A HAPPY FAMILY
"... ONE MUST write only when one feels like it. It must be like the light of the sun which comes from an infinite source of light, not like sparks produced with iron and flint—only such stuff can be called art, only such writers can be called true artists. But what about myself ?" Here our author jumped out of bed, determined to tackle the task that he had decided upon, which was to write something and get some money which he needed badly. As to his market, he had decided upon the Happiness Monthly, as its rate was comparatively generous. But he must take a suitable topic, otherwise they won't take it. He is not too proud to meet their requirements. Now what are some of the problems that agitate youth of to-day ? There are many such problems but most of them probably concern love, marriage and the family. Yes, there are innumerable young men and women to-day who are discussing these problems. Therefore, he decided to write about the family. But how ? . . . otherwise they will not take it. There is no sense in going against the current of the times, though . . .

He strode over to his desk, sat down, took out a sheet of paper ruled with green lines, and wrote down without hesitation, though not without a sense that he was compromising his art, this title: "A Happy Family."

Then he paused and stared at the rafters while he tried to figure out where he should set down his happy family. "Should I make it Peking?" thought he. "No, that won't do, for Peking is such a dead city, even the air is dead. You can't shut out this deathly atmosphere even though you build a high wall around this family. So it won't do, absolutely no. As to Kiangsu and Chekiang, civil war has been brewing there for sometime and may break out at any moment ; the same thing may be said of Fukien, only more so. Szechwan and Kuangtung ? They are fighting there this minute. Shantung and Honan ? There's kidnapping going on there. You can hardly have a happy family if one of its members is kidnapped. As to the foreign concessions in Shanghai and Tientsin, the rent is too high. If they were only in some foreign country—but that is out of the question. I wonder how it is in Yunnan and Kueichow ? In any case those provinces are too remote and inaccessible . . . " After turning the matter over in his mind and failing to find a suitable locale, he was about to call it A when he was struck by another thought : "But there is a great deal of opposition to the use of the letters of the Western alphabet to stand for personal and place names. They say that they diminish the interest of the readers. It is probably safer for me to refrain from using them. But where, where ? Hunan—there is also civil war going on. Dairen—again the rent is too high. How about Harbin, Kirin and Heilungkiang ? It is said that the provinces are over-run with bandits . . ." And thus after considering all the possible places that he could think of and dismissing them as unsuitable, he decided that A will have to do as the name of the locale of his "happy family."
"Well, there is no helping it. The happy family will have to be at A. Naturally there will be husband and wife, the master and mistress of the house, and they have married by their own consent instead of that of their parents. They have made a marriage contract involving some forty articles covering all possible contingencies, and consequently it was a marriage of freedom and equality. Moreover, both of them have had higher education, clever and high-minded ... Since returned students from Japan, are no longer at the premium they used to be, I had better make them returned students from Europe or America. The master of the house should always wear foreign clothes, his collar always white like snow; the mistress' hair should always be curled and fluffy in front like a sparrow's nest, her white teeth always exposed, though she should continue to wear her Chinese dresses ..."

"No, that won't do! Twenty-five catties!"

It was a man's voice, outside the window. He turned around to look but the screen was down and the sun beating upon it so strong that it made him dizzy. Then heard the sound of pieces of wood scattering on the ground. "Well, it doesn't matter," he said to himself and returned to his thoughts. "But twenty-five catties of what?—But of course they are both clever and high-minded and loved literature and the arts. But since they were brought up in happiness, they did not like Russian literature . . . Russian literature deals mostly with the lower classes and is therefore not suited to such a family. Twenty-five catties? It doesn't matter. Then, what should they read? The poems of Byron? Keats? No, they are not entirely suitable.—But of, course, they both like to read 'An Ideal Husband.' I have not yet read it, but since even the professors praise it, it must be good and should be read by both. They should each have a copy
of their own, two copies of 'An Ideal Husband' must be provided for this happy family..." He felt a little hungry, and so he put down his brush and supported his head between his hands, letting it suspend like a globe between two posts.

. . . They are having lunch," he thought, "and their table is covered with a snow white cloth. The cook brings up the dishes—Chinese dishes. What twenty-five catties,

I wonder? It doesn't matter. Why Chinese dishes? Because the Westerners all say that Chinese cooking is the best and most wholesome; that is the reason why they have clung to Chinese dishes. The first dish was, well, what should the first dish be?"

"Firewood ..."

He looked back, startled, and there stood to his left the mistress of his own house her sad, weary eyes fixed on him.

"What?" he said impatiently to his wife for disturbing him in his creative labor.

"The firewood has all gone, and I've to get some to-day. It cost only two and four the last time and yet he wants two and six. What do you think of offering him two and five?"

"All right, give him two and five."

"But we come off too badly on the weight. He insists on it's being twenty-four and half catties. I think I'll allow him only twenty-three and half. What do you think?"

"All right, all right, call it twenty-three and half."

"Then it's five times five equals twenty-five, three times five equals fifteen . . ."

"Yes, five times five equals twenty-five, three times five equals fifteen . . ." He too, got stuck, and turning back to his desk he seized his brush and began to figure out on the paper on which he had written "A Happy Family." It took him some time to get the correct answer, whereupon he looked up and said,

"Five and eight!"

"In that case I don't have enough here. I still need eight or nine coppers ..."

He pulled open his drawer, seized a handful of coppers, around twenty or thirty, put them in her open hand and watched her go out of the room. Then he turned on again to his desk. He had a stuffed up feeling in his head as if it was filled up with firewood and Arabic numerals. He inhaled deeply and then exhaled as if trying the to rid himself of the firewood and numerals. Indeed this made his heart feel light and again he turned his thoughts to his happy family.
"What dishes should the cook bring? Such things as breaded tenderloin and sea slugs with eggs of shrimps are a little too common. 'I'll say that they are having the war of dragons and tigers?' But what does 'the war of dragons and tigers' consist of? Some say that it is a Cantonese delicacy served only at elaborate banquets and consists of cat and snake meat. But I have seen the name listed on the menu of a Kiangsi restaurant. I know that the Kiangsu people do not eat cats and snakes, so their 'war of dragons and tigers' must consist of frog and eel as some one told me. Now from what province should I let my hero and heroine come from?—Well, that does not matter. No matter where they come from it won't do any harm to let them eat a dish of 'war of dragons and tigers' whether made of cat and snake or of frog and eel. So that's settled, the first dish will be 'war of dragons and tigers.'

'Thereupon the dish was put in the centre of the table and the happy couple took up their chopsticks and smiling happily and looking at each other said pointing to the dish:

"'My dear, please'

'Please, you first, my dear.'

"'Oh, no, please you!

'Thereupon they simultaneously dipped their chopsticks and picked up a hunk of snake meat—no, no, snake meat is, after all, a bit too outlandish. It is better to make it eel. That means, then, this particular 'war of dragons and tigers' is made of frog and eel. So simultaneously they picked out a piece of eel of the same size—five times five equals twenty-five, three times five . . . and put it in their mouths . . ." He had desire to look back that he found difficult to resist, for there was a bustle behind him and some one had come in and out several times. However, he succeeded in resisting the temptation and pursued his incoherent thoughts: 'This is rather banal, I am afraid. How could there be such a family? Oh, how confused are my thoughts. If I go like this I shall not be able to finish this in spite of the excellent theme that I have. Perhaps I don't have to make them returned students; it is sufficient to make them graduates.
of some institution of higher learning within the country. So they are both college graduates, high-minded and clever, high-minded . . . The hero is a literary man; the heroine a literary woman, or a lover of literature. Or perhaps the heroine a poetess and the hero a lover of poetry and a believer in women's rights. Perhaps . . ." But in the end he succumbed and turned around to look.

When he did so he found himself staring into a new pile of cabbages by the book case behind his back, arranged in the form a big A, three on the bottom row, two in the middle and one on top.

He sighed with surprise and felt flushed in the face and a tinkling sensation at his spine. He took a deep breath in an effort to stop the tinkling sensation and continued: "The house of the happy family must have plenty of rooms. They must have a store room in which to keep such things as cabbages. They must have a study with the walls lined with bookcases full of both Chinese and foreign books among which be found 'An Ideal Husband'—two copies altogether. Naturally there will be no cabbage pile. They will have a bed room with a four poster bed made of brass. The bed might be plainer, one of elm wood made in the factory of the First Metropolitan Prison, for instance. The space under the bed will not be cluttered up with things . . ." He took a glance under his own bed and found all the firewood gone, leaving only a grass rope lying there like a dead snake.

"Twenty-three and a half catties . . ." Realizing that the firewood would soon be brought in and dumped under the bed and again feeling a sensation of being stuffed up with it, he got up hastily to close his door. But no sooner did his hand touch the

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door than he felt that this was too crude a gesture and compromised by letting the dust-covered curtain. He was rather pleased with this compromise measure there was in this measure, he thought, neither the eccentricity of the hermit nor that of security in a policy of the open door.

"... The door of the master's study must always be closed," he thought he had gone back to his desk. "If she has anything to talk over with him, she should knock first and wait for his permission to come in. This is the right way to do it. Now supposing the master is sitting in his study and the mistress wants to talk literature with him. She will knock first.—You may be sure that she will not be bringing in a pile of cabbage.

" 'Come in, please, my dear.'

"But what if the master has no time to talk about literature? Could he ignore her and let go on knocking at the door? That probably would not do. Perhaps 'An Ideal Husband' has all these things in it.—That must be a really fine book. I must get a copy and read it when I get some money for my manuscripts . . ."

Whack!

He straightened up at this, for he knew from past experience that this whack resulted from the contact of the mistress' palm and the head of their three-year old daughter.
"In the happy family . . ." he continued to think in spite of the fact that his daughter was now weeping, "children come late, come late. Maybe it is best to have no children at all. It is so much more peaceful with only two.—They might even live in a hotel and let them supply everything. It would be even more peaceful if one alone . . ." The cries became louder and he got up and he thought as he went through the curtain, "But Marx wrote his 'Capital' amidst the cries and bawls 'children. That's why he was such a great man . . ." He walked into the outer room and opened the storm door. He smelled an odor of kerosene smoke as he opened the door. The child was lying to the right of the door with her face to the ground. She went into crying when she saw him.

"Now, now, don't cry, my good child," he said and picked her up. As he turned around he saw his wife standing angrily to the left of the door, her hands on her hips as she were about to begin some callisthenics.

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"So even you try to impose on me! Instead of trying to help me, you are always trying to give me trouble --- now you've upset the lamp. What are we going to use tonight?

"Now, don't cry, don't cry, my good little girl," he said as he carried her into his room and rubbed her head. He set her down, pulled out his chair and sat down with her between his knees. Raising his hand he said, "Now don't cry any more, my good little girl. Watch dieh-dieh act cat-wash-face for you." At the same time he stuck out his tongue, made a motion of licking his hand and then started to move his hand in circles in front of his face.
The child burst out laughing and saying, "Oh, hua-eh!"

"Yes, yes, hua-eh," he agreed as he drew one more circle before his face. After he stopped the child continued to smile at him and looking at him through her tear-wetted eyes. He suddenly realized how like her mother's was her lovable and innocent face, that is, her mother as he knew her five years back, especially her red lips, only they were smaller. On a certain bright winter afternoon she had looked at him with a smiling face and tear-wetted eyes exactly like this when he told her that he was ready for her sake, to sacrifice everything and brush aside all opposition. He sat there lost in thought and feeling a strange intoxication.

"Ah, what lovely lips . . . "he thought.

The door curtain was suddenly raised and the firewood began to come in.

He was awakened from his reveries. The child was still looking at him with tear-laden eyes, her red lips slightly parted, while the firewood poured in bundle after bundle.

"... I dare say that she, too, will be engaged in nothing better than to count five times five equals twenty-five, nine times nine equals eighty-one . . . and her eyes will be sad and weary . . . " Brusquely he took up the sheet of paper with green lines on which he had written 'A Happy Family' and some figures and crumpled it up. But he opened it a little again and wiped off her tears and her nose with it. "Good little girl, go and play now," he said, pushing her away, and throwing the crumpled paper into the waste basket.

Almost immediately he felt that he was not being as patient and kind to the child as he might have been. He turned around again and watched her as she went out lonely and desolated. In his ears he could still hear the sound of falling wood. He tried to compose himself. He turned back toward his desk, closed his eyes suppressed his motley arrays of thoughts and sat quietly. He saw before his eyes a round, flat dark flower with a yellow centre which floated from the left corner of his eyes across to the right until it vanished. This was followed by a bright green flower with a dark green centre, which in turn was followed by six cabbages staring at him in the form of an A.

* Pen-name of Chou Shu-jen, 1881-1936.