

goods and open him a shop." Said he, "How much will that be?" And she, "An hundred dirhams." Quoth the Robber, "That maketh five hundred dirhams; I will pay it; but may I be triply divorced from my wife if all my possessions amount to more than this, and they be the savings of twenty years! Let me go my way, so I may deliver them to thee." Cried she, "O fool, how shall I let thee go thy way? Utterly impossible! Be pleased to give me a right token." So he gave her a token for his wife and she cried out to her young daughter and said to her, "Keep this door." Then she charged her husband to watch over the Robber till she should return, and repairing to his wife, acquainted her with his case and told her that her husband the thief had been taken and had compounded for his release, at the price of seven hundred dirhams, and named to her the token. Accordingly, she gave her the money and she took it and returned to her house. By this time, the dawn had dawned; so she let the thief go his way, and when he went out, she said to him, "O my dear, when shall I see thee come and take the treasure?" And he, "O indebted one, when thou needest other seven hundred dirhams, wherewith to amend thy case and that of thy children and to pay thy debts." And he went out, hardly believing in his deliverance from her.

The Wonderful Stone

From the Chinese

IN the prefecture of Shun-t'ien¹ there lived a man named Hsing Yün-fei, who was an amateur mineralogist and would pay any price for a good specimen. One day as he was fishing in the river something caught his net, and diving down he brought up a stone about a foot in diameter, beautifully carved on all sides to resemble clustering hills and peaks.

¹ In which Peking is situated.

He was quite as pleased with this as if he had found some precious stone; and having had an elegant sandal-wood stand made for it, he set his prize upon the table. Whenever it was about to rain, clouds, which from a distance looked like new cottonwool, would come forth from each of the holes or grottoes on the stone, and appear to close them up. By-and-by an influential personage called at the house and begged to see the stone, immediately seizing it and handing it over to a lusty servant, at the same time whipping his horse and riding away. Hsing was in despair; but all he could do was to mourn the loss of his stone, and indulge his anger against the thief. Meanwhile, the servant, who had carried off the stone on his back, stopped to rest at a bridge, when all of a sudden his hand slipped and the stone fell into the water. His master was extremely put out at this, and gave him a sound beating; subsequently hiring several divers, who tried every means in their power to recover the stone, but were quite unable to find it. He then went away, having first published a notice of reward, and by these means many were tempted to seek for the stone. Soon after, Hsing himself came to the spot, and as he mournfully approached the bank, lo! the water became clear, and he could see the stone lying at the bottom. Taking off his clothes he quickly jumped in and brought it out, together with the sandal-wood stand which was still with it. He carried it off home, but being no longer desirous of showing it to people, he had an inner room cleaned and put it in there. Some time afterwards an old man knocked at the door and asked to be allowed to see the stone; whereupon Hsing replied that he had lost it a long time ago. "Isn't that it in the inner room?" said the old man, smiling. "Oh, walk in and see for yourself if you don't believe me," answered Hsing; and the old man did walk in, and there was the stone on the table. This took Hsing very much aback; and the old man then laid his hand upon the stone and said, "This is an old family relic of mine: I lost it many months since. How does it come to be here? I pray you now restore it to me." Hsing didn't know what to say, but

declared he was the owner of the stone; upon which the old man remarked, "If it is really yours, what evidence can you bring to prove it?" Hsing made no reply; and the old man continued, "To show you that I know this stone, I may mention that it has altogether ninety-two grottoes, and that in the largest of these are five words:

'A stone from Heaven above.'

Hsing looked and found that there were actually some small characters, no larger than grains of rice, which by straining his eyes a little he managed to read; also that the number of grottoes was as the old man had said. However, he would not give him the stone; and the old man laughed, and asked, "Pray, what right have you to keep other people's things?" He then bowed and went away, Hsing escorting him as far as the door; but when he returned to the room the stone had disappeared. In a great fright, he ran after the old man, who had walked slowly and was not far off, and seizing his sleeve entreated him to give back the stone. "Do you think," said the latter, "that I could conceal a stone a foot in diameter in my sleeve?" But Hsing knew that he must be superhuman, and led him back to the house, where he threw himself on his knees and begged that he might have the stone. "Is it yours or mine?" asked the old man. "Of course it is yours," replied Hsing, "though I hope you will consent to deny yourself the pleasure of keeping it." "In that case," said the old man, "it is back again"; and going into the inner room they found the stone in its old place. "The jewels of this world," observed Hsing's visitor, "should be given to those who know how to take care of them. This stone can choose its own master, and I am very pleased that it should remain with you; at the same time I must inform you that it was in too great a hurry to come into the world of mortals, and has not yet been freed from all contingent calamities. I had better take it away with me, and three years hence you shall have it again. If, however, you insist on keeping it, then

your span of life will be shortened by three years, that your terms of existence may harmonize together. Are you willing?" Hsing said he was; whereupon the old man with his fingers closed up three of the stone's grottoes, which yielded to his touch like mud. When this was done, he turned to Hsing and told him that the grottoes on that stone represented the years of his life; and then he took his leave, firmly refusing to remain any longer, and not disclosing his name.

More than a year after this, Hsing had occasion to go away on business, and in the night a thief broke in and carried off the stone, taking nothing else at all. When Hsing came home, he was dreadfully grieved, as if his whole object in life was gone; and made all possible inquiries and efforts to get it back, but without the slightest result. Some time passed away, when one day going into a temple Hsing noticed a man selling stones, and among the rest he saw his old friend. Of course he immediately wanted to regain possession of it; but as the stone-seller would not consent, he shouldered the stone and went off to the nearest mandarin. The stone-seller was then asked what proof he could give that the stone was his; and he replied that the number of grottoes was eighty-nine. Hsing inquired if that was all he had to say, and when the other acknowledged that it was, he himself told the magistrate what were the characters inscribed within, also calling attention to the finger marks at the closed-up grottoes. He therefore gained his case, and the mandarin would have bamboozed the stone-seller, had he not declared that he bought it in the market for twenty ounces of silver,—whereupon he was dismissed.

A high official next offered Hsing one hundred ounces of silver for it; but he refused to sell it even for ten thousand, which so enraged the would-be purchaser that he worked up a case against Hsing¹ and got him put in prison. Hsing

¹ A common form of revenge in China, and one which is easily carried through when the prosecutor is a man of wealth and influence.