it supports. However, the word has been spoken—let the sentence be filled in.”

“ The full roundness of your illustrious outline is as a display of coloured lights to gladden my commonplace vision,” replied Lin submissively. “ Undoubtedly of late, however, an element of dampness has interfered with the brilliance of the display.”

“ Speak clearly and regardless of polite evasion,” commanded Wang-Ho. “ My internal organs have for some time suspected that hostile influences were at work. For how long have you noticed this, as it may be expressed, falling off ? ”

“ My mind is as refined crystal before your compelling glance,” admitted Lin. “ Ever since it has been your custom to wear the funeral robe fashioned by Shen Heng has your noble shadow suffered erosion.”

This answer, converging as it did upon the doubts that had already corroded the merchant's satisfaction, convinced him of Cheng Lin's discrimination while it increased his own suspicion. He had for some little time noticed that after wearing the robe he invariably suffered pangs that could only be attributed to the influence of malign and obscure beings. It is true that the occasions of his wearing the robe were elaborate and many-coursed feasts when he and his guests had partaken lavishly of birds' nests, sharks' fins, sea snails, and other viands of a rich and glutinous nature. But if he could not both wear the funeral robe and partake unstintingly of well-spiced food, the harmonious relation of things was imperilled, and, as it was since the introduction of the funeral robe into his habit that matters had assumed a more poignant phase, it was clear that the influence of the funeral robe was at the root of the trouble.

"Yet," protested Wang-Ho, "the mandarin Ling-hi boasts that he has already lengthened the span of his natural life several years by such an expedient, and my friend the high official T'cheng asserts that, while wearing a much less expensive robe than mine, he feels the essence of an increased vitality passing continuously into his being. Why, then, am I marked out for this infliction, Cheng Lin?"

"Revered," replied Lin, with engaging candour, "the inconveniences of living in a country so densely populated with demons, vampires, spirits, ghouls, dragons, omens, forces, and influences, both good and bad, as our own unapproachably-favoured Empire is, cannot be evaded from one end of life to the other. How much greater is the difficulty when the prescribed forms for baffling the ill-disposed among the unseen appears to have been wrongly angled by those framing the Rites!"

Wang-Ho made a gesture of despair. It conveyed to Lin's mind the wise reminder of N'sy hing: When one is inquiring for a way of escape from an advancing tiger flowers of speech assume the form of noisome bindweed. He therefore continued:

"Hitherto it has been assumed that for a funeral robe to exercise its most beneficial force it should be the work of a maiden of immature years, the assumption being that, having a prolonged period of existence before her, the influence of longevity would pass through her fingers into the garment and in turn fortify the wearer."

"Assuredly," agreed Wang-Ho anxiously. "Thus was the analogy outlined to me by one skilled in the devices, and the logic of it seems unassailable."

"Yet," objected Lin, with sympathetic concern in his voice, "how unfortunate must be the position of a person involved in a robe that has been embroidered by one who, instead of a long life, has been marked out by the Destinies for premature decay and an untimely death! For in that case the influence——"

"Such instances," interrupted Wang-Ho, helping himself profusely to rice-spirit from a jar near at hand, "must providentially be of rare occurrence?"

"Esteemed head," replied Lin, helping Wang-Ho to yet another superfluity of rice-spirit, "there are moments when it behoves each of us to maintain an unflaccid outline. Suspecting the true cause of your declining radiance, I have, at an involved expenditure of seven taels and three hand-counts of brass cash, pursued this matter to its ultimate source. The robe in question owes its attainment to one Min of the obscure house of Hsi, who recently ceased to have an existence while her years yet numbered short of a score. Not only was it the last work upon which she was engaged, but so closely were the two identified that her abrupt Passing Beyond must certainly exercise a corresponding effect upon any subsequent wearer."

"Alas!" exclaimed Wang-Ho, feeling many of the symptoms of contagion already manifesting themselves about his body, "was the infliction of a painless nature?"

"As to whether it was leprosy, the spotted plague, or acute demoniacal possession, the degraded Shen Heng maintains an unworthy silence. Indeed, at the mention of Hsi Min's name he wraps his garment about his head and rolls upon the floor—from which the worst may be inferred. They of Min's house, however, are less capable of guile, and for an adequate consideration, while not denying that Shen Heng has paid them to maintain a stealthy silence, they freely admit that the facts are as they have been stated."

"In that case Shen Heng shall certainly return the five hundred taels in exchange for his discreditable burial robe," exclaimed Wang-Ho vindictively.

"Venerated personality," said Lin, with unabated loyalty, "the essential part of the development is to safeguard your own incomparable being against every danger. Shen Heng may be safely left to the avenging demons that are ever lying in wait for the contemptible."

"The first part of your remark is inspired," agreed Wang-Ho, his incapable mind already beginning to assume a less funereal forecast. "Proceed regardless of all obstacles."

"Consider the outcome of publicly compelling Shen Heng to undo the transaction, even if it could be legally achieved! Word of the calamity would pass on heated breath, each succeeding one becoming more heavily embroiled than the robe itself. The yamens and palaces of your distinguished friends would echo with the once honoured name of Wang-Ho, now associated with every form of malignant distemper and impending fate. All would hasten to withdraw themselves from the contagion of your overhanging end."

"Am I, then," demanded Wang-Ho, "to suffer the loss of five hundred taels and retain an inadequate and detestable burial robe that will continue to exercise its malign influence over my being?"

"By no means," replied Lin confidently. "But be warned by the precept, 'Do not burn down your house in order to inconvenience even your chief wife's mother.' Sooner or later a relation of Shen Heng will turn his steps towards your inner office. You can then, without undue effort, impose on him the five hundred taels that you have suffered loss from they of his house. In the meantime a device must be sought for exchanging your dangerous but imposing-looking robe for one of proved efficiency."

"It begins to assume a definite problem in this person's mind as to whether such a burial robe exists," declared Wang-Ho stubbornly.

"Yet it cannot be doubted, when a reliable system is adopted in the fabrication," protested Lin. "For a score and five years the one to whom this person owes his being has worn such a robe."

"To what age did your venerated father attain?" inquired the merchant, with courteous interest.

"Fourscore years and three parts of yet another score."

"And the robe in question eventually accompanied him when he Passed Beyond?"

"Doubtless it will. He is still wearing it," replied Lin, as one who speaks of casual occurrences.

"Is he, then, at so advanced an age, in the state of an ordinary existence?"

"Assuredly. Fortified by the virtue emanating from the garment referred to, it is his deliberate intention to continue here for yet another score of years at least."

"But if such robes are of so doubtful a nature, how can reliance be placed on any one?"

"Esteemed," replied Lin, "it is a matter that has long been suspected among the observant. Unfortunately the Ruby Buttons of the past mistakenly formulated that the essence of continuous existence was imparted to a burial robe through the hands of a young maiden—hence so many deplorable experiences. The proper person to be so employed is undoubtedly one of venerable attainment, for only thereby can the claim to possess the vital principle be assured."

"Was the robe which has so effectively sustained your meritorious father thus constructed?" inquired Wang-Ho, inviting Lin to recline himself upon a couch by a gesture as of one who discovers for the first time that an honoured guest has been overlooked.

"It is of ancient make, and thereby in the undiscriminating eye doubtless somewhat threadbare; but to the desert traveller all wells are sparkling," replied Lin. "A venerable woman, inspired of certain magic wisdom which she wove into the texture, to the exclusion of the showier qualities, designed it at the age of threescore years and three short of another score. She was engaged upon its fabrication yet another seven, and finally Passed Upwards at an attainment of three hundred and thirty-three years, three moons, and three days, thus conforming to all the Principles of allowed witchcraft."

"Cheng Lin," said Wang-Ho amiably, pouring out for the one whom he addressed a full measure of rice-spirit, "the duty that an obedient son owes even to a grasping and self-indulgent father has in the past been pressed to a too conspicuous front, at the expense of the harmonious relation that should exist between a comfortably-positioned servant and a generous and benevolent master. Now in the matter of these two coffin cloths—"

"My ears are widely opened towards your auspicious words, benevolence," replied Lin.

"You, Cheng Lin, are still too young to be concerned with the question of Passing Beyond; your imperishable father is, one is compelled to say, already old enough to go. As regards both persons, therefore, the assumed virtue of one burial robe above another should be merely a matter of speculative interest. Now if some arrangement should be suggested, not unprofitable to yourself, by which one robe might be imperceptibly substituted for another—and, after all, one burial robe is very like another—"

“ The prospect of deceiving a trustful and venerated sire is so ignoble that scarcely any material gain would be a fitting compensation—were it not for the fact that an impending loss of vision renders the deception somewhat easy to accomplish. Proceed, therefore, munificence, towards a precise statement of your open-handed prodigality.”

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Indescribable was the bitterness of Shen Heng's throat when Cheng Lin unfolded his burden and revealed the Wang-Ho five hundred tael burial robe, with an unassuming request for the return of the purchase-money, either in gold or honourable paper, as the article was found unsuitable. Shen Heng shook the rafters of the Golden Abacus with indignation and called upon his domestic demons, the spirits of eleven generations of embroidering ancestors, and the illuminated tablets containing the High Code and Authority of the Distinguished Brotherhood of Coffin Cloth and Burial Robe Makers in protest against so barbarous an innovation.

Bowing repeatedly and modestly expressing himself to the effect that it was incredible that he was not justly struck dead before the sublime spectacle of Shen Heng's virtuous indignation, Cheng Lin carefully produced the written lines of the agreement, gently directing the Distinguished Brother's fire-kindling eyes to an indicated detail. It was a provision that the robe should be returned and the purchase-money restored if the garment was not all that was therein stipulated; with his invariable painstaking loyalty Lin had insisted upon this safeguard when he drew up the form, although, doubtless from a disinclination to extol his own services, he had omitted mentioning the fact to Wang-Ho in their recent conversation.

With deprecating firmness Lin directed Shen Heng's reluctant eyes to another line—the unfortunate exaction of fifty taels in return for the guarantee that the robe should be permeated with the spirit of rejuvenation. As the undoubted embroiderer of the robe—one Min of the family of Hsi—had admittedly Passed Beyond almost with the last stitch, it was evident that she could only have conveyed by her touch an entirely contrary emanation. If, as Shen Heng never ceased to declare, Min was still somewhere alive, let her be produced and a fitting token of reconciliation would be forthcoming; otherwise, although with the acutest reluctance, it would be necessary to carry the claim to the court of the chief District Mandarin, and (Cheng Lin trembled at the sacrilegious thought) it would be impossible to conceal the fact that Shen Heng employed persons of inauspicious omen, and the high repute of coffin cloths from the Golden Abacus would be lost. The hint arrested Shen Heng's fingers in the act of tearing out a handful of his beautiful pig-tail. For the first time he noticed, with intense self-reproach, that Lin was not reclining on a couch.

The amiable discussion that followed, conducted with discriminating dignity by Shen Heng and conscientious humility on the part of Cheng

Lin, extended from one gong-stroke before noon until close upon the time for the evening rice. The details arrived at were that Shen Heng should deliver to Lin four hundred and fifty taels against the return of the robe. He would also press upon that person a silk purse with an onyx clasp containing twenty-five taels, as a deliberate mark of his individual appreciation and quite apart from anything to do with the transaction on hand. All suggestions of anything other than the strictest high-mindedness were withdrawn from both sides. In order that the day should not be wholly destitute of sunshine at the Golden Abacus, Lin declared his intention of purchasing, at a price not exceeding three taels and a half, the oldest and most unattractive burial robe that the stock contained. So moved was Shen Heng by this delicate consideration that he refused to accept more than two taels and three-quarters. Moreover, he added for Lin's acceptance a small jar of crystallised limpets.

To those short-sighted ones who profess to discover in the conduct of Cheng Lin (now an official of the seventeenth grade and drawing his quarterly sufficiency of taels in a distant province) something not absolutely honourably-arranged, it is only necessary to display the ultimate end as it affected those persons in any way connected :

Wang-Ho thus obtained a burial robe in which he was able to repose absolute confidence. Doubtless it would have sustained him to an advanced age had he not committed self-ending, in the ordinary way of business, a few years later.

Shen Heng soon disposed of the returned garment for a thousand taels to a person who had become prematurely wealthy owing to the distressed state of the Empire. In addition, he had sold, for more than two taels, a robe which he had no real expectation of ever selling at all.

Min, made welcome at the house of Meän and Lin, removed with them to the distant province. There she found that the remuneration for burial-robe embroidery was greater than she had ever obtained before. With the money thus amassed she was able to marry an official of noble rank.

The father of Cheng Lin had passed into the Upper Air many years before the incidents with which this written narrative concerns itself. He is thus in no way affected, but Lin did not neglect in the time of his prosperity to transmit to him frequent sacrifices of seasonable delicacies suited to his condition.