

The king who sought a son-in-law and found a beggar.

Told By Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that, once upon a time, there was a royal family which had seven sons but only one daughter. Thus her mother and father were especially fond of her. When she was grown up, her parents and uncles wanted to choose for her a very good husband. Having no better method, when the time for choosing came, they first said to the mandarins from all around, "We wish to choose a husband for this our daughter. You who are seeking a bride, wait until the day of choosing, then let everyone come". Now that the king's letter had been received, on the day that the king had specified, people from every place and every district arrived, together with many common folk who came to watch. The king took his daughter and changed her into a piece of silver which he threw into the sky for the suitors to catch. The king said, "Whichever one of you catches it, to him will I give my daughter". From that day, and for three days, the king kept on throwing, but no one made a catch.

On the last day there was a beggar watching. He wanted to go and join those who were trying to catch the silver piece, but people would not let him go, because he had no high position, no good name, and was poorly clothed. Accordingly he went, and, taking a straw mat that people sleep on, wrapped it around his body, and jumped into someone's cesspit, so that his body was plastered with excrement and stank terribly. This time when he went, folk got out of his way, and he ran over with the important people to catch the silver piece. As soon as he ran up, the silver piece fell into the skirt of his gown. But the king did not give her to him. The king said, "That time does not count, give it back to me and I will throw it once more. If you catch it again I will give her to you". So once more the king threw it up into the sky for everyone to catch, but the silver piece dropped again from the sky into the skirt of the beggar's gown. The king said, "This time she reckons as yours". But the beggar, having no house, took the king's daughter to live under a cliff. Every day he went to work for people in the city using the money which they paid him as wages, to buy food for his wife to eat.

On one occasion as he went, he saw that the mandarin was about to build a house, and there were many people busy carrying timber. He also noticed a lot of folk together carrying a single piece. He said, "Why does this timber need such a crowd to carry it?" The people who were carrying the timber said, "Why do you disparage people? You come and carry it and show us how it should be done!" The beggar went, and on each occasion carried two pieces at a time. When people saw it they were all astonished. They went and told the mandarin, who said to him, "Being so strong, how much do you want to eat each time?" The beggar said, "I want three bushels of grain a time". The mandarin said, "This is not over much. From now on I want you only to carry the timber for my house". So the beggar carried timber for the mandarin. He carried for only two days and there was no room left in the city to stack it.

The mandarin then said to him, "Now there is one district where there are a lot of robbers. I want you to go and fight them. When you have subdued that district, I will give you the position of a mandarin". The beggar said, "That is fine, but I have still got my wife at home. I must go back to see her because there is no food to eat in our house". The mandarin said to him, "Where is your house?" The beggar said, "I have no house to live in. I brought my wife to live under a cliff". The mandarin said, "You need

not worry. You go and fight the robbers, and we will send her food to eat". Then the mandarin said, "How can one send a letter?" He said, "You may give it to the swallows to take". Since the beggar had been away a long time, his wife had nothing to eat, so that she wanted to go and die. As she was going out she saw a swallow carrying a letter. She took it and read it, and learned that her husband had gone to fight the robbers. She also received a letter saying that the mandarin was sending food for her to eat. Not many days passed, and she received her husband's letter saying that he had subdued the robbers, that the mandarin had given him a district to govern, and that he was coming to escort her there.