

M432

The orphan who gathered firefood.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong

They tell a story that, once upon a time, there was a Miao lad whose mother and father had both died. Every day he gathered firewood to go and sell. From the first day of the first month until Dragon month, every day he went gathering firewood. Every day, carrying the firewood on his back, he rested on the same great rock. Two days before New Year the rock said, "Orphan lad, you carry firewood every day and press on me. Now people are about to celebrate New Year, I will open my mouth and you can stretch in your hand and scoop up silver, to go and buy food to eat, so that you will not need to go gathering firewood". The orphan stretched his hand and scooped up silver from inside the rock. This he took home and went and bought all kinds of things and all kinds of food.

His friend in the village who was quite well off, called for him one day and said, "Come, let us two go and gather firewood". He replied, "Come in and sit down for a smoke, then we will go". His friend said, "You, so poor, what tobacco have you got?" The orphan said, "Though I may not have any, come in and wait for me, we two will go in company". The rich lad went in and sat down, and the orphan went and found food for him to eat. The rich lad said, "Orphan, how is that you are rich?" The Orphan lad said, "I went to gather fire wood, and every day I carried it back and rested it on a great rock. One day the rock said, 'Orphan lad, you carry firewood every day and press upon me. Now stretch out your hand and take some silver from my inside and go and buy food to eat. Do not come pressing upon me any more'. This is how I have food to eat".

The rich lad listened, and went off to do the same. One day the rich lad carried firewood and rested on the rock. The rock said, "You come every day pressing upon me. I will open my mouth and you can stretch out your hand and scoop up some silver". He had made up his mind that he would scoop up a great deal, and so it was that he could not pull his hand out, and the rock closed its mouth and caught his hand. His wife brought him food every day, but after a long time the lad's wife became very ragged. One day when she brought the food, her breast was showing. The rock, seeing it, laughed, and so the rich lad got free, but because of his greed, in the end he got not a single piece of silver.